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Friends and Strangers: Experience and Commonality in a James Bay Town

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A Thesis

in

The Department

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Abstract

Friends and Strangers: Experience and Commonality in a James Bay Town

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This thesis, based on three months of fieldwork in 1998, is a study of inter-cultural friendships between Native and non-Native residents of Chisasibi, Quebec in which I examine the factors that hinder and/or enable friendships to form between individuals of different cultural backgrounds. I describe how, despite historical and political tensions that are a part of the larger context of Native/non-Native relations in Canada, individuals are able to establish friendships based on shared social networks and experiences, age and common interests; in particular, popular youth culture (beer, soccer, rock music and so forth).

I employ the concepts of cultural and social systems, as delineated by Gary Witherspoon (1975) and the notion of *habitus* as explained by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). The field methods used in gathering data followed Jean-Guy Goulet's (1998) experiential approach where personal interaction is considered as the primary means for obtaining knowledge. Data was derived both from discussions with Native and non-Native residents of Chisasibi and from my own experiences in relating to people in different social situations in the community.

The primary goal of the thesis is to help open channels of communication between Native and non-Native Canadians. The ethnographic portion of this work is therefore written in narrative form to explore a form of ethnography that is reflexive and humanistic and that promotes the ideals of autonomy and sharing that are valued by members of my host community.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my warmest gratitude to my hosts in Chisasibi, for allowing me to stay in their home. Although I was a complete stranger, they not only helped with this project but they also helped to teach me the real value of reaching out to help people.

I would also like to thank all the Native and non-Native people in Chisasibi who treated me with kindness by talking with me, feeding me when I was hungry, and showing me things and experiences I never knew existed.

In the academic world, I wish to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sally Cole, who has been supportive of this endeavour from the beginning and from whom I have learned so much about writing in the past five years. Warm thanks are also extended to Dr. Dominique Legros, member of my thesis committee, who has always helped me look beyond the horizons of academic knowledge. I would also like to thank Professor Nadia Ferrara, who kindly agreed to come on board as a third reader in spite of time constraints and who offered very helpful feedback.

Thanks are also due to Jody Stavely, graduate secretary in the department of Sociology and Anthropology, who has been eternally patient and extremely helpful in the face of my constant questions over the years.

On the home front, I would like to thank my husband, Larry, who drove me all the way to Chisasibi and has been supportive in too many ways to count, and my son Jacob, who arrived after this research was done and who helped me rethink my reasons for doing this. I also want to thank my parents for always supporting my academic interests and encouraging me to pursue my interests.

Finally, I wish to thank the Universe for allowing all of these wonderful people to exist.

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Introduction

Friends and strangers interact on a daily basis in the town of Chisasibi, Quebec, as well as in towns and cities all over Canada. The type of interaction with which I am concerned in this thesis is that which takes place between Cree and non-Native residents of Chisasibi. I specifically examine the dynamics that permeate casual contact between individuals of the two groups and the ways in which people find commonality in spite of cultural differences and socio-political and historical tensions.

The thesis is based on the three months of fieldwork I conducted in Chisasibi in the late summer and early fall of 1998. Chisasibi, situated near the mouth of La Grande River, is the northernmost community on the eastern coast of James Bay. Comprised mainly of inland and coastal Cree, Chisasibi's population also contains a small group of Inuit and approximately one hundred non-Natives who come to work in various functions.

There is a long history of contact between the Cree and non-Natives, especially non-Natives of European descent. From the fur trade to more recent dam building and forestry projects, the Cree have been in various situations where it was necessary for them to negotiate with Euro-Canadian governments and companies. In addition, there have been religious missions established in the area which have served as catalysts for certain ideological changes within the Cree community relating to traditional values and practices.

In general, then, Cree/non-Native relations, like Native/non-Native relations elsewhere in Canada, have traditionally been permeated with tensions arising out of the political and economic struggles in which the two groups were involved. In fact, much of the literature

dealing with Native/non-Native relations focuses on the tensions and the lack of bonding between individuals of different cultural groups that are due to power imbalances in work-related contexts.

In this thesis, I explore the ways in which certain individuals are able to overcome the difficulties related to inter-cultural bonding and establish friendships of varying degrees of length and depth across cultural boundaries. I focus on the interplay of different factors such as cultural background, life experience, age, common interests and social positioning to show how hindrances to inter-cultural bonding can be alleviated, if not eliminated, under certain circumstances to allow individuals to develop stronger alliances and, possibly, friendships.

It is important to acknowledge that the notion of friendship that I use derives from my own western-based experience. The extent to which this notion is culturally relevant to the Cree is unclear. However, the thesis deals with Native/non-Native relations mainly from a non-Native viewpoint since it would be impossible for me, as a non-Native, to assume any other stance. Therefore, I feel that the use of a western notion to examine the ways in which westerners in a Native community experience interpersonal relations is justified.

From my experiences in the field, I know that Cree individuals use western terminology to refer to their own Native and non-Native acquaintances. It was not uncommon for a Cree to refer to someone as their "friend" or "buddy". Nevertheless, it is also possible that the terms were used with different connotations than they hold when used by westerners. In fact, the ways in which the Cree interpret and maintain friendship is quite different from the ways westerners (specifically English and French Canadians) do so. This is discussed in greater detail in chapter seven.

In spite of the problematic nature of the term, I feel that it remains useful for the purpose of this thesis. A major complaint of many informants was the difficulties involved in establishing and maintaining what they call "friendships". Additionally, the capacity to make friends among the Cree was often described as a desirable trait among non-Natives. I therefore believe that the notion of friendship, while it may have different denotations and/or connotations among different individuals according to their cultural background, experience and so forth, is highly relevant to the daily lives of many residents of Chisasibi.

It is also important to clarify that friendship does not necessarily entail life-long involvement. The friendships to which I refer in this thesis vary in depth and length. It could be said that an association, even an intense one, lasting only a few weeks would not be categorized as a friendship. I maintain, however, that when individuals refer to each other as friends, they are involved in a relationship based on friendship *at that time* regardless of future events which may cause the friendship to dissipate. In other words, such future events do not invalidate or nullify the existence of their friendship in the present.

In chapter two, I describe the theoretical framework that I use to discuss the dynamics involved in the formation of inter-cultural friendships. This framework is based on the notion that individual life experience, embodied in Pierre Bourdieu's 1990 concept of *habitus*, allows people to navigate between different cultural systems, as described by Gary Witherspoon (1975), in order to find grounds for commonality.

Once commonality between individuals is found and friendship blossoms, the willingness of the participants to accept and experience the other culture may allow them to integrate

another culture to varying degrees. For example, Bruce Grindal and Frank Salamone (1995:5) discuss the perception of: "another truth, . . . that can be known through personal experience and interaction with people who "know" in different ways." As Jean-Guy Goulet (1998) also argues, the accumulation of one's own lived experience within another culture and the incorporation of the ideas gained from interactions with informants and friends allow one to learn in a manner appropriate to the context within which its members live their lives.

Accordingly, the primary method I used to obtain knowledge in the course of my fieldwork was based on concepts of experiential anthropology (especially indexicality and reflexivity) as described by Goulet (cf. Goulet and Young 1994). In addition to open-ended interviews with several Cree and non-Native residents, my experience of finding commonality with individuals of various cultural groups forms the corpus of information upon which this thesis is based. The ethnographic section of the thesis therefore comprises a detailed summary of the main points drawn from the interviews and descriptions of different situations where issues of cultural belonging and identity, life experience and commonality were prevalent.

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My initial plan for this project was to conduct research on the links between gender relations and the hunting ideology among the Cree of Chisasibi (cf. Leacock 1978; Tanner 1979; Rogers 1963). I was especially interested in finding out whether patterns of interaction between men and women established in the context of hunting and trapping remained active in a more sedentary town life. The research was to be based on formal interviews and participant observation in town and in the bush.

My project was, for all intents and purposes, a "traditional" anthropological project which would lead me to theorize about the lives of the people I would be "studying" and to make comparisons with other hunting societies. While I had certain qualms about the seemingly scientific nature of this project which led me to question its usefulness to the Cree people I would be working with, I found ways of justifying my actions. I reasoned, for instance, that this was a mere Master's thesis and that this was a process I needed to go through in order to become a full-fledged anthropologist. Furthermore, since I sincerely believed that I would uncover some wonderful things about egalitarianism among Cree men and women, I reasoned that I would be promoting respect for the Cree by showing them in a positive light. I patted myself on the back for my noble intentions and went on my way.

Within a few days after my arrival in Chisasibi, however, I began to see that I would need to change my approach. Firstly, my hosts, Kathy and Antonio[1], as well as several other Cree and non-Native people I encountered, were sceptical of anthropological research. They described to me how certain researchers had falsely represented their culture and had used information obtained from the Cree to their own ends, such as obtaining a university degree. "They come here and get information but they are the ones who get the degree," commented Kathy. In spite of my good intentions, I was unable to coherently explain my project in such a way that it would not seem like a run-of-the- mill anthropological research project in which the Cree were my 'subjects'. Although I cringed whenever they introduced me to other people as someone who would be studying and observing them, I could not describe what I was doing in any other terms.

Secondly, the issue of gender relations was a delicate topic and I began to feel that an

adequate discussion would require much more time than that which was available to me. In three months, it would be very difficult for people to reach a level of comfort where they would openly discuss such a theme. Furthermore, the Cree seemed rather uninterested in the topic.

In the meantime, I had observed the lack of association between Cree and non-Native residents. In fact, public conversations between Cree and non-Natives seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. I broached the issue with a few people who confirmed that this dynamic was a prevalent facet of daily life in Chisasibi and that this would be a suitable research topic. Therefore, after some reflection, I decided to change the nature of my project. I owed it to the people who let me live in their community to be honest with myself and with them and to show them that I meant it when I said that I disagreed with the way they had been exploited and exoticized by outsiders studying their culture.

The new topic of Cree/non-Native relations was more feasible than my previous topic. It would allow me to write a thesis that reflected the concerns of members of the community. In addition, an experiential approach to my fieldwork allowed me to achieve a way of learning that was more appropriate to the way of teaching adopted by the Cree. Instead of an empirical approach which would impose my own way of learning on them, I would attempt to adapt to the ways in which they were prepared to share knowledge and experience (see Goulet 1998). I began to jokingly refer to my project as "new age anthropology" and explained to people that I wished to write a thesis that I could give back to the community and that they would hopefully not find insulting.

Accordingly, I avoid unnecessary theorizing about Cree culture. My theoretical

analysis pertains solely to the extent to which different cultural systems collide and intersect with each other to form a backdrop for inter-cultural relations. My reasons for this are ethical as well as academic. As mentioned above, several people expressed their distaste for this form of research and writing. I therefore feel that making generalizations about their values and way of life would be insulting and pretentious. Furthermore, it would be academically unsound to create theories about Cree culture based on three months of fieldwork.

The way in which the ethnographic chapters are written is a reflection of the experiential methodology used to conduct the research. Ethnographic descriptions in prose form are interspersed with personal and analytical reflections and excerpts from my field journal. Rather than describe in great detail the activities of specific individuals, this thesis focuses on interactions between various individuals and the descriptions of these interactions by their participants. In the words of Nigel Rapport (1997: 25): "For the actual nature of the human world is of individuals in interaction. This is its causation - the cause of there being human worlds of culture and society - and it manifestation - the practice of human worlds is individuals interacting with one another."

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This thesis is divided into two parts. Part one contains chapters one, two and three and offers the descriptive, historical and theoretical discussions of the field site and research. Chapter one comprises a physical description of Chisasibi and an outline of the research methods I used in my work. Chapter two outlines the descriptions of Native/non-Native relations by my informants and the ways in which various individuals negotiate the multiple factors affecting these relations and chapter three offers a theoretical overview of Native/non-

Native relations and describes the theoretical model that I use to explain Native/non-Native relations in Chisasibi.

Part two contains the ethnographic chapters of the thesis. Written mainly in narrative form, these chapters give examples of my own experience relating to both Native and non-Natives in Chisasibi and offer reflections on their correlation with the theoretical discussion contained in chapter two. Finally, in the conclusion, I reiterate and elaborate upon the correlation between my experience, the experiences described by my informants and the theoretical premise of the thesis.

Part One

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Native/non-Native Relations in Chisasibi: Outline and Discussion

Chapter 1 - Field Site and Methodology

Arriving in Chisasibi

The sun had stopped shining somewhere between Val d'Or and Matagami and, for the past six hours, we had seen nothing but trees and the hydro-electric towers that loomed menacingly above them. It seemed as if we had stopped moving while the world around us simply rushed past us in the opposite direction. However, our destination seemed like it would never arrive to meet us.

My husband, Larry, was driving me to Chisasibi, where I would spend the next three months. At the time, we lived in the town of Sutton, in Quebec's Eastern Townships, and our trip had taken us past Montreal, through the Réserve Faunique de la Vérandrie (a natural park) and, finally, up along the James Bay Road (Figure 1 on page 10).

Our only human contact within the past few hours had been at the gas station situated at Kilometre 381 on the James Bay Road, halfway between Matagami and Radisson. The gas station attendant, a young Francophone male, seemed to come straight out of a Twilight Zone episode with his long, grim and suspicious face. While he did not seem to be pleased with the prospect of dealing with us, he seemed to be mildly curious as to why we were there. I guessed that, aside from Native residents of James Bay and Hydro-Quebec workers, he did not get the occasion to see many new faces.

I asked him, in French, where the washrooms were and he pointed to two different buildings: "There are some with the showers and others in the cafeteria," he answered, with a *québécois* version of a drawl. He looked away, looked back at me and reluctantly added:

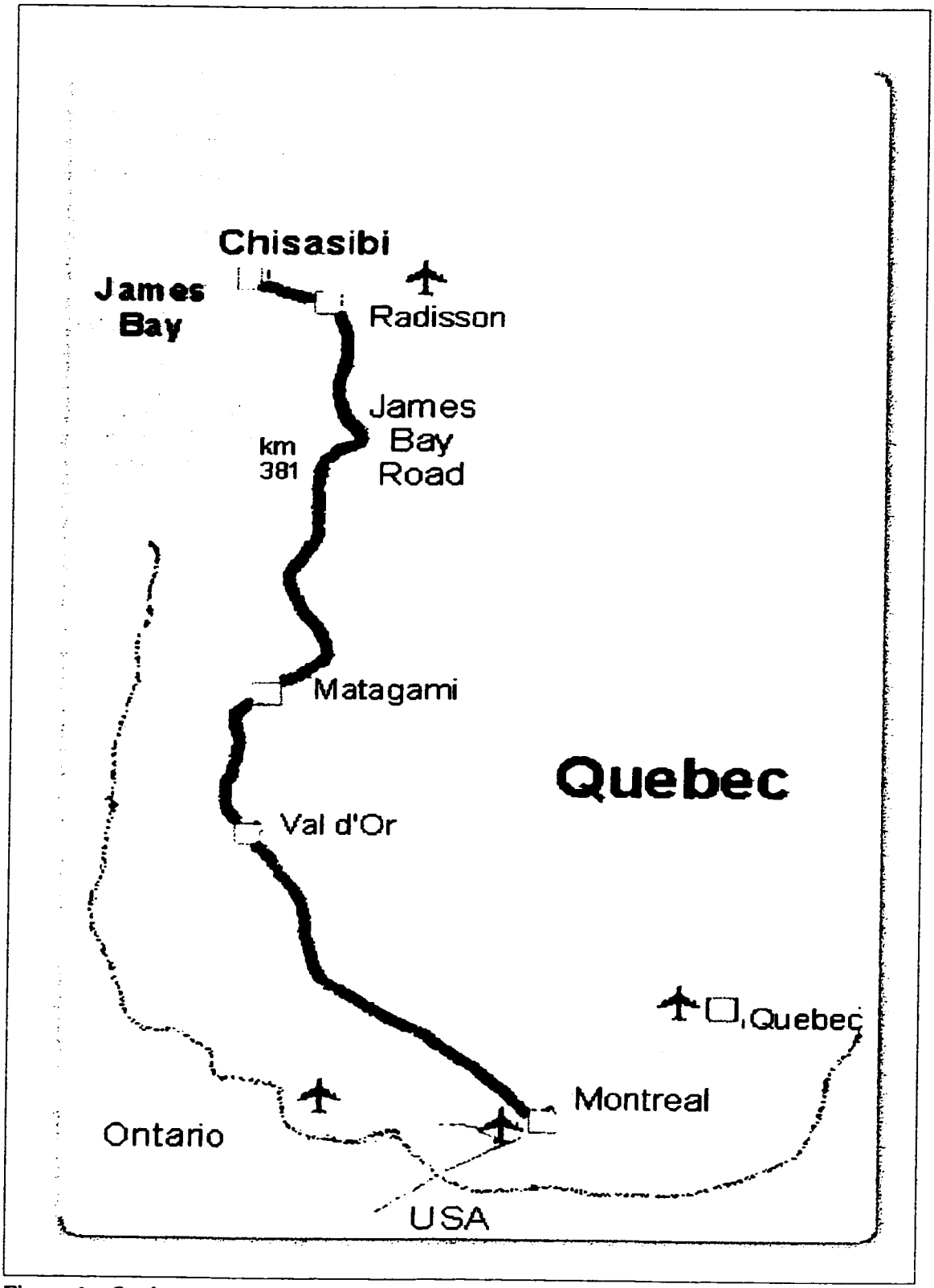

Figure 1 - Quebec map (From James Bay to Montreal)

"You'll probably find the ones in the cafeteria a bit cleaner." With that, he took the money we owed for the gas and escaped into the small building from where he had come.

Following his advice, we chose to use the washrooms in the cafeteria. As one of my hobbies is reading graffiti on washroom walls, I was glad to be able to partake of it here. Mostly in English, the writing seemed to have been done by young Native women since it largely discussed the different Cree communities. The phrase I remember the most vividly is the one that read: "Waswanipi suck [sic] by me...I'm from there." I noticed this particular piece of writing because, several years before, I visited a friend in Waswanipi, one of the nine James Bay Cree communities. I was struck by the negativity of the phrase and couldn't help wondering where the woman or girl who wrote it was now.

Luckily, our next human encounter was much less eerie. Along the stretch of road between the turn-off to Radisson and Chisasibi, we eventually came to a small building on the right-hand side of the road. A sign told us, in English, French, and Cree, that we had to stop for inspection before going any further. While I would later learn that this was called "the gate" by local residents, I had not previously been aware that such a thing was in place. Since I had heard that the community had problems with alcohol and drugs, however, I was not entirely surprised.

A Cree man in his forties came out of the building. As he approached us, I rolled down my window, smiled and said: "Hi!" He smiled back, went to the back of the car and wrote down the licence plate number on a yellow 'Post-It' pad. When he came back to my side of the car, I asked him if he wanted us to open the hatch in the back.

"No," he replied and asked my husband his name.

Larry responded. The man hesitated and then handed the pad to him. "Can you write it down?" Larry wrote his name above the license plate number and handed the pad back to the attendant who then asked Larry when we would be leaving.

"I'll be passing back through in the morning," Larry said.

"But I'll be staying here for a few months," I added, feeling left out of the conversation. The man didn't seem very concerned about this and told us we could go through. We said good-bye and left.

I was not as nervous as I thought I would be as we got closer and closer to Chisasibi. I was actually excited about seeing what would be my home for the next three months. While the 18-hour drive from Sutton had undoubtedly dulled my emotions, Larry pointed out to me that the previous months of planning had prepared me for this experience. Although he had been the one driving all day, he was significantly more coherent than I was.

We eventually came to a sign that said that we were entering Chisasibi. While the road continued after the sign, there was a turn-off to the right. I looked at the directions that Scott, Kathy and Antonio's son, had given me and told Larry that we should turn here. At first, the road didn't look as though it would take us anywhere but we decided to continue and look for a gas station, which was the next landmark in Scott's directions. We saw one on our left a few moments later and knew that we were on the right track.

From the road we were on, several small dirt roads turned off, each leading to two or more clusters of houses. We finally found the right place and I got out of the car and knocked on the door. There was no answer. I was terrified. Scott had told me, the night before, that he would be home but what if he had to leave for some reason? I knocked again

and there was still no answer.[1] I started walking around the house to look for another door when I heard Larry talking to someone. I came back, saw that the door was open and was immediately relieved.

I heard Larry say, "You must be Scott," to which the 20-ish man in the doorway nodded. We introduced ourselves and, after a bit of small talk mostly on Larry's and my behalf, we started unloading the car. It seemed as though I had brought all of my worldly possessions with me and I made a vow that I was going to learn to travel light.

When we were finished, Larry and I realized that we were quite hungry and decided to find out if there was an open restaurant in town. Scott and his friends told us, in between peeks at the TV show they were watching, that there was. We left the house and headed for the restaurant. We found a foot path that seemed to lead in the direction in which Scott had told us to go. Following the path, we made our way between more house clusters and encountered several young people walking around.

By this time, it was approximately 9:30 P.M. and yet it was as light out as it would have been at home at 8:30 P.M.. The day was still overcast, however, and this gave the town a feeling of dreariness. The children who were running around laughing and the slight buzz of vehicles from the main road counteracted this effect only slightly and I was beginning to feel a little numb.

We finally came to the end of the path behind a building which had a structure shaped like a giant teepee[2] in the middle of it. We walked around it and saw a big parking lot with a school on one side and a big green building on the other. Across the lot was another paved road. We walked over to it and saw that there was an arena on the other side named "Job's

Memorial Garden."[3] The restaurant was in this building so we entered and our observations of the town that evening came to an end. When we came outside again it was already dark. We could only think about going to sleep and we headed back to the house.

Chisasibi: A Description

Perhaps the easiest way to describe the general layout of Chisasibi[4] is to say it is lined by the highway, which leads to Radisson or James Bay, on one side and by La Grande River[5] on the other (Figure 2 on page 15). There is a paved road that goes around the core of the town, forming an elongated loop, and connects back to the highway in two locations at either end of the town. Clusters of houses line this road on both sides.

Another paved road goes through the loop created by the main road, connecting to it on opposite sides, and leads to the core of the town. Most of the town's businesses and services such as the school, the hospital, the police and fire stations, the arena, a construction company and the two churches (Anglican and Catholic) are situated along this road. One also finds a large green building locally known as the "commercial building", which houses a grocery store, a Northern store, the post office, a hair salon, a hardware store and a bank on the ground floor and the motel, the Band Council office, and other offices on the second floor[6]. Adjacent to the commercial building is the community centre, also known as the *Mitchuap*, the Cree word for teepee, because of the two story teepee-shaped structure in its centre. It contains several offices, an auditorium, a restaurant, a banquet hall, a gym and an arcade with pool tables and a bowling alley.

On the western side of the town, there is a newer residential section which consists

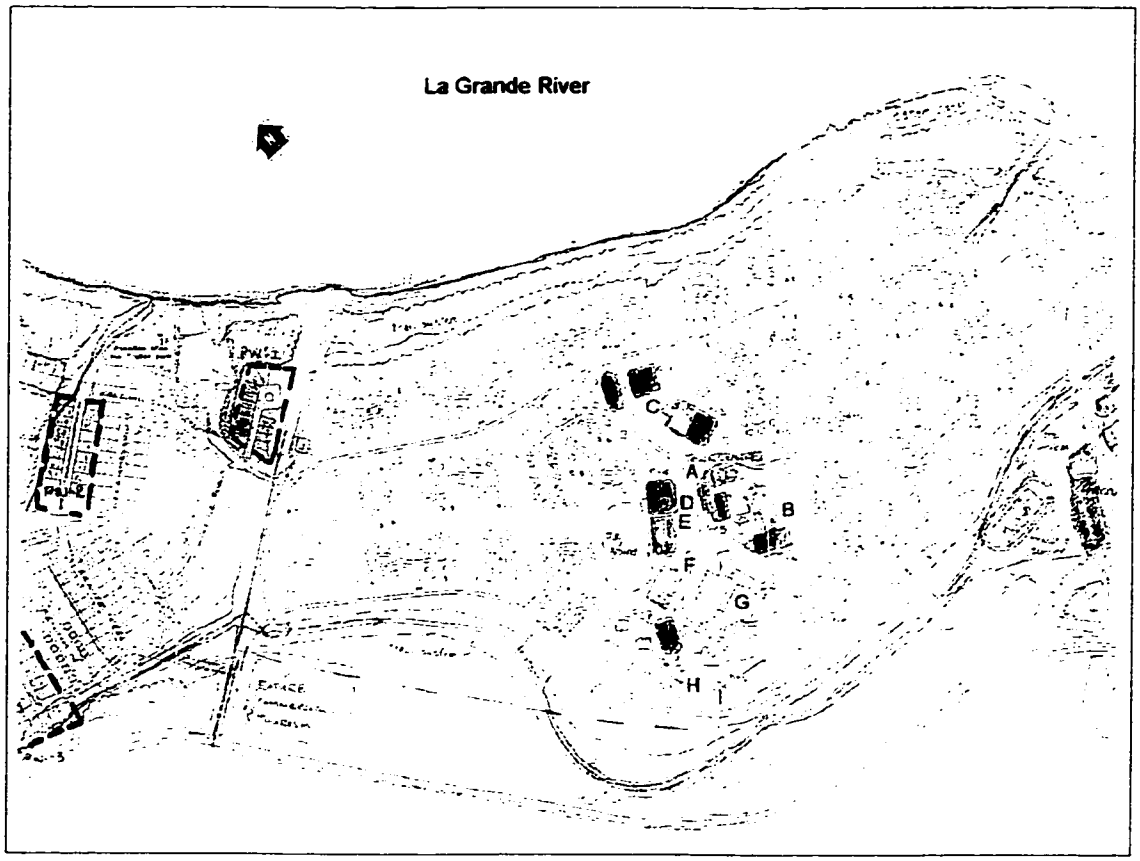

Figure 2 - Chisasibi Map (obtained from Band Coucil Office 1998)

A - Commercial Building
B - Community Centre (Mitchuap)
C - Hospital
D - Rink
E - Arena
F - Administration offices (Police station, fire station, Cree School Board, etc)
G - School
H - Anglican Church
I - Catholic Church

of several rows of houses, a gas station and the canoe shop. This part of town is nicknamed Chinatown, because of the shapes of the roofs on the houses.[7] Other businesses and services spread out through the town include another gas station, a baseball field, a video store, an ice cream stand and a daycare centre. From the main road, there are a few dirt roads and foot paths that lead to the river, the sandy beach with which it is lined and the groups of upside down canoes that are scattered along the water's edge. Across the river, row upon row of spruce trees can be seen.

My impression of Chisasibi during the first days of my stay was that it had a city-like feel in spite of its small size. The level of traffic is considerable and there are always people of all ages out walking to or from the core of the village, where the majority of people's daily activities seem to take place. The commercial building, for example, is almost always full of people. Many elderly people sit in groups on benches in the middle and along the sides while other people walk around or stand in small groups. These small gatherings of people seem to be fluid in nature; as one or two people in a given group wander off to run errands or to join another group, other people appear and take their places.

Over the course of my stay, I came to perceive the village as a kind of giant house with the downtown core as its living room. This notion was compounded by a seeming lack of concern for private property on behalf of the people of individual dwellings. For instance, people are free to wander in between houses without worrying about walking on someone else's lawn.[8] Similarly, it is standard practice when visiting someone's house to knock and, without waiting for someone to answer the door, to walk in and call out: "Hello!"

The clusters of houses tend to group families related either through blood or marriage

together. For example, Kathy and Antonio, my hosts, live at one end of a U-shaped cluster of five houses. Antonio's parents, his sister and her daughter live next door and his sister's son lives in the second house over with his wife and children.[9]

The living arrangements for workers from the outside are quite different from those of the Cree and much more reminiscent of city life. There are apartment buildings built especially for these workers. The hospital workers[10], for the most part, live in a different part of town than the school workers and most of the workers in general live apart from the Cree house clusters. During my stay, however, I heard from both Native and non-Native people that attempts at greater integration were being made so that every house cluster would also include a building for hospital and school staff.

Access to the Field Site

In the winter of 1998, I began research about how to obtain permission to conduct fieldwork in Chisasibi. Through some networking, I eventually spoke with a member of the Grand Council of the Cree (GCC) who was familiar with anthropological research and with Chisasibi.[11] I asked him if I needed permission from the GCC as well as from the Chisasibi band council but he specified to me that each community was autonomous when making this kind of decision.

Soon thereafter, I contacted Charles Bobbish, the Chief of Chisasibi,[12] to ask him for permission to study in the community. He assured me that there was no real problem as long as I intended to share the results of my work with the community. He stated that each individual made his or her own decision as to whether to be a part of this type of project and

that he had no objection.

I offered to fax him a brief summary of my thesis proposal and a letter from my professor attesting to the fact that I was indeed a student. I also asked him whether he knew of a place where I could stay. He provided me with the name of a French Canadian woman who had been working in the village for many years. "She knows everybody, I'm sure she can help you," he said.

I contacted this woman and, unfortunately, she could not help me. She gave me the names of people who might be able to give me more information but was very doubtful about whether anything would come of it. When I told her of my desire to stay in a Cree household, she told me that it would be nearly impossible to do so, as they live in very crowded houses.

After doing research on the Internet, I came upon a web site for the GCC. On this site, there was a page about the James Bay Cree Cultural Centre and a phone number for the person to contact for more information. That person was Kathy. I called her and told her that I was a student who wanted to conduct research in Chisasibi and that I found her number on the Internet.[13]

I then asked her if she knew of a family that would be willing to take me in if I paid for room and board. After a few seconds of thinking it over, she replied that I could stay in her house. She asked me if I was getting any grants and, when I told her that I was only getting student loans from the government, she said that I would not need to pay any rent. I would only need to buy my own food and pay for any long-distance calls. She specified that she and her husband were away for much of the time, that I would be alone in the house with her 20 year-old son and that there would be no one there to cook for me.

My last obstacle was finding a way to get to Chisasibi. Although I had planned a budget, financial difficulties prevented me from flying there as planned. As the weeks went by, driving became the only feasible option. Luckily, my husband, Larry, was willing to drive me to Chisasibi and we planned our trip for July 28th, 1998.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research project is primarily based on the experiential approach described by Jean-Guy Goulet (1998). In his work with the Dene Tha of Northern Canada, Goulet engaged in what he refers to as 'radical participation' to gain insight into the lives and world views of the people in whom he was interested. After some time spent with his hosts, he came to realize that, to come to any real understanding of their culture, he needed to learn from them in a manner appropriate to the ways in which they were attempting to teach him.

The Dene Tha, like many Native people, rely less on the use of verbal instruction to teach than on an experiential mode where individuals learn through direct, personal experience of different social and spiritual events. One can never know anything unless s/he has lived it. Goulet therefore needed to adjust his way of learning, based in a Canadian cultural system where people are taught through verbal instruction, to one where he opened his mind to intuitive knowledge that comes from paying attention to inner instincts, non-verbal clues and the messages contained in stories about seemingly unrelated matters (Goulet 1998: xxix-xxxiii).

The methodology used by Goulet then consisted of an immersion into the everyday lives

of the Dene Tha, not as a distanced observer, but as an involved and active participant. His involvement in various rituals and customs, as well as in different social dramas, and his willingness to incorporate Dene Tha knowledge into his personal repertoire of ideas and to put it into practice in the appropriate manner enabled him to become "fluent" in Dene social life.

In accordance with his experience-based methodology, the resulting work takes the form of a narrative ethnography combined with an ethnomethodological analysis of accounts of Dene Tha life by its participants. He includes his own interaction with Dene Tha people in different circumstances as ethnographic material upon which he draws to give readers a picture of Dene Tha existence. To avoid the danger of ignoring the ways in which participants constitute lived reality, he uses ethnomethodological concepts of indexicality, reflexivity and competency to analyse both his own experiences and those of the Dene Tha.

He describes indexicality as the context-dependent nature of meaning. In other words, the context within which a statement is made, the identity of its speaker and the way in which it is made all contribute to its actual meaning. Reflexivity, on the other hand takes into account the interplay between accounts and the settings they describe. While a description allows the discussion of the actual setting, that setting assumes meaning through its description. Finally, Goulet describes competency as the acquired capability to adequately describe a setting in a manner appropriate to the framework within which it exists for the people who inhabit that setting (Goulet 1998: xl - xli).

In my own fieldwork, and in the resulting thesis, I primarily focus on my own interaction with people of different cultural backgrounds and on their accounts of Native/non-

Native relations. My experiences with different individuals and groups in Chisasibi are used as ethnographic material, which I analyse in terms of their settings, in terms of the identities and life experience of those with whom I interacted as well as my own and in terms of the accounts of social relations told to me by various Chisasibi residents. These accounts, in turn, are analysed in terms of the circumstances within which they were produced and in terms of the identities of their producers.

The methods that I used to gather information for this thesis are informal conversation and, for lack of a better term, 'hanging around'. While I had intended to conduct formal taped interviews, I realized that, due to various circumstances and the nature of my field site and project, this would be unfeasible. I felt that formal interviews, with a predetermined list of questions, would inhibit people's responses and would not allow them to fully elaborate upon what they wanted to discuss with me. I also felt that they would put an official and businesslike strain on my relations with people whereas I wanted to deal with people on a friendly and easy-going basis.

I found, however, that I needed to approach Cree and white individuals in different manners. With Cree people, in general, I only approached people to whom I had already been introduced, who had the chance to observe me for a while or who questioned me about why I was in the community. My reasons for following this pattern were manifold. For one thing, I am somewhat shy about imposing on people and I felt that calling a stranger might be perceived by Cree people as somewhat forward, even when their name had been given to me by another Cree.[14]

Secondly, I noticed that the same names tended to surface when people told me to

whom I should speak about Cree culture. Certain people seemed to be perceived by many Cree as 'knowing' more about Cree culture than most people. While I did not specifically avoid talking with these people, I did not particularly seek them out as I wanted to give equal weight to the opinions of people who may normally be more marginalised within the community.[15]

Finally, I felt awkward jumping into anthropological research with people before they had a chance to know me. Given many people's past experiences with anthropologists in this area, I feared that they might tell me what they thought the anthropologists who had come before would have wanted to hear even though it may not have been what they actually felt or wanted to talk about.

I felt that my approach would give people a chance to know who I was, where I was coming from and that I was sincere before engaging in discussions of topics that dealt with their own lives. I also wanted people to talk to me only if they truly wanted to have a conversation with me on any general topic. In other words, I wanted them to feel that they could be free to talk about what they felt was important at the time of our conversation.

With non-Native people, the situation was entirely different. I did not cross paths with them as frequently as I did with Cree people and when I did, they tended to be in a hurry to get to wherever they were going (eg: the school, the hospital or home.) I therefore did not have many opportunities to strike up conversations with them.

After I expressed my interest in speaking to "Whites" to Jim, a Cree friend, he gave me the names of two of his White friends. Whereas I was shy to call Cree people in this fashion, I had no qualms about calling non-Native people. Upon reflection, I realized that it was due

to my sense of knowing how to speak to them that enabled me to do this. While I was always afraid of overstepping cultural norms that I might be unaware of when speaking with Cree people and of unintentionally offending them, I had no such fears with French or English Canadians. Being a participant in both cultures, I know what is offensive and what is not.

I therefore called these people, who turned out to be quite willing to talk to me and they gave me the names and numbers of some of their co-workers who they thought would also be willing to talk to me. After my first few conversations with non-Natives in the community, I realized that the open-ended approach to discussions that I had adopted with Cree would not be suitable. Because of our shared cultural background,[16] they tended to be more willing to go straight to the heart of the matter. Although I still did not conduct formal interviews, I opted for informal interviews where I would bring up different themes during our conversations without precluding any other topics they would like to discuss.

In discussions with Native and non-Native people, I broached the issues of relations between the different groups in the community. With Cree people, I tried to get a feel for the way they perceived outsiders and how they adapted to living and working side-by-side with them. I also tried to find out how they shared their own cultural heritage with outsiders. From non-Native people, I tried to learn what their preconceptions of Cree people and culture had been before they came to the community, whether these notions had or had not changed, how they adapted to the cultural differences and with being far from their own social and cultural environments. In the course of all of these discussions, I attempted to discover the elements that worked to hinder or to encourage the formation of alliances and friendships between members of the two groups.

While I feel that the approach that I adopted was mostly successful for my purposes, I realize that there are some problematic issues. The main issue is that I often learned things of a very personal nature which I obviously cannot discuss in the thesis. Due to the informal nature of our discussions, the lines between personal and general topics could become unclear. However, I feel that I have been able to include only the expressed opinions that do not violate the privacy of any individual or group.

The 'hanging around' aspect of my fieldwork mostly consisted of walking around the town, attending different events such as the Pow Wow, a square-dancing competition and basically tagging along with individuals or groups whenever I had the opportunity. I did not take notes while I was engaging in different activities because I did not want people to feel as though they were being observed. Additionally, I told people that I was not observing them and that I was mostly trying to get a feel for life in town and things that related to my topic.

Indeed, when interacting with people in different contexts, I was attempting to get a sense of how my own relations with different people were affected by different elements including cultural/ethnic background, gender, age, class, profession, etc. The resulting reflections are therefore mostly based on social interaction rather than on the actions of specific individuals.

These interactions often acted simultaneously as settings and subjects for many of the above-mentioned conversations. This dialectic proved invaluable as a source of knowledge about Native/non-Native relations. While my interactions with members of both groups were the focus of several discussions with Natives and non-Natives, the discussions themselves

were part of such interactions and therefore became a further source of knowledge about the very relations in which I am interested.

During my stay, I made various attempts to learn the basics of the Cree language. My first step was to go to the school library to find out if there were any books that would help me learn Cree. There were none. I then inquired whether the school offered any courses for outsiders wishing to learn Cree. I found out that there had been such courses in the past but that, because of the shift work required of hospital staff, it turned out to be difficult to keep a schedule and the courses were discontinued.

I found a lexicon of James Bay Cree (Cree School Board 1987) on Kathy's bookshelf and started studying. I also tried to learn various words from people. It was at this point that I encountered a major difficulty: the dialects spoken by the Cree from inland and from the coast are quite different. While there are many similarities and they can understand each other, this makes it difficult for an outsider to learn the language in great detail.

I would sometimes try out some of the words I learned from an Inlander when speaking to a Coaster (I did not always know who was from where) and be told: "No, that's not how you say it." I persevered, however, and tried to pick up some of the most important words from people and from the book. People seemed generally pleased that I was making the effort.

One Cree person commented: "Some people spend ten, twelve years here and they never try to learn one word of Cree. You . . . you've been here only about a month and you're picking some of it up. You're really trying." By the time of my departure, I knew the words for such things as hello and goodbye (*wachiya*), yes (*nihii* or *kipaa*), no (*nimaa*),

goose (*nisk*), duck (*shiship*), ok (*agudah*), "we built a fire" (*injeekudwanan*), and river (*shiipiish*).

The fact that I was not fluent in Cree was only a slight hindrance. Most of the people I encountered spoke English to different degrees. Some of the elderly people did not speak English and, unfortunately, I was unable to speak with most of them except to say 'hello.' Another result of my lack of Cree knowledge was that people could start speaking in Cree with each other when they did not want me to understand what they were saying. This can be viewed both as an advantage for them and a disadvantage for me. While I certainly missed out on some important things, they had a way of obtaining privacy even if I was standing next to them.

The most significant result of my lack of fluency in the Cree language, however, is the fact that the resulting thesis is completely based in a non-Cree form of knowledge. In three months, it was impossible to reach the level of competency and fluency described by Goulet (1998) as a necessary component to an ethnomethodological analysis of another culture. For this reason, it is necessary for me to acknowledge from the start that the knowledge produced by my fieldwork regarding Native/non-Native relations primarily takes a non-Native viewpoint.

I discuss Cree views of these relations only to the extent that they were described to me by the Cree themselves or explained to me by non-Native residents in their own attempts to rationalize the Native/non-Native dynamic. However, I make no attempt to assume a Native (Cree) point of view, to determine the truth of Cree statements or to form a theory of contemporary Cree culture based on these statements. As discussed in the introduction, my

reasons for assuming this stance are practical and in no way reflect a lack of interest for Cree culture. To the contrary, my experience in Chisasibi has heightened my desire to learn more about the Cree, their history and their knowledge on their own terms and in the proper context.

Chapter 2 - Friends and Strangers: The Talk of the Town

Almost everyone with whom I spoke in Chisasibi, whether they were Native or non-Native, had something to say about the multi-cultural aspect of the town. Issues of culture, identity and belonging seemed to be on everybody's minds and many people commented on the way in which residents categorized themselves, and others, according to ethnic groups, geographical origin and/or profession.

Once I began to question people about the relationships between Natives and non-Natives in the village, I realized that this was a sensitive subject for many people. Certain people were reluctant to talk about these issues at first, possibly because of a fear that I was looking for information about specific people. However, I reassured them that I was only trying to get their general impressions and opinions, that their input would be anonymous and that any personal information that happened to "slip out"during our conversations would not be revealed.

A certain number of people were also hesitant because they felt that they had nothing to say on the topic or that their opinions were unimportant. I assured these people that whatever they had to say would be relevant since they were directly involved in the daily life of the town and that it was this sphere of activity with which I was interested.

Once people began to answer my questions or to reflect on the topics of conversation which I proposed, their thoughts often led to discussions of cultural identity, stereotyping, gender, justice, social class, family and politics. Many of these discussions were far-reaching

in their geographical scope or in their social implications.

In this chapter, I bring forth only the ideas that were most frequently touched upon in my conversations with Chisasibi residents and which deal with the issues with which this thesis is concerned, namely the influence of cultural background and life experience upon Native/non-Native relations, or more specifically, Native/non-Native friendship. I would like to stress, however, that the views outlined here do not necessarily represent a cohesive vision of the life of the community by its members. I am simply outlining some of the different opinions and explanations that various residents expressed to me in order to give readers a feel for the variety of experiences which exist in the village. Additionally, I feel it is necessary to point out that, out of a population of approximately 3000 people, I only had in-depth conversations with roughly 30 people, or 1% of the population.[1] This is by no means a representative sample. However, it does allow for insight into some of the dynamics which take place between community members and a discussion of their implications.

Chisasibi's Internal Divisions

People of both Native and non-Native origin were happy to describe the different lines that divided the population of the town. While a cursory glance shows the obvious distinction between Natives and non-Natives, their descriptions revealed more subtle groupings. Both of the main categories of people, Native and non-Native, consist of several subgroups that are only discernable to one who has spent a considerable amount of time in the village. Had these distinctions not been pointed out to me, I would probably not have noticed them in the short time that I spent there.

The Cree

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the Cree population comprises "Coasters" and "Inlanders". This distinction, reiterated to me by many Cree informants, is based on the location of a family's hunting territory. While I did not hear of any animosity between these two groups, I heard one or two comments about the financial and political prosperity of the Inlanders compared to that of the Coasters. People also told me that the language was somewhat different but that people of both groups can easily understand each other.

Both Cree and Whites pointed out to me that the extended family[2] is the most important grouping among the Cree. People spend most of their free time with family members and willingly share their food, money or equipment with them if the need arises. I did not, however, hear of any rules for or against dating or marriage between the two groups and Coasters and Inlanders seem to easily form friendships amongst themselves.

It is therefore important to note here that this division of the Cree community seems to exist in theory and, somewhat, in practice but that it does not appear to govern people's daily lives in the sense that it does not establish strict rules about how people relate to each other within, and outside of, these groupings. The Cree population displays solidarity and commonality in the face of outside forces in spite of any internal divisions and conflicts that may exist.

Another variable that exists within the Chisasibi Cree community is town affiliation. Several people told me that Cree individuals from other James Bay Cree towns were forever identified with their community of origin regardless of the number of years they spent in Chisasibi. For example, I heard at least four or five stories about a man from Wemindji, a

village situated on the James Bay coast south of Chisasibi, who had married a Chisasibi woman and who had been living there for at least ten years. He was still known as 'the guy from Wemindji'.

Another category of Cree people that people recognized consisted of the children of marriages between Crees and Whites. Most of the comments I heard about this group were positive. I was told that people of mixed origin are accepted as Cree and that they had all the rights of Cree people. I heard one or two comments from people of Cree/White origin which led me to believe that there may be occasional difficulties related to their situation. One such child named Marie-Anne described the frustration she had felt as a younger child: "People on both sides teased me. I was told I had lice by French kids." In general, however, I heard these children referred to as Cree and I often found out only later that one of their parents was White.

Finally, another grouping that was the topic of several discussions among the Cree is religious affiliation. According to my informants, a considerable portion of the Cree population is Christian (mostly Anglican) while many other people consider themselves as 'traditionalists.' Among the traditionalists, there is an effort to preserve the traditional knowledge and practices of their ancestors in the hopes that they can be used to foster a sense of identity and responsibility. Even among traditionalists, however, there is some disagreement about what these practices are.

According to several people, some Christians feel that traditional Cree beliefs and practices, such as the use of drums and Pow-Wows, are evil. However, many Christians also feel that Christianity and traditional beliefs are compatible since they emphasize the same basic

values, such as sharing and being there for one's family. There are, of course, people who do not identify with either category.

The Inuit

While Chisasibi is primarily described as a Cree community, a small portion of the town's Native population is composed of Inuit people. Most of them apparently speak Cree and, to my inexperienced eyes, do not differ in their appearance. However, Cree people seem to be able to identify them as Inuit and the extent to which the Inuit are accepted into the Cree community varies on an individual basis whether Cree or Inuit.

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to speak to many Inuit people. From the few that I knew, I found out that they felt marginalised by Cree people and that they were sometimes bitter about their observation that the Cree had more financial benefits than the Inuit.[3] One Inuit man also told me that they felt more comfortable with Whites because they were friendlier than Crees. On the other hand, the Inuit whom I knew had some Cree friends and did not seem to be actively disliked by any of the Cree people with whom I spoke.[4]

However, a few Cree people admitted a certain disdain for the Inuit and referred to them as a "group of alcoholics and drug users". One man proudly boasted that, in his youth, he had helped drive a large number of Inuit out of the village and warned me to avoid too much contact with them when he learned that I had Inuit friends. "Don't get too attached to the riffraff," he warned.

I did not hear many comments about Inuit from non-Natives. Those who did refer to them were apparently on good terms with the Inuit they knew.[5] André, a Francophone male

who had also spent time in Whapmagoostui/Kujuuarapik, a Cree/Inuit town on the coast of Hudson Bay, observed that Inuit people seemed friendlier on the surface but that Cree made better long-term friends. "Les Inuits sont bien amicales pis y viennent te parler la première fois qu'y t'voient mais ça va jamais plus loin que ça. Les Cris, eux autres, ça prends plus de temps avant qu'y deviennent tes amis mais, une fois que t'es *in* avec eux autres, c'est à vie,"commented André. ("Inuits are really friendly and they come speak to you the first time they see you but it never goes any deeper than that. With Cree, though, it takes longer for them to be your friends but once you're in with them, it's for life."

The Non-Natives

Chisasibi's non-Native population includes people from many different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. While French and English Canadians form a large proportion, there are also South and Central Americans, Europeans, and people of African descent. It is interesting to note here that all non-Native people in the village, including Blacks, are usually referred to as 'Whites.'[6] Cree people often note, though, that black people are different from white people and that, as a group, Blacks have been marginalised by Whites in similar ways as Natives. "Hey, brother, none of this is your fault. You didn't invade us," commented a Cree man upon meeting a black man at the Pow-Wow.

The internal divisions of the non-Native population are mainly formed by professional affiliation. According to many of the people I conversed with, hospital staff and school staff[7] tend to form separate groupings. "It's funny . . . when you go to a meeting and there are white people there, you see two separate groups. At one end, there are the teachers and the

others who work at the school and at the other end, there are the doctors and nurses," observed Maxwell, a Cree man, as he worked on a canoe in his backyard.

Most of my non-Native informants admitted to the existence of this phenomenon. Some explained to me that the people with whom they work are also the people with whom they have the most in common. "Même si j'vivais dans l'sud, à Montréal, j'me tiendrais sûrement avec d'autres [travailleuses hospitalières]. On passe la plupart de notre temps ensemble au travail et on apprend à se connaître," commented Éliane, a hospital worker. "Ce n'est pas parce qu'une personne est blanche que j'ai forcément quelque chose en commun avec elle." ("Even if I lived down south, in Montreal, I would probably hang around with other [hospital workers]. We spend most of our time together at work and we get to know each other. Just because a person is white does not mean that I have anything in common with them.") Erik, a store employee, also comments on this issue: "It's hard to get to know people you don't work with here in town anyway. There's nothing much to do after work . . .people just go home to their families so you don't see other people very much."

People mentioned the high level of turnover among hospital and school staff as another source of the lack of cohesion among non-Natives. Apparently, many people come to work in the community for only a few months before deciding to move back to the south. Finally, the housing arrangements were mentioned as an isolating factor among non-Natives. In fact, hospital and school workers live in different areas of the town.

There are, of course, non-Natives in Chisasibi who work at various other businesses such as the stores, restaurants and banks. There is also a French-Canadian Catholic priest who has been in the community for more than forty years. I did not get the opportunity to meet

many of these people as they were apparently not part of the social networks that I had formed. When I tried to approach a few of them outside of the commercial building, they shied away and tried to avoid conversing with me.

Another category of non-Natives in Chisasibi consists of people who have Cree spouses. There is a considerable overlap between this category and the others as many of them met their spouses when they came to work at the school or hospital. People with Cree spouses do not seem to form an actual social group and seem to be well accepted into the Cree community since non-Natives who spend many years in the town are generally perceived more favourably than their peers.

Finally, there are usually several short-term residents who do not fall into any of these categories. These are people who come to the village for specific purposes such as research or tourism. For example, there are often medical specialists who come to the hospital or Hydro-Quebec workers who come into the town for various reasons. The period of stay for these visitors ranges from one day to several months and some people come repeatedly throughout the year.

Selves and Others: Defining Culture, Identity and Commonality in Chisasibi

From the above descriptions of Chisasibi's different social groups, we see that Native and non-Native people form their identity based on very different parameters. The members of the groups described here therefore have very different perspectives on the definitions and meanings of culture and identity, whether it is their own or that of another group. For the purpose of this thesis, it is as important to examine each group's self-perception as it is to

examine its perception of the other group since both dynamics come into play in the social arena comprised by Chisasibi.[8]

When discussing the concepts of culture and identity with different people, I got the impression that it was easier for Cree people than it was for non-Natives to tease out specific themes which they felt were relevant. As opposed to many Whites, they have been grappling with these notions and applying them to their daily lives in the midst of movements by Native people in Canada to strengthen their cultural entities and to reestablish cultural ideals which have been threatened by colonizing and globalizing forces.

Cree Culture, Values and Identity

I was warned by Kathy early in the course of my stay that many people would tell me that Cree culture was all about hunting and fishing. In her opinion, however, it is about the *values* involved. "When I was young and we lived on the island [Fort George], when people came back from the bush, my mother would send me to bring them sugar, flour and other things they had been without all winter. They would sometimes share some of their fish with us. We didn't have much but what we had, we shared. Now I share a paycheck but the principle is the same. If I wanted to, I could fill this house with antiques but I choose to share instead," she explained. Jim also stressed the importance of sharing. "It's extremely rare to catch a porcupine. If I catch a porcupine, instead of cooking it and keeping it to myself, I give a tiny bit to each and every member of my family: my sisters, brothers, their kids, my kids. Even if everyone only gets one bite, everyone gets to taste it."

According to Cree and non-Native informants, the principle of helping and sharing

seems to stretch out from family members, to Crees in general and even to non-Crees. In other words, family members are the people a given individual prioritizes, but Crees in general are also part of the sphere of people that this individual would be most willing to help. "But we help white people too if they're not arrogant. Once, a white guy was asking for directions but he was very condescending. You could tell he thought we were a bunch of fools. We don't like that too much," specified Jim.

The issue of adaptability was another important theme in my conversations with Cree people. Kathy pointed out to me that the three most important things about culture are preservation, maintenance and adaptability. She offered the example of the Cree language, which she described as a bush language. "There are words for all that is necessary to know in the bush," she specified. "There are names for different trees but all flowers, except for one, are 'flowers.'" She suggested, however, that if the Cree language does not adapt to the current way of life, it may get lost. It is therefore necessary, in her opinion, to find terms for things Cree people use today such as computers and other modern commodities.

The idea of language preservation was shared by many Cree people with whom I spoke. Teaching their children to speak Cree was a top priority for many parents, although they all acknowledged that learning English and French were important since dealing with the outside world is unavoidable.[9] Many people prided themselves on speaking two or three languages, a skill which allowed them to be functional in white society while maintaining a sense of Cree identity.

However, the notion of functionality within white society encompasses more than being able to speak English and/or French. It also involves the ability to negotiate with different

elements of an industrialized, capitalist world such as formal schooling, business meetings and contractual negotiations, for example. The importance of this functionality, especially between middle-aged people and youths, is twofold.

It is acknowledged that, due to the current size of the Cree population in relation to the available hunting territories, it would be impossible for everyone to subsist on hunting, fishing and trapping alone. As stated by Kathy: "It is necessary for some people to make the sacrifice of working at office jobs and other jobs formerly filled by non-Natives so that the people who need to hunt for a living can do it." Secondly, many people feel a certain sense of urgency regarding the attribution of these positions to Cree people in order to obtain total control over their community. In fact, young people are encouraged to study at universities down south to obtain knowledge and skills that can be used for the benefit of the community. However, several people pointed out to me that this process is greatly hindered by the negative self-image that many Cree people have of themselves and of Cree people in general.

This self-image is blamed partly on the white-based media and its often negative portrayal of Native people. It is also blamed on the treatment of Cree children by residential school teachers, nuns and missionaries in the past. I heard several accounts of the ways in which these people referred to Cree and other Native children as "savages" or as stupid and unable to learn. Those children, who are now middle-aged and have children of their own, underwent various levels of identity crises.[10]

As several Cree informants pointed out to me, many of them have now come to terms with their past and have regained their sense of identity and self-confidence. They may have inadvertently passed along some of their old feelings of self-doubt and inferiority to their

children. It is with this new generation that many adults are now actively concerned and there are many efforts to instill the values of the elders among children and youths in order to keep negative influences at bay. Dan, for example, a Cree in his twenties, regularly takes groups of children hiking in the woods to teach them basic bush skills, such as starting a fire and setting a trap, and the values with which they are associated.

In spite of these struggles with confusion regarding culture, values and identity, there is a growing trend for people to assume leadership positions within, and outside of, the community because of their ability to function within different cultural systems. People who have this ability and the propensity to use it to benefit the community are valued as are people who continue to go to the bush and attest to the importance of a hunting way of life.

Therefore, Cree ideas of culture encompass issues that transcend the usual vision of outsiders regarding Cree culture (cf. Tanner 1979). In addition to the preservation of hunting, fishing, trapping, and values such as sharing, respecting animals, caring for the land, respecting elders and their knowledge and tending children, there is the notion that being Cree includes the ability to incorporate elements of modern society into Cree life and that this adaptability will help their culture flourish.

Non-Native Identity: Work Affiliation and Social Networking

Among my non-Native informants, it was more difficult to form a cohesive view of culture because of the cultural diversity among them and because of the smaller emphasis on the notion of culture within 'mainstream' society.[11] When notions of culture were discussed in Chisasibi, whether it was with Natives or non-Natives, the culture in question was almost

always Cree. Far from being a cohesive, functional group, the non-Native population therefore has little sense of shared identity or culture.

While a non-Native's city or country of origin is usually known, there is no sub-grouping along the lines of ethnic origin or language according to my informants. Therefore, cultural elements seemingly do not contribute to their description of their identity *vis à vis* the Cree community, which is the identity with which they seemed concerned when during our discussions.

The identity of a non-Native in Chisasibi is grounded in their specific role in the community and in historical relations between Natives and non-Natives. While they base this identity mainly on their professional affiliation, their personal relations with Native people, or specifically Cree people, may also contribute to their self-identification within the village. Personal interests, knowledge about, and respect for, Cree culture, historical relations between the Cree and Euro-Canadians and positioning within social networks involving Cree people all have roles to play in the way people define themselves as members of the community. As several people told me, many of these elements involve choice and, ultimately, an individual's level of involvement is dictated by their own desire to be, or not to be, involved.

Some of the individuals who had the greatest tendency to define themselves as active members of the community were those who had personal interests which allowed them to feel a sense of commonality with others, whether those others were Native or non-Native. These interests could include hunting, fishing, sports, music or any other activity that could be shared between several people.

Ken, a hospital employee, illustrates the process whereby he became an active and long-term resident of Chisasibi. "Of course, the reason I get along with Crees is because I like to go hunting. I wasn't planning on staying here this long at first . . . I discovered that I really liked hunting so I got really involved. Now, I don't want to leave, at least not for very long at a time."

Conversely, an aversion to these activities, especially hunting and fishing, could lead a person to feel disconnected from the community. Dirk, a school worker, for example, explained to me that: "Sitting around in the bush surrounded by black flies waiting for a caribou is definitely not my idea of a good time." In addition to this aversion, he had little opportunity for contact with other adults during the course of his work.

Another major factor influencing one's integration, or lack thereof, in the community is hir level of interest in Cree life. This entails an interest in Cree culture and history, respect for the way of life of the Cree and an effort to learn the language. Without any of these elements, an individual may spend ten or more years in Chisasibi without being an active community member.

Louise, a hospital employee, exemplified the importance of this interest. "There has to be more than just the money. If it's just the money someone's here for, it's not worth it. You only get $6000 more per year here than you would down south for the same job. No, you have to have a genuine interest in the local culture and the well-being of the people. Otherwise, I can't see a person staying here for very long because they would get bored and depressed."

Finally, once these elements allow an individual to establish themselves within social

networks, it is important to maintain these networks and to move along them in order to connect with different people. Therefore, people who are able to define themselves as involved are often able to attend a given public function, for example, and know many of the people who are present.

Of course, these factors all interrelate with a person's occupation. As explained to me by a hospital worker, it is slightly easier for hospital staff to have access to Cree social networks since their occupation consists of helping people. Teachers, on the other hand, are apparently seen as meddlers by the Cree since they sometimes teach young children values different from those of their parents.

In spite of the intricacies involved with trying to express a sense of identity specific to the non-Native residents of Chisasibi, there were nevertheless contexts within which there was a clear distinction between 'us and them.' Certain delicate topics, although rare, would engender a voicing of feelings of belonging strictly to the category of 'White' as opposed to anything else. For example, André, a hospital worker, commented on the tension surrounding the work of Hydro-Quebec. "J'comprends leur dilemme (aux Cris) au sujet de tout ça. Mais moi, j'suis blanc, et j'suis habitué d'avoir de l'électricité alors il faut qu'ils respectent ça s'y veulent que j'travaille ici." ("I understand their (the Cree) dilemma about the whole thing. But I'm white and I'm used to having electricity so they have to respect that if they want me to work here."

Similarly, Father Charles, a Catholic priest, pointed out that the relative peacefulness and tolerance among the people of Chisasibi dissipate when people drink. "Les Cris et les Blancs s'entendent bien jusqu'à ce qu'ils boivent ensembles. Aussi tôt qu'ils sont saouls, les

Cris se rappellent de toutes les vielles histoires et on est rien que des 'maudits Blancs.' C'est pareil comme les québécois qui se saoulent pis qui parlent des 'maudits anglais.'" ("The Crees and the Whites get along until they drink together. As soon as they're drunk, the Crees remember all the old stories and we're just a bunch of 'damn Whites.' It's just like the *Québécois* who get drunk and talk about the 'damn English.'")

This leads us to a discussion of the different perceptions held by Natives and non-Natives about each other and how they locate people within their respective categories. It is important to note here that the opinions that the Cree expressed were sometimes made in reference to a larger population. For example, some Cree people would sometimes refer to Whites in general or to Whites in a specific location outside of Chisasibi such as Radisson, about an hour's drive away, or Montreal. Non-Native informants, on the other hand, only referred to people in Chisasibi since, in most cases, it was their only source of contact with Native people.[12]

Otherness in Chisasibi

Because of my own identity as a white person, it was somewhat difficult to get Cree people to tell me what they actually thought of Whites. However, from comments made during discussions about other topics, I knew that they identified the entity of 'The White Man' as a somewhat negative force which had been encroaching on their existence since its arrival in North America. Kathy, for example, explained that before the arrival of 'The White Man,' Cree people had foreseen their arrival. "There's an old story that said that white people would come and that everything would be a mess after that."

One of the characteristics ascribed to white people by Crees is the tendency to pigeonhole everything. Antonio told me about a Cree word which had been used to designate Whites soon after their arrival and which meant: 'Putting everything into boxes.' Whereas their own vision of the world stipulates that everything is interconnected, Cree say that white people categorize everything separately.

Another assumption about Whites is that most of them think that they are better than Native people. However, many people felt that things had gotten better over the years. Several Cree people told me about experiences in the south which justified this opinion. Dominic, who owns his own business in Chisasibi, told me about the time he spent in Montreal as a student in the 1970s. "I remember going to this restaurant on St-Catherine Street and waiting over a half-hour to be served while other people, white people, were coming in and getting served before me. Back then, if you were Native, you had to wait a *long* time before being served. I know not all white people are like that though."

Jim, who frequently takes non-Native residents to his camp, describes how some people come with an attitude of superiority, thinking that they are tough enough to handle bush life. "Some of them, they come, you know, with their collars up and strutting around. 'Hey, I'm from Montreal . . . I can take anything, man.' It's funny to see them." Silly as they may seem, however, these tourists help several Cree business owners, outfitters and guides to make additional income and are resented only slightly in this respect. White people who come without this pretentiousness are more highly respected and efforts are made to teach them about Cree culture, values and traditions when an interest is showed.

Among youths, teens and children, I noticed that television informed many of their

opinions about white people. For example, many of them assumed that I was wealthy and when I argued with them that I was, in fact, quite poor, they looked at me with expressions of disbelief. Even some adults, however, had impressions of Whites which were based on popular media images.

When referring specifically to non-Native residents of Chisasibi, a few Cree stated that people who came to work at the hospital and school did it solely for the money. When I told Jim that a few people that I had met among the non-Natives genuinely seemed to care about the well-being of the Cree community, he mimicked sarcastically: "'Of course we care . . . as long as it puts money in our bank account.'" Other Cree people, however, pointed out to me that there had been some workers from the outside who had tried hard to improve things in the community and that they knew that there were some white people who really did care.

Several Cree are puzzled by the phenomenon, described previously in this chapter, whereby the non-Natives group themselves according to their professions. The Cree often interpreted the formation of these groupings as the symptom of animosities or dislike between the hospital and school staff. To them, ethnic, or cultural, background, should easily transcend any professional affiliation among white people and the formation of separate groups represents a kind of competitive spirit or territoriality. Several Cree people pointed out to me that white people do not even acknowledge each other on the street if they do not know each other or if they know that they differ in professional affiliation[13].

"If I go to Montreal and I see another Cree person, or another Native person, I will say 'Hi!'. Since I'd be far from home, it would make me feel like I have a connection somehow. So I don't understand why . . . white people, when they see each other here, far from their

homes, they don't even speak to each other on the street if they don't know each other. Wouldn't it make you feel more connected?" pondered Jim, a Cree friend

There seems to be some disagreement among the Chisasibi Cree concerning the role of outsiders in the community. Most people view their presence as transitory and only necessary until enough Cree people are trained to do the jobs now held by Whites. A major point of disagreement is the rate at which this process is carried out. Some are in a rush to replace as many Whites as possible in the shortest amount of time. Others are more willing to slow the pace down and to make sure that the Cree replacements are thoroughly trained. In the mean time, they have no qualms about hiring trained outsiders.[14]

Darren, a Cree man in his twenties, said: "I'd rather hire Whites who have training than hire Crees who aren't trained. You can't hire them just because they're Cree . . .they have to be trained first. Right now, there aren't enough Crees who have the proper training in all the different fields. Someday, maybe, but not now. So we have to keep hiring Whites."

In general, many of my Cree informants do not seem to be as preoccupied with the local white residents as the latter seem to believe. There is a widely held assumption among white people that, as soon as an outsider passes 'the gate', the word circulates through the Cree networks that there is a new person in town. Alex, a French-Canadian business man, explained how it works. "Une heure après que sois arrivée, j'suis sûr qu'ils le savaient tous. Aussitôt qu'un blanc passe la barrière, ils s'appelent tous pour se passer le mot." ("An hour after you arrived, I'm sure they all knew about it. As soon as a white person passes the gate, they all call each other to pass the word.") However, according to my Cree informants, most of them do not seem greatly concerned with new arrivals, or even outsiders in general, and

apparently have more interesting things to talk about amongst themselves.[15]

The perception of Cree people among non-Natives, on the other hand, varies from near-obliviousness to high-esteem. Most of the non-Native residents with whom I spoke held, or claimed to hold, positive opinions about the Cree people. Again, it is important to note that my identity had an impact not only on the responses I received but also on the spectrum of people who were even willing to talk to me. While I was culturally more similar to my non-Native informants, I was still a researcher and questions about people's opinions, even opinions about another culture, apparently were close to home in many cases, especially when the informants had spent some time in the community and had forged a significant number of close contacts. Furthermore, as Susan, a non-Native respondent, pointed out to me: "Say someone's a racist. Do you really think they'll admit it to you? I mean, it's not something they're likely to be proud of."[16]

In fact, these doubts had crossed my mind and continued to nag me for some time as I was carrying out my research. However, several people eventually admitted some of their more negative views after they had thought out loud about some of the issues in question and, in a few cases, seemed relieved to be able to voice opinions that they normally needed to repress. Being from the outside, and only an ephemeral presence in the community, I could do little damage.

In general, non-Native informants were aware of the stereotypes about the Cree, and about other Native peoples in Canada. For example, they had all heard stories about drunken or lazy 'Indians' and were mostly aware of the wide-spread disdain felt toward Native people. While most of my informants claimed to be against these stereotypes, none were as appalled

by them as the people who came from outside of Europe.

Éliane, a hospital worker from France, elaborates: "En Europe, on entends presque pas parler des autochtones. Nous savons qu'ils sont là et nous entendons des histoires romantiques à ce sujet, mais en général, on ne sait pas grand chose. Lorsque j'suis arrivée au Québec, je n'en revenais simplement pas du niveau d'intolérance et de racisme. Je trouvais ça effrayant!" ("In Europe, we don't hear much about Natives. We know they are there and we hear romantic stories about them but, in general, we don't know much. When I arrived in Quebec, I could not get over the level of intolerance and racism. I was appalled !")

Aside from the stereotypes that they had heard, most of my non-Native informants had heard very little about the Cree people of the area. Informants from inside the province of Quebec had also heard about Cree people because of the struggle with Hydro-Quebec. Like most of the other informants, however, they were mostly unaware of the history of the area. Therefore, most people had very limited knowledge about Cree people and culture upon their arrival in Chisasibi. "I didn't even know that there were still Native people in Canada who still spoke their own language,"said Dirk, a Montrealer by birth.

In spite of this lack of knowledge upon their arrival in Chisasibi, most of my non-Native informants have become aware of, and sensitive to, the Cree people's concern with the maintenance of their culture, lands and language. After some exposure to bush life, for example, many outsiders come to appreciate the high value which Cree people attach to the ideal of living off the land and protecting the natural habitat of the animals that they hunt to survive.

Ken, a hospital worker from Montreal, described how he came to a greater

understanding of the Cree struggle by spending some time hunting and fishing with his Cree friends: "When you spend some time out there, you see how important their land is to them. I see now why they fought so hard against Hydro. They wanted to keep their river. That's really important to them, it's like their highway." Mr. Chambers, a business man from southern Quebec, added: "Y sont plus heureux quand y sont sur leurs terres. C'est là qu'y se sentent le plus à l'aise." ("They're happier when they're on their land. That's where they feel the most comfortable.")

Not all outsiders see the situation with as much optimism, however. In fact, a few non-Native informants commented that the Cree have trouble adapting to the greater world. One non-Native resident claimed, for example, that the Cree should conform to mainstream North America if they are to use the educational system more efficiently. "Right now, they are trying to use our educational system by adapting it to their culture. They can't do that. They let their kids stay out until the middle of the night playing baseball. Then the kids complain that they can't get up to go to school in the morning. It doesn't make sense."

In general, most of my informants situate themselves in between these two extremes. Most of them are sensitive to the issues faced by the Cree community regarding culture, land and language maintenance but many still express some doubts about the ways in which the Cree deal with these problems. These doubts range from the opinion described above to milder doubts about how the Cree community deals with social problems such as alcohol and domestic violence.

Éliane commented on what she perceives as apathy on behalf of the Cree when it comes to initiating different projects. "Je voulais sincèrement m'impliquer dans la communauté pour

aider les femmes en détresse, mais à un moment donné, je me suis tannée de toujours prendre l'initiative. Maintenant, j'aide lorsqu'on me le demande, mais j'attends qu'ils prennent l'initiative eux-mêmes. Ce n'est pas à moi de le faire pour eux." ("I sincerely wanted to get involved in the community to help women in distress, but at some point, I got tired of always taking the initiative. Now, I still help when someone asks me but I wait for them to take the initiative. It's not up to me to do it for them.")

Two of the most recurrent features ascribed to the Cree by non-Natives were their shyness and their reserved nature. These traits took some getting used to, according to many informants. "I'm used to someone talking to me if I talk to them, that's the way we are down south, right? Here, I had to get used to people being more reserved . . . the cashiers at the store hardly look up at you and sometimes they don't answer when you say 'hello.' But I got used to it," explained Ken.

Most informants state, though, that the Cree have their own subtle way of expressing friendliness once they get to know someone. Annette, a school worker, said: "When you leave the community for a few weeks and then come back, that's when you see that they're genuinely pleased to see you. The fact that you come back shows that you like them and they appreciate it."

According to several informants, the Cree have a great sense of humour and love to laugh. "They laugh about anything. That's the great thing about them. If you're a person who's not afraid to laugh at yourself, you'll get along great with them because if they see you do that, they'll know you're not too stuck up on yourself," added Ken. André also commented about the Cree sense of humour: "Y'aiment ça rire, les Cris. C'est pour ça que

j'm'entends bien avec eux-autres." ("The Crees love to laugh. That's why I get along with them.")

Another characteristic of Cree people that was mentioned to me was their generosity amongst themselves and even with non-Natives. Father Charles, when I asked if he thought the Cree were good Christians, replied: "Of course! They place a high emphasis on sharing and that's one of the central tenets of Christianity." Also, when I explained to Ken that I had offered to pay room and board to my hosts and that they had refused, he replied: "I would have been surprised if they had accepted. Even a poorer family would have probably let you stay for free. They're like that."

Several people commented that the Cree were relatively wealthy compared not only with other Native people but with the general population. "Y'ont pleins de subventions gouvernementales. En plus de ça, y payent pas de taxes. Ça va bien dans ce temps là," André pointed out to me with a wry grin. ("They get a bunch of governmental grants. On top of that, they don't pay taxes. That makes it easier.") The slight resentfulness that some non-Natives may feel in this respect is compounded by the perception that the Cree are wasteful and that they don't care about their environment in town. Alex pointed out to me, as others had, the amount of litter all over town: "Y respectent l'environnement quand y sont sur leurs terres, mais ici, dans l'village, ils s'en fouttent." ("They respect the land out in the bush, but here in town, it doesn't seem to matter to them.")

Therefore, although there is little hostility between the Cree and the non-Native residents, there are tensions that are quite tangible and reflect not only cultural and historical differences but also personal, financial and political interests. When discussing working and

social relations between the Cree and non-Natives, we see that the extent to which an individual is able to overcome these tensions and form friendships across cultural lines is interrelated with their life experience, their exposure to different cultural systems and their willingness to bridge the communication gap.

Work, Social Life and Friendship

Work environments, such as the school and the hospital, are the locations within which the Natives and non-Natives interact the most frequently and intimately. It is in these arenas that a non-Native individual's status in Cree social networks begins to germinate. Many factors inform the individual's position and movement within these network such as the way s/he interacts with Cree co-workers, patients, students or customers, hir cultural sensitivity, hir personality, and hir willingness to spend a considerable amount of time in the community.

Conversely, these work spaces allow Cree workers, patients, students, etc, to know non-Natives on a different level. While their images of non-Natives, especially Whites, may be tainted by different media images or prejudices based on past experiences with different authoritative figures with whom they have had to deal, their work may entail contact with non-Natives who differ from these images.

However, the degree to which this process is possible may differ depending on the actual working environment. Hospital workers and school workers have different sorts of contact with the Cree and may therefore establish different kinds of relationships. Hospital workers, according to several accounts, had more opportunities than the school workers to forge friendships with the Cree.

In fact, several hospital workers specified that, in the course of their work days, they had ample opportunities to show their personalities to Cree co-workers. Ken, for example, describes how he came to show his co-workers that he was humourous and approachable: "Sometimes you mess up, you mispronounce a patient's name. When I do that, I make fun of myself and show that it wasn't out of disrespect, I just goofed. When they see that you have a sense of humour and you can laugh at yourself, it helps."

Similarly, André recounts a situation where he needed to tell some people who were visiting their sick relative that they had to let her rest. He tried several times to request their departure and they continued to ignore him. "Finalement, j'me suis tanné. J'ai demandé à Sandy (a Cree co-worker) comment on dit ça en Cri. Je l'ai répété une couple de fois devant elle pour être sûr de le dire comme il faut. Elle, a pensait qu'j'étais fou! Quand j'étais sûr de moi, je suis allé leur dire en Cri. Y'étaient toutes crampés de rire!" ("Finally, I got fed up. I asked Sandy how to say it in Cree. I repeated it a few times in front of her to be sure I said it right. She thought I was nuts! When I was sure of myself, I went and told them in Cree. They all laughed like crazy!")

At the same time, hospital workers get the opportunity to see a tender side to many Cree people, who are usually seen by many non-Natives as reserved and distant. Alain recalls: "I remember when Robert's (a mutual Cree friend) father was in the hospital on his deathbed. He knew he was dying and he couldn't even talk anymore but he was so gentle. When I would go and try to do something for him or comfort him, he would put his hand on mine, tenderly, to show that he knew I was doing everything I could. I could see that in his eyes."

Similarly, Louise talks about the first contact she had with Cree patients and their

relatives. "I was sure they wouldn't like me, that they would see me as another white invader who was trying to impose her own values. But they were so kind and caring. They treated me very well."

School workers, on the other hand, work in a very different atmosphere. A few school workers, for example, related to me that they had few opportunities for contact with Cree adults and that the few that they had were sometimes confrontational. Dirk says: "It's different even whether you're a teacher or an administrator. I've been both, so I know. When you're a teacher, at least you get to commune with the kids. They get to know you and sometimes they even get to like you. The administrators only see the parents and half of the time, these meetings are confrontational. If the parents aren't satisfied about something, the administrators get all the anger. Often, the Cree parents don't agree amongst themselves, so if you do something to satisfy one group of parents, the other gives you hell."

Adam, a Montrealer in his twenties who had only been in the community for a few months, says: "Well, I only see other people who work at the school and most of them are white. There are some Crees here but they keep to themselves and we don't really work together on anything very often. So the only people I get to know are white so I hang out with them outside of work too. I have nothing against the Cree . . .I just don't get a chance to know any."

Most of the hospital employees with whom I spoke are aware that the situation is difficult for school employees. Two different hospital workers reason that this is because hospital workers are seen by the Cree as people who are helping them be healthier while the school workers are seen as meddlers who impose a western educational system on them and

who have an impact on the way Cree children grow up. Another hospital worker tells me: "I feel sorry for the teachers. If the kids decide they don't like them because they give too much homework or something, they're basically out of a job. They tell their parents that the teacher's bad and the parents force the administrators to fire him."

From the perspective of non-Native workers, though, actual working relations between themselves and Cree co-workers are generally smooth and major conflicts rarely occur. However, there may be some friction due to different working methods and habits. Louise, for example, states that she tried to adapt as well as she can to Cree work habits: "I used to get annoyed more often because they're not as rushed as we are. I always make the effort to get to work ahead of time but they walk in five, ten, fifteen minutes late. I got used to it and try not to judge them. I know that in their culture time probably has a different meaning but, sometimes, it still bothers me."

In fact, a few non-Native workers mentioned that they were torn between trying to understand Cree work habits and wanting the Cree to adapt to their methods. "Dans un certain sens, j'comprends qu'y ont leurs méthodes mais, en même temps, des fois, j'aimerais qu'y fassent un effort pour essayer les nôtres. Y'a certaines façons de travailler qui font partie de la job pis c'est difficile de faire cette job là sans ces méthodes. Par contre, eux-autres y veulent trouver leurs propres façons." ("In a way, I understand that they have their own methods but, at the same time, I wish they would make an effort to try ours. There are certain ways of working that are part of the job and it's hard to do that job without these methods. But they want to find their own methods.")

Unfortunately, I did not get many opportunities to converse with many Cree school or

hospital workers. Most of my Cree informants either work for one of the Cree organisations, such as the band council or the Cree Regional Authority (CRA), are self-employed or are unemployed. Those who work for Cree organizations have some working contact with non-Native workers such as lawyers or notaries, but this contact is not as close or as frequent as that which occurs among hospital or school workers, for example. However, Cindy, a Cree neighbour who worked for the school before she became a mother and who plans to return once her children are old enough, had only one thing to say about working with non-Natives. "It's different,"she says. "It's just . . . different. That's all I can say."

It is therefore difficult to form a complete picture of working relations between Cree and non-Natives as this would need to be based on accounts from both parties. From the accounts of my non-Native informants, we can only obtain a glimpse of some of the dynamics which unfold in the course of an average work day and the ways in which the non-Natives deal with them. From that angle, however, it can be said that the relationships between the non-Native workers and their Cree colleagues are relatively well defined in the sense that patterns emerge among them after some time spent working together. "We get into a routine," explains Louise. "Some days they say hello, some days they don't but once you know them, you don't take it personally. It's just the way they are. You pretty much know where you stand after a while."

If working relations between the Cree and the non-Natives are relatively well defined, this is not necessarily the case outside of work-related environments. While many non-Natives come to feel comfortable with their Cree co-workers, this comfort is somewhat dissipated outside of working hours for those who have not yet forged firm relationships with

Cree people based on other mutual interests, such as hunting or fishing. From several accounts, Cree workers who laugh and talk easily with non-Natives at work may just as easily ignore them out on the street or in a public location such as the commercial building. "It's as though they're embarrassed to talk to you when they're with their friends or their family. I get the feeling that being friends with whites is considered a bad thing by a lot of them."

Social contact between Cree and non-Native residents is limited, according to many accounts from both groups. Jerry, a Cree friend, says: "They don't talk to us. Don't know why." Meanwhile, Alex, a non-Native says: "Les Cris nous parlent pas aux blancs. C'est comme ça." ("The Crees don't talk to us whites. It's just the way it is.")[17]

Several people had explanations regarding this phenomenon. Kathy blames the whites for the lack of communication: "I think it's mostly because of the whites. One time, when I was younger, I had a friend who lived with a white woman. I went to visit him one day and she answered the door and told me he wasn't there. She looked at me a little bit and said: 'Maybe if you come back another time, I will let you in. I usually don't let Indians in the house but you don't seem to be like the others.'"

Alberto and Ingrid, a husband and wife couple, are both non-Native hospital workers. They are active in the community and have friends among school staff, Cree and Inuit. They both commented repeatedly that the Cree are family oriented. "They do everything with their families. That's why they don't hang around with whites outside of work,"explains Ingrid.

However, in spite of this unease described by so many people, there are certain non-Natives who are regularly approached by Cree people in public. In some cases, they even have difficulty arriving to their final destination because of the number of people who stop them

to talk. In fact, when I attended a square dancing competition with Alberto and Ingrid, Alberto was continually being called over by people to talk. He explained that he is liked by the Cree because he is not afraid to try things and to participate in their events. For example, he had actually danced at the previous competition.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, common interests also have a great impact on the level of integration of non-Natives. Ken, who is also well-liked by many Cree, enjoys hunting and fishing and frequently joins his Cree friends on their hunting trips. He explains that this is a relevant factor in his daily relations with the Cree.

If approachability and commonality are factors in the degree to which individual non-Natives establish themselves in Cree social networks, there are factors specific to Cree people that also have an impact on cross-cultural relations. It is noted by several non-Natives that the first friends they had among the Cree are those who have been educated, or who have a considerable amount of experience, in the south and who are used to dealing with non-Natives.

Most of these individuals speak English and/or French flawlessly and are able to relate to non-Natives in a way which is more familiar to the latter group. The ease with which they interact with people of various cultural backgrounds, including their own, gives them the ability to make non-Natives feel comfortable. In turn, they introduce them to other Cree, who may be less familiar with non-Native ways and who might otherwise not have approached, or been approached by, non-Natives.

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From the above, it can be seen that there are many factors that work to limit casual

contact between Natives and non-Natives in Chisasibi. Conversely, we can also see that there are various mechanisms which help to bring members of the two groups together. Ironically, these contradictory forces are closely related: while a major force keeping Natives and non-Natives apart is the difference in the ways members of the two groups form alliances and networks, these very networks and alliances enable an individual to delve further into another cultural framework once s/he has managed to befriend at least one of its members.

As illustrated by my non-Native informants, the formation of this initial bond may be forever elusive, in the case of individuals with no particular inclination to partake in activities enjoyed by the Cree. On the other hand, non-Natives with a sufficient interest and a non-condescending personality are able to enter such networks if they have the desire to do so. It is important to note, however, that in most cases, the initial Cree contact within this network is an individual whose life experience endows hir with the ability to make non-Natives feel at ease.

There is thus an interplay between cultural background and individual life experience, which gives rise to both the tensions and the possibilities surrounding Native/non-Native friendships. This interplay enables groups and individuals to navigate between the conflicting social forces existing in Chisasibi and to circulate through the various networks that link the different groups in myriad ways.

Chapter 3 -Theoretical Considerations

This thesis is primarily concerned with the many factors which influence interpersonal relations between Native and non-Native people in Chisasibi, Quebec. By interpersonal relations, I am referring to the ways in which people form, or fail to form, bonds, alliances and friendships of varying degrees. I am particularly interested in the possibilities and limitations of inter-cultural friendships between Native and non-Native people and I examine the factors that enable, or inhibit, casual contacts between individuals of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. It is, however, necessary to provide a discussion of the stage upon which these contacts take place.

It is a given fact today that Native people across Canada have extensive contact with non-Natives in their own communities as well as in major urban centres. The nature of this contact has changed over time according to various social and political processes and still varies in relation to myriad social factors which are continually at work in the lives of the different participants such as employment levels, religious affiliation, education and so forth.

In spite of broad variations in the structure of social arenas within which interaction between Natives and non-Natives occurs, there are striking similarities in the dynamics that take place in various communities. An examination of a selection of literature dealing with this interaction reveals the emergence of general patterns in the ways in which both Natives and non-Natives perceive, and react to, each other's presence. Therefore, following a brief historical outline of the major events that have transpired in the James Bay area since the arrival of Europeans, I offer a discussion of the above-mentioned patterns and an examination

of some of the considerations put forth by different anthropologists.

Eastern James Bay since European Contact

The Cree have been in contact with Europeans since the 17th century. A significant portion of the information concerning the Cree deals with their involvement in the fur trade. According to Toby Morantz and Daniel Francis (1983), the Cree first became involved through their trade with Native groups further south who, in turn, traded with the French. Once the British Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) was established in 1670, the Cree were in direct contact with Europeans on a more permanent basis Morantz & Francis 1983).

Relations between the Cree and the HBC men remained relatively peaceful during the next centuries. It was seemingly not the HBC's intention to change the local cultures and they adopted Native customs through intermarriage and trade relations. It was , in fact, advantageous for them to do so as there was often French competition for furs (Morantz & Francis 1983).

Jennifer Brown's (1980) work, which is based on her examination of HBC archives, also sheds some light on the nature of social relations between HBC employees and the Cree. According to Brown, the HBC did not want to encourage white settlement in northern Canada. They therefore hired unmarried European men specifically to avoid the presence of European wives and children. Furthermore, the HBC implemented rules forbidding their employees to 'converse' with Native women. In spite of these rules, however, many unions were formed between HBC men and Cree women (Brown 1980; Van Kirk 1980). Brown specifies that, due to the fact that they eventually came to be accepted by the HBC, records

of these unions exist and they were referred to as formed through "the custom of the country."

In spite of this general peace, there were still some inevitable tensions throughout this period of time. Fluctuations in the European fur market caused the HBC to try to change the prices of furs. Since the Cree were not concerned with this market, disagreements would ensue. Other disagreements arose when the HBC wanted to stop extending credit. However, most of these issues were negotiated peacefully (Morantz and Francis 1983).

It would be a mistake to assume that the Cree depended on trade items. These items supplemented those already used by the Cree. Edward Rogers (1963) has argued that the Cree tended to limit the amount of trading they engaged in until the middle of the 19th century. Furthermore, trade goods consisted mainly of tools and equipment until the end of the 19th century when the Cree began to increase their purchases of food and other items from the company store.

Until the middle of the 19th century, there was no permanent missionary presence in the James Bay area. It was not in the HBC's best interest that the Cree convert to Christianity. This would entail a stronger Cree presence at the trading posts since missionaries encouraged people to settle down. The new converts would then hunt less and use up the HBC's food supplies. Nonetheless, a strong Anglican presence was felt by the end of the century (Morantz & Francis 1983).

While the missionaries hoped to transform Cree social life and chastised the Cree for clinging to their traditional practices, the process whereby the Cree adopted Christianity is unclear. Robert Brightman (1993), in his description of the Rock Cree of Northern Manitoba,

points out that Catholic missionaries offered emergency food supplies and medical help to the Cree. Whether this was the case for the missionaries in eastern James Bay is unknown but, if this was the case, it may have encouraged a large proportion of the Cree to become Christians, while at the same time retaining their own spiritual practices. In any case, it has been noted by several ethnographers that the Cree continued to practice their own rites well into the 20th century (Speck 1935; Rogers 1963; Tanner 1979; Feit 1986). These authors note that these practices contained many elements which may or may not be of Christian origin. Brightman also notes for the Rock Cree that: "Indigenous spirituality has decisively colored at each stage the sense that Crees make of Catholicism and in this sense reproduces itself in new idioms" (1993: 27)

The main point to be drawn from the outline given thus far is that Europeans did not attempt to change Cree culture until the missionaries arrived on the scene. It was only at this point that the Cree faced any coercion to abandon their traditions and whether this coercion was completely successful is still debatable. The traders, for various reasons, had not been interested in 'civilizing' the Cree and largely depended on Cree bush skills for survival. Furthermore, the absence of permanent white settlements kept the Cree relatively isolated from white civilization (Rogers 1963).

The past century was the one in which there were the greatest changes in Cree lives (Rogers 1963; Feit 1995). The decline of the price for beaver pelts and increasing government intervention led many Cree to seek wage labour. At the same time, the Cree increasingly became embedded within the Canadian political system. In the 1930s and 40s, the Department of Indian Affairs established official lists of band membership and elected a

chief and council for each band (Feit 1995).

Hunting territories were mapped by the governments of Quebec and Canada, each one with a "tally man" who was paid each year to tally the number of beaver lodges on the territory (Feit 1995). This number would be used by the government to determine the beaver quota for the year. According to Harvey Feit, this system was based on a preexisting division of hunting territories and "tally man" was the government's name for the stewards who were already "in charge" of the territories. It is important to note, however, that the steward did not own the territory as such but was responsible for making sure that it was not over exploited in any given year.

In spite of the above changes and the decreasing number of people who relied on hunting for subsistence, many Cree maintained a hunting way of life into the 1970s (Feit 1995; Tanner 1979). According to Adrian Tanner's (1979) observations in Mistassini between 1969 and 1971, hunting was a prominent part of the yearly cycle of the Cree. He argues that the Cree created a dual economic system whereby a hunting and trapping economy was used in the winter while an economy based on wage labour dominated in the summer.

In 1971, the government of Quebec elaborated plans for the development of a hydroelectric project in the James Bay area. The project would involve diverting seven major rivers of the area and would result in flooding much of the land used by the Cree and the Inuit for hunting purposes. Not surprisingly, the government had not considered these consequences and, when confronted with them, argued that the Cree were no longer using hunting as a major source of subsistence (Richardson 1976; Salisbury 1986).

The Indians of Quebec Association (IQA) took the matter to court on behalf of the

Cree who wished to stop work on the project which would destroy their lands (Richardson 1976; Salisbury 1986). Judge Malouf ruled in favour of the Cree in November 1973 but the decision was overturned seven days later by Judge Turgeon on the grounds that the inconvenience caused to the James Bay Energy Corporation and the James Bay Development Corporation, which had already been established to build the hydro project and develop the region, outweighed the damage caused to the land (Salisbury 1986).

Negotiations between the Grand Council of the Crees[1] of Quebec (GCCQ), which had recently been formed, and the prime minister of Quebec, Robert Bourassa, ensued which would eventually lead to the signing of the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) in November 1975 (Richardson 1976; Salisbury 1986). The JBNQA stipulated that the Cree were to receive a total of ninety million dollars in installments before 1996. It also designated the areas where the Cree would or would not be allowed to hunt (Salisbury 1986).

The Income Security Programme for Hunters and Trappers (ISP) was started in 1975. This would provide a guaranteed income for full-time hunters. A certain amount would be given depending on the size of the family and an additional amount would be given for each day spent in the bush for hunting (Salisbury 1986).

The Cree Regional Authority (CRA) was also established in 1975. Composed of two elected members of each band, this council represents the Cree on government bodies. However, it does not have authority over the bands themselves. Other groups were formed such as the Cree School Board (CSB) and the Cree Regional Board of Health and Social Services (CRBHSS). The CRBHSS would eventually take control of the hospitals situated in Cree land while the CSB would take control of all educational institutions (Salisbury 1986).

Throughout the 1980s, the Cree continued their struggle for the maintenance of a hunting way of life. While many Cree hunt full-time, they have often been faced with conflicts arising from the desire to send their children to school. Education, while seen as favourable, interfered with the learning of bush skills. People with high-school education, however, usually obtained wage employment (Salisbury 1986).

In the 1990s, the Cree live in nine communities: Chisasibi, Whapmagoostui, Wemindji, Nemaska, Waswanipi , Waskaganish, Eastmain, Oujé-Bougoumou and Misstissini (Feit 1995). The GCCQ and the CRA are still active and the Cree still govern their educational and health institutions. Each band is an autonomous entity, however, and makes its own decisions concerning its inner workings.[2] The Cree are still faced with problems arising from outside intervention, however, as increased forestry development has been encouraged by Quebec. Some hunting territories had already lost 40 percent of their trees by 1993 (Feit 1995).

The Cree are still struggling to maintain what they perceive as a traditional way of life. While early involvement in the fur trade did not induce the Cree to abandon hunting, the Cree still have not deviated from the ideal of a hunting way of life in the face of the recent crises described above. While hunting technology may have changed over time, the value of hunting persists.

Chisasibi: A Cree Town

In 1803, a Hudson's Bay Company post was opened on the island situated at the mouth of what is now called La Grande River. This post was abandoned in 1824, due to low population density in the area, but was established again in 1837. Although the local Cree

called the island Chisasibi, meaning 'Big River,' the HBC named the post Fort George and brought administration offices to the island (Anderson *et al* 1981).

Within one century of its birth, Fort George became the home of an Anglican and a Roman Catholic mission, as well as their associated schools. By the late 1970s, Fort George also contained an airport and a hospital. The population had grown from approximately 750 people in 1940 to nearly 2000 in 1980. Eighty percent of the population consisted of Cree from both the coast and inland [3] and there was also a small population of Inuit and Whites (Anderson *et al* 1981).

During planning for the construction of a dam at the mouth of La Grande River in the early 1970s, the James Bay Energy Corporation made commitments to the community of Fort George which would involve renovations on existing dwellings and the building of a bridge to the island. The JBEC found that these endeavours would cost them $30 million and offered instead to build a new and more modern town seven miles up the river. The village of Chisasibi was thus designed with the help of the Fort George Cree and was built between 1978 and 1980 (Salisbury 1986).

In 1998, Chisasibi numbered about 2715 people[4] including both Native and non-Native residents. Therefore, town life has placed the Cree in daily contact with non-Natives, who come to work in the area as doctors, nurses, teachers, consultants, and so forth. The extent to which these workers are aware of the historical forces that have shaped the region varies (see chapter two). However, it is inevitable that historical forces such as polical conflict and colonization colour inter-personal relations between Natives and non-Natives.

The Malaise of Native/non-Native Relations

Given the broad range of literature dealing with Native/non-Native relations in Canada, I have found it most useful, for comparative purposes, to limit this discussion to accounts of life in other northern communities. It is also important to note here that a large portion of the available literature was written in the 1970s, a period preceding many social and political changes that have affected relations among residents of many Native communities, including those in the James Bay area. At the time this literature came to exist, Native people were at the mercy of the Canadian government and its northern representatives. The current situation in many communities, however, is one where Native people have actively taken charge of their own communities and are seeking to regain control over their own well-being.

Many of the current forms of social interaction nonetheless have their origins in those existing at the time many anthropologists were studying such issues in northern Canada. Furthermore, many of the ways in which people interrelate today seem to comprise a reaction, or a sort of backlash, to the predominant social climate of that period, which has been described as a form of neo-colonialism (Brody 1975; Paine 1975). It therefore remains useful to consider the implications of research conducted under those circumstances.

In all of the pertinent literature, there is an emphasis on the malaise present in daily contact between Natives and non-Natives. In general, this malaise is characterized by: mutual distrust; a lack of knowledge about, or empathy for, the circumstances of the other group's existence; stereotypes about the physical and/or psychological characteristics of members of the other group and feelings of resentment regarding any privileges to which one group may be perceived as having access. It manifests itself in forms ranging from outright hostility, to

avoidance, to awkward, and often failed, attempts at friendliness.

The causes and symptoms of this malaise are manifold. Aside from linguistic and cultural barriers, one finds a lack of opportunity for casual interaction, social tensions surrounding interaction and cultural sanctions regarding interactions with 'outsiders' to one's own social and/or cultural group. This then leads to the formation of an 'us and them' scenario where interaction between the two groups is frowned upon by individuals of both groups. Negative views about one group are then reinforced among members of the opposing social group.

Although the pattern appears, and may very well be, cyclical, I will begin by describing the process whereby Natives and non-Natives become isolated from each other through a lack of opportunities for real communication. Brody (1975), Paine (1975) and Smith (1975) point out that the majority of contact between Natives and non-Natives occurs in work spaces, such as hospitals and government offices, where the non-Natives assume dominant roles *vis à vis* Natives. Social contact outside of these situations seldom occurs and, when it does, is fraught with tension and misunderstanding on behalf of all parties involved. For example:

> Most Outsider-Native interactions have their locus in public places - one [sic] the streets, in shops, beer-parlours, the cinema, etc. or in offices of administrative agencies. Correspondingly, Native persons tend to occupy the roles of customer, client, patient, etc., vis-a-vis Outsiders. Role relations of this sort tend to be formally structured and hierarchical. In this case, Outsiders tend to occupy the dominant roles. (Smith 1975: 37)

Similarly, Hugh Brody (1975) notes the lack of casual association between the Inuit and the southern Canadians working in various Arctic settlements. He states that there is little visiting of Inuit households by non-Natives and *vice versa* and that various factors such as language barriers and mutual distrust characterize such visiting when it occurs.

Robert Paine (1975) also points out the contrast between Native/non-Native contact in and out of the workplace. When non-Natives deal with Natives in the course of their official functions, they are on-duty and competent. Their interaction therefore has a strict course that it must follow and the non-Natives have most of the control over this process. Once they are off-duty, however, non-Natives become unsure of how to behave.

Native people are also unsure of how to behave in the presence of non-Natives. For instance, Brody describes the predominant view on behalf of the Inuit that Whites are unpredictable and easily angered. They therefore feel the need to placate Whites and resort to a variety of means to do so, such as agreeing with them and behaving as the Whites expect them to (Brody 1975: 157). Similarly, the Cree of Short Grass, Ontario submerge traits about themselves that are known to be frowned upon by non-Natives in order to avoid open conflict (Braroe 1975). Niels Braroe writes: "It is part of a general unwillingness on the part of Indians to reveal cultural differences that would call attention to their Indianness, which they know is disparaged by Whites and hinders interaction" (1975: 131). According to Braroe, for example, most of the Natives conceal their practices, such as carrying babies in slings on their backs, and their Native names from Whites (Braroe 1975).

Avoidance, then, is a typical solution to the tension that exists between Natives and non-Natives. Individuals of both groups avoid situations where they would be forced to interact with members of the other group. When these situations cannot be avoided, various tactics are used to ensure that the process goes smoothly. For example, in addition to the submergence of 'Native' traits mentioned by Braroe (1975), Paine (1977) differentiates between misunderstanding, or the differential interpretation of a situation by two people or

more, and ambiguity, or the conflicting interpretation of a situation on behalf of a single individual or group. He then points out that: "Confronted by a role system different from their own, both Whites and [Natives] can fall back on a position of apparent lack of comprehension of the others' behaviour" (Paine 1977: 99-100).

The principle of avoidance leads to, and is at the same time a partial result of, the formation of cliques among non-Natives in Native communities and other towns where the two groups co-exist. It has been repeatedly noted (cf. Brody 1975; Paine 1975; Stymeist 1975) that non-Natives tend to cluster together in opposition to Natives, regardless of variations in ethnic, professional and religious affiliation amongst themselves. David Stymeist (1975), for example, comments on the multiple ethnic groups present in Crow Lake, Ontario and how all differentiation between non-Native identities ceases once they are placed in opposition to Native identity. Therefore, all non-Natives are "white men" regardless of their cultural and ethnic background. This dynamic takes shape both in the way these groups consciously band together against Natives and in the way Natives themselves perceive non-Natives.

Brody also discusses this opposition while stressing that non-Natives actually establish their identities, and those of other non-Natives *in terms of* their individual relationships with Natives. "Whites have arranged each other in an invisible hierarchy, with positions determined by whether or not Eskimos like them" (Brody 1975: 73). According to Brody, Whites in the Arctic judge each other according to how well they get along with the Natives. While it is desirable to be liked by the Natives, excessive fraternizing with them is frowned upon by Whites in general (Brody 1975).

Thomas Dunk (1991), in his study of white working-class men in Thunder Bay, Ontario, described how their perceptions of local Natives defined their perception of their position relative to southern Whites: "The Indian is also a powerful symbol in the whites' understanding of their relationship to other whites, especially those in the metropolis located in the southern part of the province. The Indian thus plays a symbolic role in the two sets of relationships, one between local whites and local Natives, and the other between local whites and other whites" (Dunk 1991: 103).

The formation of a group identity based on relationships with another group is further elaborated by Evelyn Plaice (1990) in her analysis of Native/Settler relations in Labrador: "The self-reflective nature of ethnic identity stems from the fact that perceptions of ethnic identity are based upon the recognition of differences between self and other. In expressing perceptions of Indians, Settlers are exploring and communicating these differences in a social arena. It follows, then, that Settler perceptions of Indians provide important clues about Settlers themselves" (Plaice 1990: 3-4).

The fact that perceptions of the other are frequently erroneous is irrelevant to the way they are used by members of different groups to validate their own identities. In fact, Braroe (1975) argues that "pluralistic ignorance," or the lack of knowledge that Natives and non-Natives have about each other's daily lives and the stereotypes that Natives and non-Natives believe about each other actually enables a relatively peaceful, albeit tense, co-existence by stabilizing interaction. The negative views attributed to the neighbouring group allow one to feel a sense of superiority and help to stave off open conflict.

Braroe writes: "Essentially, the Short Grass Whites assert their own moral superiority,

and explain their relative affluence, by a simple line of reasoning: Indians are poor because they are shiftless; and they are shiftless because they have given up old customs but not adopted new ones (that is, White ones)" (1975: 137). On the other hand, "in Short Grass, the Indians' ignorance of White ways of life makes it possible for them to construct fantasy pictures of White impurity. They can thus rescue a degree of self-worth to the extent that they deny it to Whites; and this is made possible by the absence of conflicting information about Whites. Thus ignorance is stabilizing, that is, it averts open conflict" (1975: 182). John Kennedy, writing of Inuit/settler relations in Labrador (1975: 373), also points out that: "ethnic boundary maintenance assists each group's contention that it is superior to the other."

Braroe (1975) and Brody(1975) point out that ideals about Native traditions held by non-Natives are a prime source of misunderstanding between the two groups. Several authors suggest that "traditional" Native traits such as good hunting skills, hard work, etc are highly valued among non-Natives, who perceive contemporary Natives as lacking these "traditional" skills. Ideals of "real Indianness" or of "real Eskimoness" blur the perceptions of non-Natives regarding Natives and bring to light a kind of "imperialist nostalgia", as described by Renato Rosaldo (1989) where colonizers idealize the very traditions, values and behaviours they have been charged with destroying. Rosaldo writes:

> Curiously enough, agents of colonialism - officials, constabulary officers, missionaries, and other figures from whom anthropologists ritually dissociate themselves - often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was "traditionally" (that is, when they first encountered it). The peculiarity of their yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed. Therefore, my concern resides with a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed" (Rosaldo 1989: 69)

Rosaldo goes on to examine the ways in which different colonizing agents view themselves as fulfilling a duty to bring less advanced societies up to par with that of Western civilization. I believe a similar dynamic occurs in the scenarios outlined by Braroe (1975) and Brody (1975): the non-Natives idealize the past and mourn for the time when Natives practised what the whites perceive to be their traditional culture, even though they (the non-Natives) are active participants in the demise, or at least in the hiding, of many of these very practices.

Returning to the opposition between Natives and non-Natives, we see that there is a somewhat fixed nature to each group in spite of the fluid nature of their internal structures. For instance, Paine delineates the progression of non-Native cliques in an Arctic community and shows how they are reproduced over time in spite of the high turnover of non-Native workers and residents. There is also an ongoing set of rules regarding the interactions which may, or may not, take place between them. If non-Natives, in general, frown upon excessive fraternization with Natives, there also appear to be cultural sanctions among Native groups pertaining to inter-cultural contact (Brody 1975; Plaice 1990; Stymeist 1975).

Shmuel Ben-Dor (1975) describes how the Inuit of Labrador use kinship ties to establish social contact and that social relations with non-kin, and therefore non-Natives in most cases, are limited. Kennedy (1975) also describes Inuit/Settler relations in Makkovik as "overshadowed by cultural constraints restricting continuous interaction" with non-kin. In other words, the Inuit have no rules governing interaction outside of kinship-based networks.

We therefore see that, in most cases, friendships or other elaborate relationships

between Natives and non-Natives are rare and that those which exist are frequently frowned upon by members of each group. The social dynamics that inform daily interactions between individual members of the groups inhibit the formation of friendships and prevailing values and customs inherent to each group act to propagate the tendencies arising out of those interactions.

Inter-cultural Malaise in Chisasibi

The distinction between work and casual interaction is a much noted source of alienation between Native and non-Native residents of Chisasibi. In fact, many non-Natives pointed out to me that, after work, everyone goes home and that there is little contact outside the workplace. Avoidance, however, does not seem to be desirable and sporadic attempts are made on behalf of individuals of both groups to bridge gaps.

As in the cases described above, there is a differentiation between two main groups in Chisasibi (Natives and non-Natives) and internal divisions rarely affect inter-relations between them (Figure 3 on page 76). While there is a pervasive sense of opposition between Natives and non-Natives, casual contact between individuals of the two groups is not frowned upon. Nevertheless, there appears to be many unspoken rules regarding this contact and individuals navigate their way through the tide comprised by these rules to form relations of varying degrees of length and intensity.

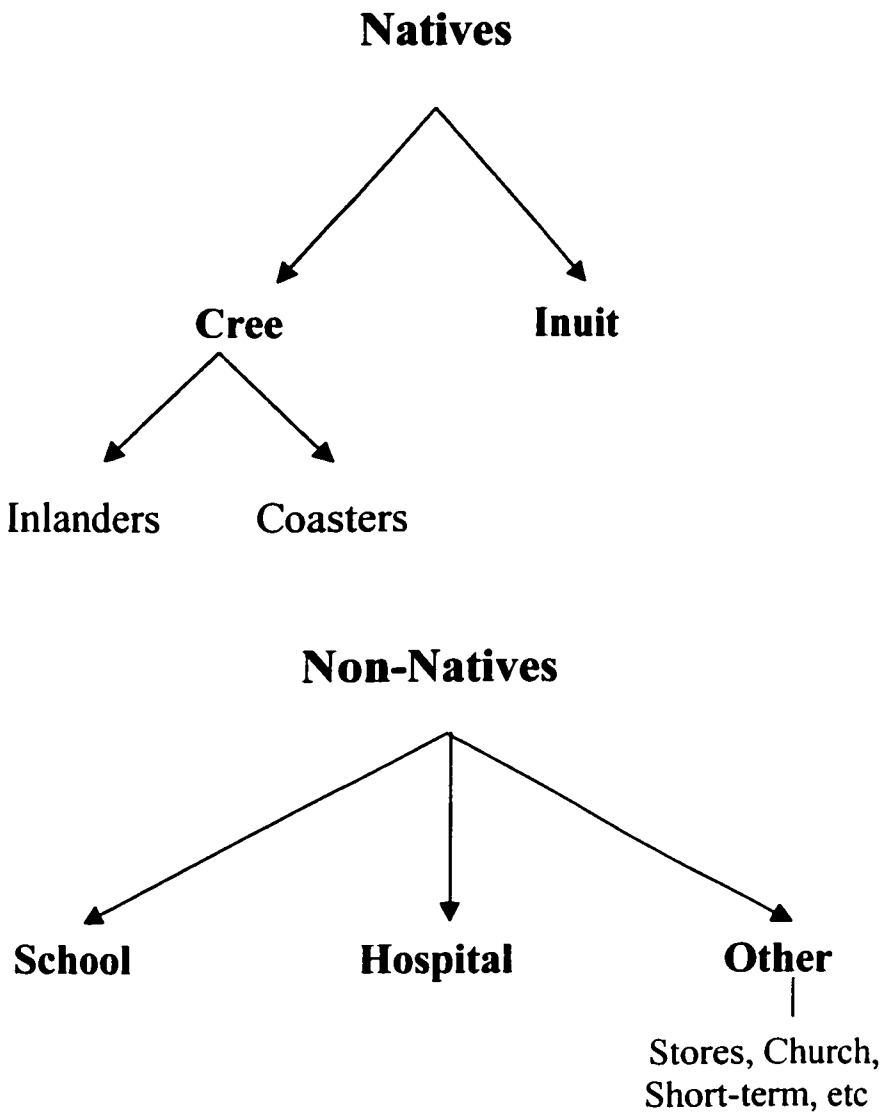

Figure 3 – Natives/non-Natives (internal divisions)

Culture, Society, Experience and the Formation of Inter-Cultural Friendship

I now turn to a discussion of the theoretical framework I have developed to process the knowledge gained from my fieldwork in Chisasibi. As a starting point for a discussion of friendship, I will use the starting point for friendship itself, namely, the discovery of commonality between individuals. At first glance, this notion may appear unproblematic to most Euro-Canadians. Most people in mainstream North America have experienced friendship formation first-hand several times over the course of their lives and would be able to outline the basic process whereby people become involved in such relations.

For example, two people[5] meet in a given setting, such as school or the workplace and, after a few conversations, discover that they have similar interests outside that setting (eg; music, sports, etc). They decide to meet outside of their prescribed meeting times and place to partake in activities pertaining to their common interest. They may gradually discover that they have other things in common such as similar political opinions or religious beliefs. In most cases, it is a relatively straightforward process which can lead to friendships of varying degrees of closeness and length depending on individual personality and external factors, such as the marriage or relocation of one of the individuals.

Where the friendship must prove itself is in the way its adherents deal with each other's points of divergence. After the initial discovery of mutual interests, there may be the discovery that the two people differ on other issues or on the exact details of their mutual interests. For example, Donna might find out that her new friend Kim, a fellow rock concert enthusiast, is a staunch pro-choice activist while Donna is decidedly pro-life. It is at this point that the friendship may either deteriorate due to seemingly unresolvable differences or flourish

as the two people in question decide to respect each other's differences and focus on what they have in common. In the latter case, there is the possibility that the building of a strong friendship will pave the way for open discussions about the topics upon which they disagree and that each individual will develop a tolerant attitude toward the other's views and, consequently, of other people who hold similar views. Therefore, if Donna and Kim's friendship lasts, Donna may become more willing to have conversations with other pro-choice activists because she has come to tolerate her friend's views whereas she may previously have avoided all contact with members of such groups.

There are however, inherent difficulties in this process in multicultural environments. As I discussed previously, friendships between Natives and non-Natives are relatively infrequent and difficult to maintain. In general, members of the two groups have little contact outside the workplace, where relations are uneven and strained, and they often hold various value judgements against each other so that few people are able to achieve the level of comfort necessary to the strengthening of peer bonds across cultural and ethnic lines. My experience in Chisasibi, however, shows that there are different factors that come into play to allow like-minded people to surmount these obstacles and to form friendships, which often last after the individuals in question have become geographically separated.

Cultural and Social Systems in Chisasibi

Gary Witherspoon (1975) makes the distinction between cultural and social systems in his analysis of Navajo kinship. I now turn to a discussion of this distinction, as it is relevant to the social situation in Chisasibi. Witherspoon describes a cultural system as one whereby

the world is explained in terms of its parameters, its components, the meanings of its components and the relationships between them. In other words, a cultural system is what encompasses all the possibilities for behaviour and thought upon which people draw when faced with specific situations.

According to Witherspoon, the social system describes what actually happens at the pragmatic level. It is the level at which the symbolic meanings defined in the cultural level take form, are confronted with material realities, and are manipulated by the people involved. A moment in time of some particular social system presents us with a permutation of possible thoughts, actions and reactions that have been taken from the cultural system and applied to the given social situation.

To help place this in the context of inter-cultural relations, I would like to draw a parallel between Witherspoon's description and Karl Izikowitz' (1969) distinction between introspective and outward-looking categories of social and cultural differences between ethnic groups. The introspective categories consist of techniques of expression, value systems and self-identification while the outward-looking categories pertain to identification based on outside evaluation of the group and interaction on different levels. I propose that these outward-looking categories arise out of Witherspoon's social system since the way a group is identified and the interaction its members assume with another group's members stem from daily realities with which they must tangibly deal. Likewise, the introspective categories are situated in the cultural system, or systems, of each group.

There is, of course, the danger that cultural systems, like many traditional concepts of culture, could be seen as maintaining rigid boundaries between groups (Barth 1969) or that

this scheme could be seen as another form of determinism. As the social and cultural systems are interactive, however, not only do the introspective categories of difference inform the outward-looking categories, but the latter come to influence the workings of the introspective categories. Thus, the way a group identifies itself will affect its interaction with another group but the way it is perceived by the other group will impact its self-identity.

Now, taking the shared physical space of Chisasibi to represent a social system within which Cree and non-Native individuals interact, I must specify that there is more than one cultural system attached to this space. In fact, there are several cultural systems that overlap and intersect within it and upon which individuals of different cultural groups may draw to make sense of the interactions that take place. Although it is possible for me to specify that these cultural systems are not so straightforward that one could superimpose them directly on the different groups of people who live and work in Chisasibi, pinpointing and defining all of the active cultural systems in Chisasibi would be a difficult task and could only be done with the help of a longer fieldwork period than the one I undertook. For the sake of illustration, however, I will take the two major cultural systems to be "mainstream Cree" and "mainstream white" (Figure 4 on page 81) .

If the ways in which Cree and non-Native individuals interact differs according to the social situation in which the interaction takes place, it is because their interaction refers back to the cultural system to which that specific situation is associated. For example, Cree and non-Native individuals working together in the hospital are interacting according to the cultural system that is generally associated with hospital work in Canada (ie: White). However, each individual has at hir[6] disposal another cultural system, that is, the one in which

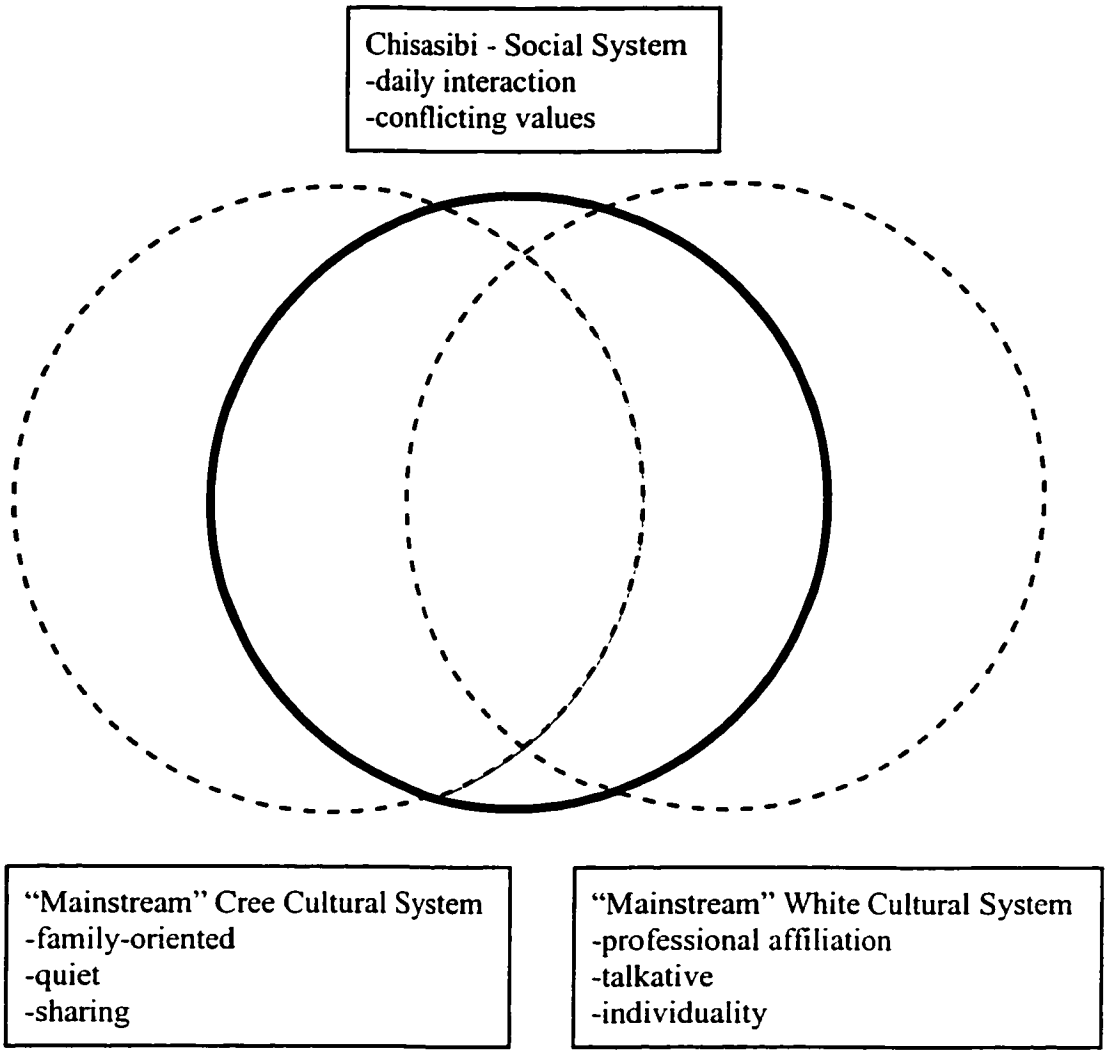

Figure 4 - Chisasibi's Cultural Systems

s/he was raised and educated and may therefore be torn between the hospital's system of referents and hir own.

The central concern, then, is the extent to which the intersections between Chisasibi's various cultural systems actually serve to inhibit or to facilitate cross-cultural friendships. To help clarify this issue, and to point out how individual history and identity come into play, I now turn to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*:

> The *habitus* - embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and acting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history and so ensures the permanence in change that makes the individual agent a world within a world. (Bourdieu 1980: 56)

Bourdieu applies the idea of *habitus* to groups and individuals and explains how it enables people to process new situations according to others they have experienced in the past. Therefore, an accumulation of knowledge is embodied through a life-time of shared experience, in the case of a group *habitus*, or even through individual experience itself. The concept is useful insofar as it takes into account the indeterminacy of everyday life and practice. However, Bourdieu, while seeking to escape the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity in anthropological thought, uses the concept as another vehicle whereby humans function without a conscious knowledge of their own motivations, whether or not these stem from a group or individual *habitus*.

He thereby asserts that: "The *habitus* is a spontaneity without consciousness or will, opposed as much to the mechanical necessity of things without history in mechanistic theories as it is to the reflexive freedom of subjects 'without inertia' in rationalist theories"(Bourdieu

1980: 56). In his view, although the *habitus* is equipped to incorporate new situations by using past experience as a frame of reference, it perpetuates itself through mechanisms whereby people avoid, albeit unknowingly, situations that would force a disruption in their collective and/or personal *habitus*.

Individual agency is thereby neatly removed from Bourdieu's theory. I feel, however, that this agency is a crucial element in the formation of the *habitus*. I am, therefore, in agreement with Michael Jackson's (1996) position that:

> Any theory of culture, *habitus* or lifeworld must include some account of those moments in social life when the customary, given, habitual, and normal is disrupted, flouted, suspended, and negated. At such moments, crisis transforms the world from an apparently fixed and finished set of rules into a repertoire of possibilities. (Jackson 1996: 22)

With this in mind, I use the concept of *habitus* to elaborate on the way individuals in Chisasibi are able to have access to more than one cultural system, or "repertoire of possibilities". I state, above, that there are several overlapping cultural systems in Chisasibi and that individuals draw on all of them in their daily interactions. I now further posit that it is *within individuals* that these cultural systems intersect. Each individual's life history, or *habitus*, lends itself to the conscious and/or unconscious embodiment of the world-views, values and behaviours associated with different cultural systems.

While it is somewhat true that individuals tend to associate primarily with people who share a *habitus*, or who share their predominant cultural system, the nature of the social system which is Chisasibi constantly brings people together in such ways that individual and group *habitus* are questioned and reformulated. This dual function of the *habitus*, then, and the way it combines different, and often conflicting, cultural systems together within people,

both complicates and facilitates the formation of inter-cultural friendships.

To illustrate, let us consider traits which are seen as representative of social life of the main groups of Chisasibi residents, namely Cree and White. Whereas the Cree manifest strong family ties and the tendency to associate mainly with one's kin, Whites exhibit the tendency to associate mostly with co-workers. If Chisasibi residents do, in fact, interact almost exclusively with people who likely share their *habitus*, or at least a part of it, this would seem to support Bourdieu's claim about the self-perpetuating nature of the *habitus*. It would thus appear that this trait, part of a group *habitus* and of a wider cultural system, precludes the formation of friendships with non-Natives.

However, this scenario must be reconciled with the fact that individuals have had different experiences. Many middle-aged Cree, for example, were sent to residential schools in southern Canada as adolescents where they were forcibly acculturated, in the simplest sense of the term, into the mainstream Canadian cultural system. Back in their own communities, they display the ability to 'act white' when the situation required it and, frequently, the desire to associate with non-Natives on a casual basis. On the other hand, some non-Natives have had previous opportunities to live in Native communities and, over time, have learned to reach out to Native people on terms other than those on which they deal in work-related environments. These examples of individual *habitus*, derived partly from past disruptions in individual lives, inform the greater repertoire of possibilities to which Jackson (1996) so eloquently refers.

A crucial factor in the interplay of different *habitus* and cultural systems is group and individual identity. As explained above, self-identity in groups and in individuals stems from

the cultural system whereas identity based on outsider perceptions rises from the social system. It is within the *habitus* that these different, and often clashing, forms of identity inter-relate. Additionally, the *habitus*, as well as cultural systems, help define specific identity markers such as ethnicity, gender, physical appearance, age, class and sexuality. Simply put, it is life experience *combined* with these markers that enable people to determine the level of bonding they will achieve with each other across cultural lines. An individual's personality and hir desire for friendship, both stemming from individual *habitus*, are necessary catalysts for the process in question. The identity markers I have enumerated come into play at different times and in different situations and add nuance to the relationships which are thus formed.

At this point, one might ask how the basic process of friendship formation I outlined in the beginning of this chapter ties in to the scheme I have just described. Returning to the idea of commonality, we see that it may be difficult for individuals in inter-cultural contexts to find points of commonality with people other than those who share their *habitus* or, at least, their cultural system. If we again take close family relations to be one of the features of a Cree *habitus*, and professional affiliation to be one of the features of a non-Native (specifically White North American) *habitus*,[7] we see that the social pattern formed by these tendencies is not generally conducive to easy exchanges between individuals which would allow for the discovery of common interests. In addition, factors such as gender and age might make such exchanges virtually unthinkable.[8]

However, because of the personal *habitus*, which allows individuals to view social situations and other people from different perspectives, opportunities for casual exchange may

occur at unpredictable moments and may lead to unexpected sources of commonality. The degree and nature of the ensuing friendships will then flow between the same factors which inhibited and/or facilitated their creation. It is to the inner workings of such friendships that I now turn in an attempt to demonstrate the potential that inter-cultural friendships have for allowing people to integrate, to a certain degree, into a cultural system foreign to their own.

Accessing Culture: Acceptance, Experience and Comprehension

The discussion thus far has set the stage for the analysis of inter-cultural friendships. We have seen that different variables, including cultural background, life experience and personality, form a complex web of social forces that people must negotiate in their attempts to form such friendships. As discussed in this thesis, there are individuals who, due to various factors, are able to integrate a different culture to varying degrees. The ability depends not only on life experience but on a desire to live a different state of being and a willingness to use different modes of perception in the acquisition of cultural knowledge.

In chapter 6, I describe a conversation between myself and Antonio about ways of learning. After a weekend spent in the bush, he asked me what I had learned. Not knowing what to say, I replied that I was unable to explain it. He then pointed out to me that, although I was unable to explain the inner workings of a car, I was still able to drive one. This led me think in automotive terms: an individual can drive a car if s/he *accepts* the functions of the different pedals, steering wheel, etc., without *comprehending* the inner workings of the car. Conversely, s/he can comprehend the inner workings of the car without ever driving it although s/he still needs to accept the functions of the different parts. Similarly, s/he cannot

experience what it feels like to drive a car without accepting these functions and actually driving the car. However, s/he does not need to comprehend in order to experience and *vice versa.*

With regards to cultural knowledge, we have a similar scenario. A person can function in a cultural environment if s/he accepts various aspects of it. Experience and comprehension, while both requiring acceptance, do not require each other (Figure 5). Comprehension is strictly intellectual but experience requires tactile, aural and visual knowledge as well as the cerebral activity, which embodies the sensory experience itself.

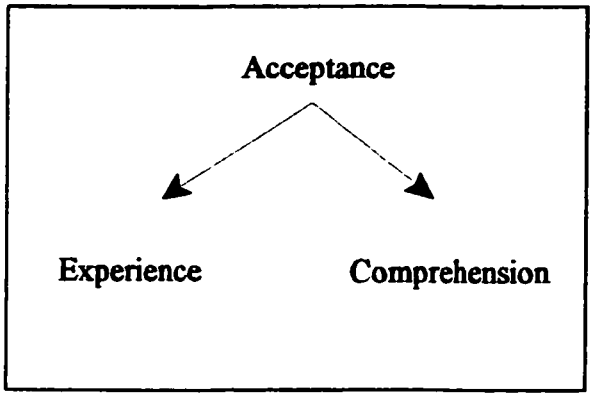

Figure 5

Of course, progress, in this sense, is not always smooth. People frequently switch into wrong "gears" at the wrong time before they incorporate the intuitive knowledge of when to switch gears which only comes from time spent driving and learning (ie: from experience). Inter-cultural friendships ease the acquisition of such knowledge by providing the opportunity to spend the necessary time experiencing culture.

This brings to mind Johannes Fabian's (1983) concept of coevalness which, although

it is used to discuss the relationship between the ethnographer and hir subjects,[9] can easily be applied to the topic of inter-cultural friendship. Fabian describes coevalness as a necessary condition for the production of valid ethnography. In his view, anthropology has traditionally thrived on the use of temporal devices to distance the ethnographer, and hir readers, from hir subjects. He describes the process whereby anthropology distances its "others" as a denial of coevalness; in other words, there is a refusal to admit that non-western cultures belong to the same time frame as the West. They are, indeed, relegated to the status of remnants from an ancient past.

He advocates, instead, an attitude of coevalness, where all cultures and societies exhibit "intersocietal contemporaneity" (p.148). The concept of coeval, according to Fabian, connotes "a common, active 'occupation,' or sharing, of time" (p.31). He further states that: "Time, in the sense of shared intersubjective Time, is a necessary condition of communication" (p.42).

Similarly, Nadia Ferrara, from her experience with the Eastern James Bay Cree, points out that, among the Cree:

> "I have noticed that co-presence - just being together and not necessarily talking- is what is valued. Once the non-Native accepts this style of simply being then the non-Native person is invited 'into' their culture. In other words, once I showed my understanding, acceptance of and respect for their ways, then and only then was I invited to the bushcamp and their homes, to join in their feasts and to eat with them" (Ferrara 1999: 58).

Accepting another cultural system as coeval to one's own then, is also a prerequisite to forming valid friendships and other bonds across cultural lines. While accepting the existence and function of specific cultural traits allows one to comprehend, in an analytical

sense, the workings of a cultural system, only the acceptance of coevalness can truly lead to an experiential knowledge, although possibly biased, of that system.

Once an individual has accepted, and has been accepted by, another as coeval, s/he must then allow herself to learn about the cultural system on the same terms as those who were born into it. Jean-Guy Goulet (1998) provides a useful argument based on his experience with the Dene Tha. Goulet advocates an experience-based approach to gaining cultural knowledge where an individual adopts a learning style based on the teaching methods of the host culture. For the Dene Tha, as well as for many Native North Americans, learning comes from quiet observation and true knowledge comes from lived experience. A Western approach to learning based on verbal instruction is undesirable and ineffective in such a society.

Goulet's argument is carried out mostly with reference to ethnographic learning, but I feel that it can be applied with equal validity to the learning people undertake when they are involved in friendship-based relations, whether these are situated within or across cultural lines. Sitting in the middle of the tundra listening to the silence brings friends into closer communication than would a conversation where one person describes the calm, yet energy-imbued, atmosphere of that particular landscape.

We must not forget that such a friendship is originally made possible because of the existence of commonality and in spite of the existence of difference (in identity, in culture, in *habitus*, etc.) The topography of an inter-cultural friendship, then, weaves through layers of commonality and difference, highlighting one then the other, forcing friends to appreciate what was hitherto unknown and foreign and finally allowing them to expand their individual world-views, cultural systems and *habitus*.

The central argument of this thesis is, therefore, that life experience, cultural background, identity and personality, embodied in the *habitus*, and a willingness to incorporate new elements and new forms of knowledge into the *habitus*, are crucial factors in inter-cultural friendship formation. These factors allow individuals to attain various degrees of competence and fluency in a different cultural system. Without them, they merely interact with the cultural system in question on an ephemeral basis, never achieving any particular level of comfort within it or the ability to share time and space with its members.

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In this chapter, I have outlined some of the main issues surrounding the nature of Native/non-Native relations in Canada in an attempt to provide a background for the possibilities of friendship formation between members of the two groups. I have provided an outline for the theoretical considerations which frame this thesis and which help to show how, given the right circumstances, individual life experience, cultural background and personality can act to overcome the obstacles posed by historical tensions, such as colonizing forces, and inter-cultural malaise between Natives and non-Natives.

The remaining chapters give examples of the ways in which I was able to become involved in some of the processes described above. They describe some of the difficulties related to inter-cultural bonding, such as miscommunication and misinterpretation and they show how my own life experience, identity and personality worked with the life experience, identities and personalities of my acquaintances to allow for the establishment of a greater rapport, and sometimes friendship, in the midst of the tensions surrounding our initial encounters.

Part Two

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Native/non-Native Relations in Chisasibi: Ethnographic Description

Chapter 4 - Shifting Gears: Acquaintance and Acceptance

Life in the House

Over the course of my stay in Chisasibi, life in Kathy and Antonio's house often seemed to follow quite a different trajectory from life in the rest of the town. While I was relatively at ease dealing with people on the streets and in public places, I usually felt awkward and out of place inside the house. Fearing that I was intruding on family affairs, I tried to stay out of the way when people were sitting together and talking. When I did stay during a conversation, I tended to feel as though I was hindering the comfort of different family members. My feelings of discomfort were in no way due to any actions or words on behalf of my hosts. Instead, my own shyness and my own fears of doing or saying something that would offend them paralysed me in the midst of the most basic actions, such as preparing food or walking by other people to get to another part of the house.

Kathy and Antonio were absent for a large portion of the time that I spent in their house as they had business in other parts of the province and country. They arrived a few days after I had and left two weeks later, leaving me alone with their 20-year-old son, Scott. He left to start college in Ottawa at the end of August and I was alone until his parents returned to go to the bush with their friend Jim on Labour Day weekend (see chapter 6). Once we had returned to Chisasibi after the long weekend, they left again until the end of September, when they spent less than one week in town, after which I was alone in the house for a one-month stretch until I left at the end of October.

"Our Own Anthropologist"

A few days after my arrival, I had the chance to meet Kathy and Antonio, who had generously offered to let me stay in their home in spite of the fact that I was a complete stranger. They arrived from Montréal one afternoon as I was sitting at the kitchen table perusing a copy of a Lexicon of the Cree language (Cree School Board: 1987) that I had found on their bookshelf.

The front door opened and a short woman in her fifties with shoulder length, dark hair and a denim shirt entered. After greeting her son, she turned to me. "Hi, I'm Kathy," she said, shaking my hand.

"Hi, I"m Nancy," I replied nervously, even though I knew that she had already deduced who I was by the fact that I was in her house. I sat back down at the table, not wanting to intrude on her reunion with Scott.

A few minutes later, a tall, round man with very long dark hair came into the house. He shook my hand and said, "Antonio." Again, I nervously uttered my name and he went to sit on the couch.

Later that day, Kathy sat with me at the table and asked me what exactly my project was about. With my original research plan still in mind, I attempted to explain that I was interested in issues of cultural maintenance and gender relations. "I'm kind of amazed by . . . the solidarity Cree people show especially after all the things that were done . . . like what Hydro did," I added.

"Well, what Hydro did wasn't so bad. They . . .well, they brought us out of the stone age," she said. "What the missionaries did was much worse. They destroyed values." She

proceeded to explain how she had been studying the writings of the early missionaries and that she felt that they had had a profoundly negative impact on Cree culture and society.

She then told me about some of the anthropologists and scientists who had visited the area. "Especially in the seventies, there were a lot and they were very rude. Some of them would argue with elders about when the fish would spawn because they were supposed to be 'experts.' The elders had known this all their lives. And they made all kinds of demands."

"When I did my Master's, I met a lot of students who thought that they knew everything after they graduated. Compare that to the elders. They're so wise but they're also humble. My uncle is an elder and he says that what he knows . . . is insignificant compared to what he still has to learn."

After this initial conversation, Kathy jokingly referred to me as 'her own anthropologist.' "In the seventies, there were so many anthropologists here, they said that eventually every Cree family would have one,"she would say, "I didn't get one then, but I finally have my own anthropologist."

Both she and her husband introduced me to their friends as an anthropologist who was there to 'study' or 'observe' them. My attempts to explain that I wanted to do something different were in vain; I was unable to articulate what I wanted to do and had to resort to the vague notion that I wanted to create something that was artistic as well as academically sound and that I wanted to do this with people's interests in mind.

In spite of their doubts, or what I perceived as doubts, they gently and patiently nudged me along, introducing me to people who they felt would be able and willing to help me with my project. They would, in passing, offer words of wisdom in passing about the nature of

knowledge itself. "It's difficult to explain something to someone when you don't know how they understand things," warned Antonio one afternoon. Yet, the last words he told me face to face before he left Chisasibi for the last time before my departure were: "Don't forget, you're only limited by your imagination."

Kathy would occasionally ask me what I had learned from particular individuals or situations. I answered meekly, afraid that she would tell me that I was all wrong, that I had completely misunderstood what everyone had said and done. She usually did not answer, often leaving me to puzzle over my own silly replies.

One afternoon she informed me that she was concerned with the fact that I did not use a notebook to record our conversations. "It worries me that you don't take notes," she commented. "How will you remember what we tell you? You seem very sincere, but there have been so many false representations of us in the past."

Again, I awkwardly tried to explain my own methods, that I felt that taking notes would impede my comprehension of what people told me and that my goal was to obtain a complete sensory experience of having conversations with people. In the end, my uneasiness led me to blurt out that I was afraid of making people uncomfortable by writing their words down in a notebook and I tried to assure her that, every evening, I wrote down the day's events, including important quotes from people with whom I had conversed.

It became increasingly important to me, as the days and weeks went by, to prove to Kathy that I could be helpful. I pitched in with housework of all sorts and offered to run errands for her. I was proud when she asked me to do something for her, feeling that she trusted me enough with important tasks such as sending a package to her colleague in Oujé-

Bougoumou by airmail. I came to believe that what I sometimes perceived as annoyance or impatience on her behalf was perhaps a personality trait and not an expression of any sort of contempt for me.

Certain situations left me feeling awkward for extended periods of time until I told myself that I was the only one agonizing over a *faux pas* that I had committed. For example:

> We went to the Bay today to pick sweet grass. There was Kathy, Allie and her daughters, Fern and a friend of hers (I don't remember her name.) It was the first time that I saw the Bay and I went over to touch it. It's not a blue thing on a map anymore! Kathy and the other women started to pick sweet grass. Bored, I played in the sand with the girls. They eventually went off to pick berries with their Mom so I went to see Kathy and asked her how she picked sweet grass. She showed me how to tell the sweet grass apart from the regular grass. I went to another spot nearby and started to pick. "You're supposed to put down tobacco first and say a prayer of thanks to the Earth for everything it sacrificed to keep you alive. You don't just start picking it," she chided. Ashamed, I put the two blades I had picked back on the ground. "Well, you may as well keep it now. I"ll include you in my prayer," she said.
> I was upset and embarrassed. Why hadn't she told me before? In the meantime, Allie had come back and had heard the conversation. She gave me a sympathetic look, told me not to worry and gave me some tobacco to put down. "You didn't know," she said. "Don't worry."
> This evening, as we were all sitting in the living room, I told Kathy and Antonio that I still felt guilty. "You don't have to feel guilty, you didn't know," replied Kathy patiently.
> "You have an excuse the first time. Next time, you should know," added Antonio with a teasing grin, dismissing the subject. [Fieldnotes: August 7th, 1998]

With time, I also picked up on seemingly minor details that, in fact, had a significant impact on the ways in which we communicated. For example, I would often become flustered and annoyed when Kathy would ask me: "Can you give me that thing over there?"

"What thing? Where?" I would ask, looking wildly in all directions. I had not seen her

point in any specific direction and had no idea to what she was referring.

"That!" she would say, pointing at the desired object with her finger.

I eventually learned that the Cree point with their bottom lip and not with their finger. In what Antonio jokingly referred to as 'Cree sign language,' an individual would curl hir bottom lip into a 'u' and slightly tilt their chin toward a given thing or direction. I finally understood that Kathy had been pointing things out to me all along: I had simply been looking in the wrong place.

Kathy would often tell me anecdotes from her past regarding school, marriage, children, religion, etc. Some of them were funny and some were heart-wrenching. The more I learned about her life and the things she had overcome, the more I admired her. Her similarities to my own mother were striking and listening to her talk about her children helped me to understand how my mother felt about me.

Antonio, on the other hand, rarely spoke about himself. He tended to offer humourous commentary on specific events or people and on life in general. Interestingly, his commentary often took the form of questions. For example, when I told him that he reminded me of my father-in-law, he glanced at me briefly and quipped: "Is that a good or a bad thing?" His easy-going manner put me at ease even when it left me speechless and I always looked forward to his kind smile at the end of the day when he gave me a hearty "Good Night!" in reply to my casual "'Night!"

"D'Oh!" - How Homer Saved the Day

"You watch The Simpsons too?" asked Antonio as I settled down on the couch

opposite Scott.

"Religiously!"I replied, as Antonio shook his head in mock disbelief. In fact, watching *The Simpsons* with Scott had become a daily ritual that allowed me to let my hair down and enjoy a peaceful co-existence with this man/boy who had justifiably appeared so wary of me upon my arrival.

Before Kathy and Antonio's first arrival, Scott and I had the house to ourselves. Quiet and reserved, he only spoke to me when I asked him questions and his replies were, for the most part, monosyllabic. He seemed annoyed at my presence and, in spite of our relative closeness in age, suspicious that I was spying on him.

A few days after his parents' arrival, Scott's 18-year-old sister Janice arrived. Although she was slightly reserved, she appeared more open to conversing with me. One afternoon, as they were sitting quietly in the living room watching the television, I heard the familiar theme song that has invaded millions of North American homes every afternoon for the past decade. Already longing for a taste of home, albeit fleeting, I quickly made my way to the living room and settled down to watch *The Simpsons* with them.

Watching *The Simpsons* with Scott at 4:00 PM quickly became a fast routine. Although we barely spoke, we laughed together at Homer Simpson's antics and revelled in his ensuing misery. I was immensely pleased one afternoon when, sitting quietly in another room, lost in thought, I heard Scott call out: "Nancy! It's time for the Simpsons!"

Scott and I never became completely at ease with each other. However, by the time he left town to go back to school in Ottawa at the end of August, we would occasionally have conversations about non-television related things, such as Chisasibi's 18th birthday and the

acquisition of groceries. We were even able to joke around with each other and his smile at these times showed me that I had been terribly mistaken all along.

I had believed that he disliked me, much as I had believed that Kathy and Antonio were annoyed by me. Once I had the opportunity to know him better, I perceived him as a calm and friendly presence and we were both able to communicate ideas and kindness through mere gestures. It saddened me that we did not have the time to become closer friends but I was thankful that a seemingly trivial thing such as *The Simpsons*, or more accurately, the *act* of watching *The Simpsons* together in silence had allowed us to show each other our respective true colours without undue flash.

This process foreshadowed the way I would later relate to other Cree youth.[1] In general, they appeared uninterested in discussing issues of Cree culture. They wanted to talk about the same things southern Canadians discussed, such as television, music and movies. They had grown up watching the same shows and listening to the same music that I had. Popular entertainment did not belong specifically to "Western" culture. Instead, it was part of a common experience. These topics then became the middle ground upon which I was able to commune with other youth. This middle ground enabled us to get accustomed to each other and provided a safe forum in which we could air our views without being afraid of offending the other party. Once we had established relationships on this ground, the Cree youths I befriended were more willing to share their cultural realms with me and discuss issues that they would not have agreed to discussing had I initiated formal interviews. For example:

I went for a walk with Janice last night and met a few of her friends. She didn't seem all that thrilled to be seen with me, in fact, when she saw her friends hanging around in front of a house, she looked as though she wished I would just disappear. I got the impression that it wasn't cool to be seen with whites. Anyway, they turned out to be friendly enough. Especially Jerry. After we had been standing around for a few minutes, he finally asked her: "So . . . who's your friend." She shyly explained that I was a student staying in her parents' house and I told the guys my name was Nancy. Jerry offered me a can of beer, and, being under the impression that beer was a rare commodity, I asked if I owed him anything. "Hey! That's insulting!" he exclaimed in mock despair.

"Sorry, I only wanted to be polite. I thought it was hard to find beer around here," I replied.

"Just say thank you," said James.

"Thank you," I said, tipping my can in Jerry's direction. After a few minutes we all went inside. Jerry got out his guitar and started playing Eric Clapton songs. In between songs, we chatted about rock music and compared our favourite bands and songs. We briefly discussed spirituality, but Jerry did not seem interested in this topic. Later, we (Janice, James, Jerry and I) went to hang around outside the commercial building. It was about 1:30 AM and there were kids and teenagers walking around, drinking and smoking. We chose a spot and stood around talking. I was given another can of beer and James asked me what I thought of their town. "I find it peaceful," I said. "The first thing I noticed was that there are a lot of little kids and they're running around, all happy."

He looked at me thoughtfully and said: "I always wonder what new people think when they come here. Like, what impression this place gives people. I don't know. Sometimes it seems sad and depressing. I don't know."

"Well, I noticed too that Whites and Crees don't mix?" I asked/stated. Jerry shook his head gravely: "No, the Whites and the Crees don't hang out together."

Our serious discussion was soon interrupted by a group of people in a van. They signalled us in. There were about ten people in the van and when the Hawaii-5-0 theme song played on the radio, they started to jump and thrash around. Too tired to enjoy it, I asked the driver (who was sober, thankfully) to drop me off at the house. [Fieldnotes: August 13th, 1998]

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This morning, I woke up with the smell of beer in my face. I opened my bleary eyes and saw Jerry grinning at me. He must've come in

with Scott last night, I know they were hanging out together. "How'd you get in here?" I asked. "Get up, I'll make breakfast," he said, ignoring my question. I was glad that it was chilly and that I had slept in jogging pants and a t-shirt.
I got up and followed Jerry into the kitchen, where he prepared an interesting mixture of scrambled eggs, cheese and iced tea (!)
After we ate, we watched movies. Scott was still asleep and we helped ourselves to the video collection. In the middle of watching Ghost, Jerry turned and asked me if I believed in witchcraft. "Well, yeah. I think there are different kinds of witchcraft though."
Jerry looked at me for a few moments. "You know, there are still people here who can cast evil spells. And there aren't many but there are a few who can still do the shaking tent. It's interesting, eh?"
"Yeah. I didn't know anything about that."
"Ya know, I think Natives make better witches than the druids and all that, don't you?"
"No, actually I don't really agree. I think it's just different ways of doing it."
"We know where all the sacred places are though."
"Well . . ."
Soon thereafter, Scott woke up and the two of them began to play on Scott's Sega system. Any discussion of witchcraft had ceased.
[Fieldnotes: August 19th, 1998]

These events, as well as the process whereby Scott and I became friendlier through sharing time watching *The Simpsons*, taught me about the ways in which the Cree get to know people. Whereas I was accustomed to learning about people by asking questions such as: "Where are you from?", "What do you do?" and so forth, Scott and Jerry got to know me, and became more comfortable with me (I believe) by sharing quiet time with me. Where I had lived and worked before were of no consequence to them: they got to know and accept me as I was *at that time and in that place*. This helped me learn the value of knowing people in the field as they wanted to be known.

These events also showed me how the Cree converse about different topics. Instead of talking exclusively about one topic for long stretches of time, a given topic could come up

at any given time, after an individual had time to think about it. If the individual has nothing to say about the topic when it is first brought up, s/he will think about it and may express hir views in an apparently unrelated context (cf. Bobbish Atkinson & Magonet 1990; Goulet 1998). Therefore, while I had previously mentioned spirituality in an earlier conversation with Jerry, he had nothing to say about it at that time. In a different context, after he had a chance to think about it, he broached the subject of his own accord.

Life In Town - "Are You a Nurse or Something?"

Although I was a stranger, I went almost unnoticed by local residents for the first two weeks of my stay. Undoubtedly, this was due to the occurrence of the Pow Wow and the large number of people from outside Chisasibi who attended it. Once the flurry of activity associated with the Pow Wow had subsided, various people began to approach me, curious about my continued presence.

The most common assumption made about me was that I was a new employee at either the hospital or the school, the two biggest employers of non-Natives in the community. Questions such as "Are you a nurse or something?"; "Do you teach at the school?" and "Do you work here?" were a polite way for people to ask me to identify myself. After a brief explanation from me about who I was, why I was in town and where I was staying, people usually carried on with their activities without further comment, often seeming to be more or less unconcerned with my presence.

I was initially struck by the reserved and quiet nature of many of the Cree I met. My attempts at friendliness were more often than not met with non-committal "hello's" or with

barely perceptible nods. Cashiers at the different stores barely looked at me and usually held out their hand for payment without telling me what amount I owed them. It was only after having quietly observed me for some time that Cree people, usually men, would approach me and ask me about myself by means of one of the generic questions described above.

There were, of course, exceptions to this. I occasionally met Cree individuals who smilingly approached me and began a conversation. In these cases, I often felt that the people in question had some experience in southern Canada and, therefore, in southern ways and that they were reaching out in a way that they knew I would recognize and with which I would be comfortable. The two types of exchanges were in sharp contrast to one another and my daily interactions would often fluctuate between the two in such a way that different world-views would often collide and intersect within the span of a single conversation. The following excerpts from my journal exemplify this:

> I met Johanna today, a round, jovial woman in her late twenties. She came to help with clean-up day[2] with her two sons, Samuel and Alexander, in tow. She came up to me and asked me if I was new in town, what I was doing, etc. After I told her who I was, she said: "Well, coming here today is a good way to meet the people and to show that you care. It's good that you came." Moments later, two other women of about the same age approached her silently. Johanna greeted them and introduced me to them, telling them I was a student who was in town for a while and that I was going to help out today. They nodded ever so slightly in my direction with Mona Lisa smiles and began a rapid conversation in Cree with Johanna. [Fieldnotes: July 30th, 1998]

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> Today, I met a really sweet lady. Her name was Anna and she's a little bizarre but very friendly. . . she walked up to me by the *Mitchuap* and said: "Danielle!" I told her my name was Nancy and she exclaimed: "Oh my goodness, I thought you were my friend

> Danielle from the Huron village. You look just like her with your long, pretty hair. Oh! Well, Nancy what are you doing here?" I chatted with her for a bit and went on my way. [Fieldnotes: August 27th, 1998.]
>
> . . .
>
> I saw Anna again today in front of the commercial. She was even less coherent than the other time. She recognized me, though, and remembered my name. She introduced me to another woman but I don't remember her name. She told her that I was on vacation here and said: "Isn't that nice?" The other woman stared at me for a moment and said: "Hm, nice vacation" and proceeded to talk in Cree with Anna. [Fieldnotes: August 31st, 1998]

I had been prepared for this; I had accepted the fact that the Cree had a different approach to getting to know people than what I was accustomed to in the south. In my mind, I understood that they were not being unfriendly. I nevertheless reacted to these types of situations by silently withdrawing, unable to overcome the feeling that I was unwelcome.

The reactions of non-Natives to my presence were as varied as those of the Cree. Some people would smile, say hello and continue on their way while others would barely look at me, often ignoring my own "hello." These two extremes reminded me of the contrast between southern small-town residents and city dwellers: in one case, people are willing to engage in polite, albeit limited conversation with strangers and, in the other, people withdraw into their own minds, refusing external contact with anyone they do not already know.

Interestingly, fewer non-Natives than Cree approached me to find out who I was. Those who did were usually not residents and were only in town for a few days on business. Over the course of my stay, I found out that most non-Natives had assumed, due to my continued presence, that I was employed at the hospital, in the case of school staff, or at the school, in the case of hospital staff.

Over time, I developed a sense of when it was appropriate to approach Cree people in public and when I should stay away. Through trial and error, I discovered that, even if someone was smiling at me, it was not necessarily a good idea to walk up to them and start a conversation.[3] Many such attempts on my behalf were thwarted and I began to leave people more time to observe me before I approached them. I began to wait until I had made eye contact with an individual several times before I would try to speak with them.

I also learned that it was not an especially good idea to approach someone if s/he was with hir friends or co-workers, unless I already knew most of them as well. This would lead to discomfort on behalf of all parties involved. The friends would often act as if they were unsure of how to react to my presence and would remain silent until I left.

When I was approached by a group of people, usually Cree men, there would usually be only one person who spoke directly to me. It became apparent to me that I was only supposed to speak to him since attempts to speak to other members of the group were met with silence. After some time, however, the other people would often come around and joke shyly with me.

The Day the Artist Came

It was only on my second-to-last day that I learned the extent to which people had become accustomed to my quiet presence in town. I had, over the course of my stay, established a daily routine whereby I would go to the two grocery stores in the commercial building to pick up food for the day. I would bring them home, go back to the commercial building to pick up any mail at the post office, and proceed to take long walks throughout the

town, stopping frequently to speak to friends and/or acquaintances.

My walks took me in between houses, in and out of the commercial building, into the Mitchuap building where I would walk through the arcade/pool hall and occasionally play a game of pool to the music of ABBA blaring through the speakers:

There was something in the air that night
the stars were bright
Fernando

I walked for hours on end, becoming oblivious to the veiled curiosity of the people in the cars that drove by. I would sometimes see the same person drive by, in both directions, up to five or six times in the course of a walk. We became used to each other, the drivers and I, and there are several people in Chisasibi who I never met in person and only waved to on a daily basis as they drove on by. For example, I looked forward, every day, to the gentle, toothless smile and welcoming wave of an old man in his blue and white suburban. Although we never spoke, we nonetheless communicated many things to each other during my stay in his windy town.

In spite of this form of interaction with my surroundings and with the people who inhabited it, of whom I had grown so fond, I was nevertheless surprised when Sean, an artist from Ottawa revealed to me that many people knew my name and my habits. Sean had spoken to Kathy, who was in Oujé-Bougoumou at the time, about taking pictures of a traditional Cree drum. She had told him that, although she was unable to take him to her house, I was there and would let him in.

When he arrived at the house with his companion, I was wandering through town, alternately chatting with people and contemplating my impending, and unwanted, departure.

As I walked home from the foot path that I had come to know so well, (so well, in fact, that I could walk on it at night during a new moon and not trip on any of the rocks and roots that overran it), I saw a familiar vehicle parked by the side of the road near the house.

It belonged to a neighbour, and, when they spotted me, they stopped and let out a white man in his mid-thirties. He approached me and asked: "Are you Nancy?"

"That's me," I replied.

"Oh, good! Kathy said you'd be around." Sean told me how worried he had been when he had found no one home upon his arrival. I grinned, as it reminded me of my panic at the prospect that Scott had left the house the day Larry and I had arrived in town. He then told me how, Daniel, the neighbour out of whose van he had just emerged, had taken him on a drive around town to look for me.

"We went into that shopping centre and asked a few people where you were and they said that you hung around in the community centre sometimes so we . . .,"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted, "You mean you found people who knew me that easily? How many people did you have to ask before you found them?"

"Well, I asked a handful of people, I don't know . . . at least a half dozen, if they knew where Nancy was, and they said: 'Do you mean that girl with the long hair that walks around all the time?' I didn't know what you looked like, so I just said: 'Yeah, I guess so.'"

Flustered by the thought that a half dozen people chosen at random had known who I was, I wanted to cry at the thought that I was leaving with two days. The next day, which was to be my last day, I wandered through the town one last time, mentally hugging all the sweet and silent people that I had come to co-exist with for such a short period of time and

who I had initially thought would were so unresponsive to my presence that it would be virtually impossible to befriend them. Many of them did not know me directly and yet we knew each other in a way that mattered; in an intangible, unspoken way that only comes with shared calmness and honest gazes.

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In this chapter I have described my initial encounters with the town, with my host family and with various members of the community. As can be seen from this material, the life experience of a non-Native entering the community has a great deal of impact on the texture of the contacts in which s/he engages, as does the experience of her interlocutors. Upon entering Chisasibi, a new social system, I only had access to previous cultural systems to which I had been exposed and in which I had achieved competency (ie. French Canadian, English Canadian and American). These cultural systems were all somewhat present in Chisasibi, and had affected it in various ways (due to historical and political relations). I was therefore able to navigate through it with a certain degree of functionality. However, I was lacking experience in the main cultural system present in Chisasibi, which is the Cree cultural system. With gradual exposure to it, I was able to incorporate certain elements of it into my *habitus*, both consciously (entering someone's house without waiting for someone to answer the door) and unconsciously (getting to know people through silence).

Chapter 5 - Wet Sundays

One of the first things that I discovered on my own about Chisasibi is that, rain or shine, Sundays were the best days to go walking between the houses and find groups of five men or more sitting around drinking beer or other sorts of alcohol. These men tended to be in their twenties but ranged from late teens to mid-thirties. Within the first two weeks, I was faced with a major decision regarding my association with the "drunks"[1]: would I ignore them like other people in the village tended to do or would I follow my own code and talk with them as I would with anyone else? The first choice would obviously be safer as my hosts and many other people I had met recommended that I stay away from them. I feared that associating with drinkers would harm my reputation by making me appear untrustworthy.

I have never personally had any prejudice against drunks, whether they were occasional drunks or alcoholics. My own philosophy regarding alcohol consumption is very liberal and, as an undergraduate, I had not escaped the party craze associated with the student life. In addition, I have never seen alcohol consumption as a negative thing as I grew up in a home where moderate alcohol consumption was a normal part of life.[2]

My hesitation to associate with drinkers in Chisasibi stemmed mainly from the fact that the town is considered "dry" (i.e.: possessing or drinking alcohol in town is forbidden) and that alcohol abuse is seen as one of the biggest social problems in many Native communities. I did not want to be seen as someone who came from outside of the community and encouraged people to drink or who, somehow, validated an alcoholic way of life by participating in this type of behaviour.

The other factor that came into play, and which was the main point most of the people who warned me not to hang out with drunks were trying to make, was my own safety. I realized that certain situations might be risky as alcohol sometimes makes an otherwise harmless person violent and that, as a woman and an outsider, I might be a target for harassment or violence.

However, ignoring people based on one facet of their personality and on what others say about them is not a part of my own code of ethics. Obeying the mainstream code of walking by drunks and not talking to them, pretending they did not exist, would have made me feel extremely uncomfortable as it was not in my character to do so. I decided that having one or two beer with a group of people out in the open would not be a cause for anyone to chastise me and, if criticized, I could easily defend my behaviour. Furthermore, I felt able to use my judgement to assess the risk level of a given situation. I would never get myself into a situation where I was unable to leave if things started getting out of hand. I would also avoid having more than one or two drinks so that my own judgement would not become impaired.

This chapter therefore describes a few encounters that I had with "drunks,"and discusses what I learned from these experiences and the implications they had regarding the issues of culture, inter-cultural relations and experience. I was to find out that the impact this decision had on the way I was perceived was minimal, if not positive, and that it enabled me to have access to social circles that were closed even to my hosts.

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My first Sunday in Chisasibi was an overcast, cold and windy day the likes of which I

had rarely encountered at home in the summer. Nevertheless, I chose to go out and wander the streets in an attempt to meet people. As I would gradually discover in the weeks to come, Chisasibi was virtually deserted on weekends as a large part of the population took advantage of their time off from work or school to spend time in the bush with their families. I was therefore surprised at the lack of activity in town that day.

I decided to seek shelter from the cold in the commercial building. I was going to buy some juice and a loaf of bread and walk back to the house.[3] While buying my juice and bread, however, I noticed that there were a considerable number of people coming into the commercial building and I decided to splurge on a can of iced tea and sit on one of the benches in the middle for a while.

As I sat there, people looked at me a little curiously but moved on. I saw people come in, buy a few groceries and leave. Others just circled the large open area where the benches were and left. There were also people who simply walked in through one set of doors and headed straight to the other set without looking at anything else on their way through. In spite of this mild level of activity, the atmosphere of the commercial building was very quiet and I decided once again to leave. At that moment, a group of men in their twenties came in. They were talking and laughing and, upon noticing me, two of them headed my way.

"Hello,"one of them said. "I'm Sammy. What's your name?" I told him my name and the other man introduced himself as Stéphane. After a bit of friendly chitchatting, they asked me if I wanted to go outside and walk around with them. By this time, I had realized that they were under the influence of alcohol. They were swaying mildly and had a slight slur in their speech.

While I was still ambivalent at this point about whether or not I would associate with drinkers, I was already yearning for the company of people my age and this seemed to be a good opportunity to make some friends. I decided to go outside with them but to be ready to leave if things seemed to get dangerous. As we left the building, I caught a surprised glance from the security guard and felt as though he was somehow disappointed in me.

We stepped outside and Sammy offered to hold my grocery bag. "No, it's OK. It's really light," I said. "It's only bread and juice . . . I can carry it. Thanks anyway."

"Well, us Crees, we always help each other out,"he replied, taking the bag. He asked for a sip of my iced tea saying: "You know, we share everything too. Even women." I could tell he was teasing me and I gently poked at him with my elbow.

Seconds later, a van pulled up. A young woman was driving and there were about three other people in the van. "Hey! What's this?!" Stéphane exclaimed happily. The driver motioned everyone into the van. Sammy, motioned for me to follow, and since there were several women in the van, I did. The interior smelled of old cigarettes and alcohol and country/western music was blaring loudly from the tape deck. There was rapid conversation in Cree among Stéphane and the people in the van. I looked around and noticed that other people who had come into the commercial building with Sammy and Stéphane had disappeared.

Sammy introduced me to a girl named Julie. Julie was obviously quite drunk and rambled on to me for some time about how boring it was to be young in Chisasibi. "We're surrounded, you know? There's nothing to do here at all and they watch us all the time. We're surrounded..."

As she trailed off, I looked at one of the guys in the van, sitting there quietly. "Do you like country music a lot?" I asked him. He shrugged his shoulders, giggled a little and said, "No, not really." Around this time, I heard an angry Cree conversation from the front of the van.

"Get out! Get out if you're not gonna buy anything," Julie told Sammy angrily. I looked around, confused. Julie told me, "Go! Go with your friends!" I followed Sammy with the realization that Julie and her friends were probably bootleggers.

Sammy looked at me apologetically. "We don't have enough to buy anything. Let's go." At this time, Bobby, one of the guys from inside the commercial building rejoined us and I noticed that Stéphane had stayed in the van. As we walked across the parking lot toward the side of the hospital, a big, waddling man walked towards us. Sammy and Bobby greeted him. He nodded toward me while speaking in Cree to Sammy and Bobby. I could tell by the tone of his voice that he was not pleased to see me.

"Who are you?" he finally asked me in English. As I told him I was an anthropology student, he nodded knowingly. "You're studying drunks?"he inquired.

"No, no, I'm just hanging out today. I'm not studying you, I just . . ."

"This is my uncle," Bobby interrupted.

We all headed toward a bench situated by the hospital. As we walked, Bobby's uncle sporadically stared at me and shook his head. Uncertain of how to react, I avoided his gaze and made conversation with Sammy, who seemed oblivious to the older man's disapproval.

Once we reached the bench, the three men sat down leaving me a spot in between Sammy and Bobby. I chose to stand in case I needed to make a quick exit. Sammy still had

my bag of groceries but I decided that if I needed to leave in a hurry, he could keep the juice and the bread.

They started questioning me about where I was staying in the village, how long I was here for, and so on. I gave vague replies as I was starting to feel uncomfortable speaking to this man who so obviously disliked me. After a few minutes, Bobby's uncle started speaking rapidly in Cree to the two other men, who looked down and nodded silently.

When he had finished speaking, Bobby looked away angrily while Sammy looked up at me. He seemed sad as he handed me my bag of groceries and said: "He wants you to leave. He thinks we shouldn't be talking to you." Bobby's uncle nodded to me happily as Sammy spoke, glad to finally get his way.

"Is it because I'm white?" I asked him directly, wanting to prove to myself that, in spite of what anyone said, reverse racism does exist. After looking away, momentarily embarrassed, then proudly looking straight at me, he nodded and motioned me away with his hand, dismissing me from his drunken life.

I walked away, feeling rejected and vowing to listen next time people warned me not to associate with drunks. "We're sorry Nancy," I heard from behind me. I turned around to see Sammy and Bobby waving at me sadly. To my surprise, Bobby's uncle also looked sad and mouthed the words, "I'm sorry." Shaking my head in disbelief, I continued to walk.

While I was still within hearing range of the three men, I ran into the quiet man from the van, who had giggled at the prospect of liking country music. He had a bottle of vodka in his hand and was headed to the bench. "You're leaving?" he asked.

"Yeah, that guy over there wants me to leave," I replied resentfully. He looked over

to the other men with a look on his face that said that he was also embarrassed by the situation then said, "Well, we'll see you around again I hope."

As I walked back to the house, I tried to be objective about that day's events but the sting of rejection was too strong. After only a few days in this town, I felt as though I was paying for the sins of all of the fur traders, missionaries, politicians and anthropologists who had come and meddled with Cree culture. I did not know who I should be angry with: Bobby's uncle for judging me because I was white, the other men for submitting to his will, all the white people who had helped create this cross-cultural tension or myself for being arrogant enough to come here and think that I could glean some understanding of this unfamiliar way of life.

It was only once I had started making friends later in the course of my stay that I started to be able to look back at the situation with some personal distance. I then realized that, out of four people, only one of them had actually disliked me. Upon further reflection, I came to see that it more as a case of distrust than of dislike. I remembered his question about whether I was studying drunks and I thought back to the way drunks were referred to in the community.

It occurred to me that the drunks in Chisasibi form a marginalized group within the town not only because they drink but also because they may portray a bad image of the community. It is well known that, in White society, there is a wide-spread stereotype of "drunken Indians." That being said, the people who drink heavily, whether it is out of choice or out of addiction, are probably aware that they constitute a prime target for criticism, punishment and analysis. Bobby's uncle, who was considerably older than the other men, had

probably witnessed more situations where Cree culture was probed by Whites in some function or another and situations where drunks were targeted in some way either by other Cree or by Whites.

I eventually came to see that, by being suspicious of me, he was looking out for himself, for his nephew and his friends, and/or for their culture and way of life. Once I had accepted this as a valid point of view, it was much easier for me to see that the whole situation was not a clear-cut case of being rejected because I was white. There were far greater factors at play such as this man's life experience in or out of Chisasibi, the effects of alcohol consumption, prejudice about alcoholics and Native people in general as well as the colonial history of Native/non-Native relations.

In addition, I came to be glad that I had experienced this form of rejection. Although I, like most people, have experienced rejection in some form or another during my childhood, I had never been in a situation where being white was a factor in this rejection. I had gone through my childhood in a small white American town in downstate New York seeing Black and Asian children get teased. As a teenager in Sherbrooke, Quebec, I had also witnessed Asian people being laughed at and called names. Even as an adult in Montréal I have seen blatant racist acts being committed. Although I had always felt that this was wrong and usually felt sorry for the people who were the target, I had never felt what it is like to be singled out because of skin colour.

It would be pretentious and ludicrous of me to claim that I now know this feeling because of this situation and others like it in Chisasibi. I was not called any names. No acts of violence were committed against me. My experience had nothing to do with the

experience of the people I had seen mocked and dehumanized because their skin was not white. In fact, I only experienced a small fraction of the marginalisation that they must have felt.

However, I feel that this experience forced me to reflect on how my whiteness affected the way people perceived me for the first time in my life. Being white had not been something I had to think about every day when I was in a white environment. In a Cree environment, it was a daily fact of life: I was a stranger and I was white. I could see it in people's faces when they saw me for the first time. It was not necessarily a negative thing, but it was there where it had never been before.

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On the following Sunday, Kathy asked me to go and buy some milk for her at the store. I obligingly went for her, glad that she felt she could count on me to run errands for her. It was a much brighter day than the previous Sunday. In fact, it was almost warm. As I approached the commercial building, I came across a tall, thin woman in her late 50s who was headed in the same direction. I cheerily said; "Wachiya!" She smiled at me and started chatting with me about the days when she worked as a nurse at the hospital and how her father was one of the people who signed the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

As we came to the entrance of the commercial building, I spotted Sammy leaning against a post near the door. Still feeling hurt from the previous week's ordeal, I looked away in the hope that he would not recognize me. I was also interested in what Adelaide, the woman with whom I was walking, had to say and had no intention of jeopardizing a possible friendship with her.

Sammy, however, not only recognized me but he remembered my name as well. "Nancy!" he called out. "Hey, Nancy!"

Not wanting to hurt his feelings but wanting to show that I was involved in another conversation, I called out, "Hi. See you later." As Adelaide spat out: "Drunks!" under her breath, I saw Sammy look after me with a hurt and puzzled expression. I felt bad about the situation but also felt unable to do anything about it. Once inside the commercial building, Adelaide went her way. I bought Kathy's milk and headed back toward the house. As I left the commercial building, Sammy was nowhere in sight.

Later that afternoon, after I had finished helping with yardwork[4], I left the house again with Janice and her friends. We spent part of the day in the pool hall and the rest was spent wandering the streets. At one point, Janice called home to ask her mother a question. She soon regretted that action as Kathy insisted that we both come back to the house at once after walking Tess[5] home.

"Some drunk guy was at the house looking for you so now we have to go home," Janice said resentfully. Feeling awkward, I complied. We walked Tess home, much to her dismay, and went back to the house.

As it turns out, Sammy had knocked at the door when Allie, Kathy's other daughter, was alone in the house with her two young daughters. According to Allie, she did not immediately realize that Sammy was drunk. He asked for me and, when she told him that I was not there, he approached her, kissed her hand and told her that she was beautiful. It was at his point that she smelled the alcohol on his breath and shooed him out, locking the door behind him. Neither Kathy nor Antonio ever questioned me about how I became involved

with Sammy or with drunks in general. They did, however, advise me always to lock the door when I was alone in the house and not to walk around alone at night.

On the one hand, I was beginning to think that they were right and that the drunks would eventually get me into trouble. On the other hand, I felt badly about judging a whole group of people based on one person's actions. Furthermore, I did not see how Sammy coming to the door and asking for me in plain daylight was a bad thing. As far as I knew, he left when he was told to and did not do anything to warrant the view that he was dangerous aside from being under the influence of alcohol. I therefore did not entirely write off any future contacts with drunks. I vowed to look for Sammy the next day and to have chat with him. Unfortunately, I never ran into him again. I did encounter Bobby one evening, however, who also recognized me and apologized for his uncle. "He's such a racist," he commented as he lit a cigarette. That was also the last time I saw Bobby. As for his uncle, I never encountered him again after the first Sunday.

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Almost every Sunday for the remainder of my stay, I would spot little groups of people, mostly men, huddled together around a bottle of alcohol or a big can of beer. If they spotted me, they usually spoke to me and occasionally invited me to join them. Once or twice, I was invited to join a group by one or two men but was waved away by the women in the group, in which case I left.

When the whole group seemed receptive to me and they were close enough to a foot path so that I could easily get away if in case of trouble, I usually joined them. On one particular occasion, a group of about six or seven men of various ages were sitting near a

shed behind a house. There was an old, wooden bench and a couple of rusty chairs. They were only about ten feet away from the path.

They invited me over. I accepted and sat down on an old chair next to Rick, Andy, Steve and a few other young men who floated around. I was offered my very own king can of beer. This was rare; someone in the group usually shared their own beer with me as alcohol was expensive to buy from bootleggers.

We talked about all sorts of things and I eventually tried out the few Cree words that I had learned. "Don't talk Cree, that's stupid, man!" exclaimed Andy. I jokingly asked them how to swear in Cree. In spite of the fact that they were all in their mid-twenties or older, they giggled like school boys. "Why do you want to talk like that? That's no good," chided Andy again.

"It's just for fun. I won't say it to anyone. I probably won't even remember any of it," I said. Steve and Andy proceeded to ramble off a series of expressions describing male and female genitals and explaining that these words were insulting. Rick, who was more quiet and reserved, looked on, suppressing a smile and trying to look shocked.

As the afternoon went on, more people had started to join the group. I had not noticed as I was busy conversing with Steve, Rick and Andy, who were the core of the group. A few young women were sitting around and some teenage boys were circling the group, tossing a ball and looking on curiously. Occasionally, someone would call out to Steve, Andy or Rick and a short Cree conversation would then ensue.

After I finished my can of beer, I was slightly drunk as it was a big can and I had not had that much beer in a long time. Andy, Rick and Steve were hungry and decided to got to

the *Mitchuap* for something to eat. They wanted me to go with them so I joined them. They were quite drunk and their speech had become virtually incoherent.

When we reached the restaurant, the waitresses looked back and forth from me to the three men. It occurred to me, in my drunken state, that not many of the Whites in the community hung around with drunks and that this must have seemed quite strange to them. It also occurred to me that I had been drinking in plain view of anyone who had walked on the foot path by which we had been sitting all afternoon.

We sat down and ordered. I was not hungry so I only ordered an iced tea. As the men ate, they started telling me about the time they had gone goose hunting at the point where James Bay and Hudson Bay meet. All of a sudden, in spite of their drunkenness, they became extremely coherent and passionate. They told me about the funny mishaps that had happened and how many geese they had caught. Even Rick, who was the quietest one of the group, was talking excitedly.

After about ten minutes, they became their old drunken selves again, disillusioned and incoherent. "Bay James. F***ing stupid place," Andy mumbled for the third time that day. It was getting too depressing. I decided to leave. After protesting, they finally let me go. Steve, who had many nicknames including Godzilla, told the waitress to put my iced tea on his bill. I argued weakly, finally caving in.

"Well, I am pretty broke," I said, which was the truth. I only had about twenty dollars until my student loan arrived. "Yeah, right," they snickered in disbelief. On that note, I started walking home.

As I walked, I thought about how disillusioned they were. Every time I had tried to

speak in Cree, one of them would discourage me. It was as though they thought it was not something worth learning. However, once they started talking about goose hunting, an important Cree activity, they became articulate and passionate. Being Cree was no longer something to be ashamed of. It was, instead, a source of pride. They did not even seem drunk anymore during this discussion.

Later that evening, I went to the general store to get some bread. On my way out, I came upon Steve and Andy again. At this point, they were extremely drunk. They walked with much difficulty and were slurring so much that I could barely understand them. "Hey, Nancy, whatcha doin'?" asked Steve. "Come have a drink wid us."

"I don't have time right now. Maybe later," I said trying to get away quickly. I did not want to get involved with them when they were this drunk.

"Ah, come on! Where you goin'?" Steve asked angrily.

"I'm going to a friend's house," I lied.

"Oh, yeah? I have a friend for you," he replied, unzipping his black jeans.

Barely containing my laughter, I said: "See ya later!" and ran across the street just before a series of cars drove by so that Steve would have no way of catching up to me.

The next morning, outside the commercial building, I saw Steve again. He was sober this time and looked at me uncertainly. "Did I do something bad last night?" he asked shyly.

"Well, you did something pretty silly. And you were a bit rude. But I know you were drunk so I don't hold it against you," I told him, trying to reassure him. In spite of my tone, I could still barely refrain from giggling as I remembered the previous night's events.

"*Agudah*," ("OK") he said as he walked away.[6]

During the rest of my stay, I encountered Steve, Andy and Rick several times but I never had the occasion to sit and drink with them again. Steve's attitude would range from very shy to very rude, depending on how drunk he was. During my last few weeks in Chisasibi, when I began hanging around with Calvin, an Inuit friend, Steve began to be more aloof with me. Calvin and his wife, Nicole, who is French Canadian, said that he had always been like that with women. "If he's not drunk, he doesn't know what to say to a woman."

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While I had initially feared that my reputation among the Cree would be jeopardized by contact with drunks, I found out that it had very little impact. The fact that I sat with drunks occasionally was only mentioned to me twice. On the first occasion, I was using one of the pay phones in the Mitchuap building when a man in his late twenties approached me and introduced himself. He said he had seen me before hanging out with Steve and had been curious about me since it was rare that white people drank with Crees. He told me he had nothing against it and that he was not a drunk but that he had a drink or a joint on occasion.

The other instance occurred when I was playing pool with Don and Alex. We had a few beers that evening and, at around 2:30 AM, Don finally got around to mentioning that he knew I had some beer with Steve and Andy and that I hung around with Calvin and Jessie, Calvin's Cree friend. He had been itching to bring it up all evening.

"How do you know all that?" I asked.

"I heard it through the grapevine," he smirked as I tapped him on the arm with a pool cue.

Overall, I got the impression that the people who saw me often enough came to realize

that I was not in the same category as the other white people who came to Chisasibi. They seemed unsure about how to categorize me and I think that they eventually gave up trying.

In the end, these and other experiences and their impact showed me that there are many factors involved in inter-personal relations between people of different cultural or ethnic groups. While the ways Native and non-Native people in Chisasibi relate to each other may initially appear to follow a set of unspoken rules established by the history of contact between the two groups, the current political situation and work obligations, there is a different dynamic involved when certain variables are changed.

These variables may include, for example, the life experiences of the individuals in question, their positions *within their own cultural groups*, and the specific situation within which the contact occurs. Therefore, while most Cree-White contact occurs in either a work-related location, such as the school or the hospital, or in a confrontational context, such as political negotiations, the contacts I had with Crees took place in different circumstances.

In the case of my contacts with drunks, for example, all of the above-mentioned variables were different from the usual Cree-White contact. The life experience of the drunks and my own coincided to the extent that I could sympathize with their drinking problems having myself had personal experience with alcohol-related problems, such as low self-esteem and marginalisation. As for their position within their cultural group, they had their own social circle which did not include the more vocal individuals of the community. Similarly, I am not a doctor, nurse or teacher as are most of the white people in the community. Finally, the context within which we interrelated was obviously not work-related or confrontational.

In brief, these experiences gave me a glimpse of some of the possibilities involved in

cross-cultural contacts when assumptions about the other group are put aside and affinities are focused upon. They also made me glad that I had followed my own instinct regarding my decision to befriend the people who were most like my own friends back home. Instead of limiting me, this decision opened up a whole world of possibilities.

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The events described in this chapter deal mostly with issues of identity and marginality and the ways in which they enabled me to establish a rapport with a certain circle of people. While there are significant cultural differences between myself and "the drunks", my willingness to sit, drink and talk with them showed them, for the most part, that I was more similar to them than they may have originally thought. In other words, we shared a system of reference that intersected with both their cultural system and mine. This system of reference, woven into our *habitus*, provided the commonality that we needed to establish ongoing bonds.

Like the contacts I had with other Chisasibi residents, my initial contact with "drunks" was problematic and uncomfortable. However, some reflection and an effort on my part to try to put people at ease eventually allowed me to integrate these groups of men to varying degrees. This is not to say that these contacts remained unproblematic; in fact, anger or fear sporadically resurfaced during these interactions. Nevertheless, the Sunday afternoons that the "drunks" and I spent hanging around, talking and accepting each other as "coeval" permitted me to weave myself into the social fabric of the town. Because of various circumstances, I never became close enough to any of the "drunks" to call them friends, but my ongoing association with them placed me within a network, consisting of the more

marginal residents of Chisasibi, that I may not otherwise have accessed so quickly and easily.

Chapter 6 - Cree & White: A Weekend in the Bush

"How are you gonna fit six people, all their stuff and all those boxes onto a canoe?" I asked Jim. He had just invited me to spend Labour Day weekend at his camp in the bush along with Kathy, Antonio and two of his friends from Ontario. Everyone would be bringing their personal items and, in addition, Jim needed to bring some supplies for his brother who was building a new cabin on their land, which is situated north of Chisasibi on the coast of James Bay.

He explained to me that the trip entailed a one-hour drive to Longue Pointe, where his canoe was parked, and a two-hour canoe trip on the bay. Since the only canoes I had ever seen were the type that can be rented by the side of most lakes in upstate New York, I had trouble visualizing how the above-mentioned load would fit into a tiny two-seated vessel.

"So . . . what are you gonna do?" I persisted. "I can't believe you can fit all that. It's impossible."

"Wait. You'll see," he said, nodding wisely.

Jim, a rugged man in his late forties, is a longtime friend of Antonio and Kathy. We were introduced at the house one day when he dropped in for a visit. Antonio urged me to contact him as he thought Jim could be helpful in my quest for knowledge about cultural issues. Promising to overcome my shyness, I told Antonio that I would call Jim that week. As it turned out, I did not need to call since Jim called me of his own accord.[1]

Skeptical of anthropological research in general, Jim was nonetheless enthusiastic about helping me with my project. When I asked him why he was being helpful in spite of his

doubts, he replied that, when he met me, I specified that I was only a *student* of anthropology and that this gave him the impression that I was not yet so set in my ways and so more able to absorb new ideas.

Jim felt that a weekend spent in the bush was an ideal way for me to get a first-hand glimpse, albeit a brief one, of one of the driving forces behind Cree life. As he explained to me several times, people have to cooperate to survive in the bush. While a little friendly competition is not unheard of as each hunter wants to be the one to catch that night's meal, the main goal is that there be enough food for everyone.

"Of course I want to be the one to shoot the caribou but if my friend has a perfect view and he can get it easier than me, I'm not gonna jump in front of him to block him. I'm just glad we have food, that's the important thing," he specified.

I also felt that spending some time in the bush was a good opportunity. As mentioned previously, Chisasibi was virtually deserted on weekends with a large portion of the populace gone to the bush. Something that was this important to so many people could not be ignored if I wanted to gain any kind of insight about the life of the town.

We were scheduled to leave early Friday morning. As it turned out, Jim had no problem fitting everything into the canoe. His canoe, as well as all the other canoes that I saw during my stay in Chisasibi, had nothing to do with the tiny paddle canoes I had seen in tourist areas. In fact, at least four people were needed to push it from the sand, where it was parked when not in use, onto the water. I then saw that it had ample room for all the people involved as well as all the equipment needed for the trip, such as gas cans for the outboard motor, hunting and fishing gear and sleeping bags, and the window frames for Jim's brother's cabin. There

would even have been enough room for Jim's case of beer if he had not forgotten it at home. "See," he said with a knowing look. I could only stare dumbly.

Gerard and Henry, two Franco-Ontarian brothers in their late-fifties to early sixties who fish on Jim's land every fall, were also on the trip. As Jim had humourously predicted, they were only too happy to have a newcomer along on the trip so that they would have someone to impress with all the Cree knowledge they had gained over the years. He had also stated: "It's good for us to have someone new to impress."

The canoe trip itself was extremely pleasant. It was a bright sunny day and, in the excitement of being on such a large body of water, I barely noticed the wind whipping at us. While I had been having visions of paddling for two hours, the canoe was equipped with an outboard motor. Thus, I only needed to sit and be amazed at my surroundings. Meanwhile, under Jim's amused gaze, Gerard and Henry proudly pointed out various landmarks and showed me how to tell which direction we were going in by using their watches and the sun.

The upcoming weekend was discussed during the canoe trip. While Gerard and Henry fished, Jim and Antonio would hunt geese.[2] Much teasing was directed toward the two visiting brothers who liked to brag about how many fish they were going to catch. "We'll reel 'em right in," Gerard would say. "We'll have enough food to last a week!" In the mean time, Antonio and Jim would share a knowing glance and refer to their good old fashioned Cree tackle. I would find out much later that they were actually referring to fishing nets.

The friendly banter eventually turned to politics at which point I detached my self from the conversation. I contemplated the water and how far out it stretched. I felt giddy as I grinned childishly at Kathy. She smiled back and I wondered if it was still exciting for her

even though she had done this so many times before.

Upon our arrival, all of our things needed to be transferred to sleighs attached to the back of snowmobiles so that they could be transported to Jim's camp. Until Jim mentioned it to me, I had not thought anything of riding a snowmobile when there was no snow since I was too busy enjoying the ride. "If you go back down south and say that Crees ride skidoos in the summer, they'll think you're nuts."

"I don't see what's so weird about it," I said. "If it works, why not?"

"Well, they won't believe you because most of the people who come here don't see this," he replied. "Look at this skidoo. Is this a part of Cree culture you think?"

"I don't know. That's not for me to judge anyway. I'm not Cree." From his nod, I could tell that he understood what I meant. I wanted to ask him if he thought that skidoos were a part of white culture but I decide to save a discussion about material culture for a rainy day.

However, the only rain we were to encounter that weekend occurred on the Bay during our trip back to Chisasibi on the Monday. The rest of the weekend was sunny and mild.[3] On Saturday, Gerard and Henry were all set for a day of fishing and invited me to join them. I agreed since Antonio and Jim would be hunting and Kathy seemed to want to spend some time by herself.

We hiked to Gerard and Henry's favourite fishing spot, getting lost along the way. The two men spent the day fishing. I passed a large portion of the day watching them fish although I had to spend a few hours in seclusion waiting for my pants to dry after I tripped in a swamp on the way to the river. While I was annoyed at first, I came to enjoy the opportunity for

contemplation afforded by my mishap. I sat on a rock by the river for at least one hour, watching the water and enjoying the audible silence created by the lack of an electric hum, a sound to which I was so accustomed in the south.

Feeling at peace with myself and with the world, I put my pants on, although they were still damp, and joined the men. They offered to teach me how to fish. Although I had always wanted to fish, I declined their offer. I thought about the way they referred to 'stupid fish' and the way they saw fishing as a sport and compared it to the way the Cree spoke about fishing. If I was going to learn to fish, I did not want to learn it from these two men, at least not here. In another time and place, I would not have minded but it seemed inappropriate to learn to fish 'the white way' on Cree land.

Between arguments about their respective fishing techniques, the men regaled me with tales of their past experiences with Jim and other Cree they knew. Most of their stories involved various pranks pulled on them by the Cree or funny misunderstandings that had occurred due to language and cultural barriers.

"Henry, tell her about the orange tackle," said Gerard at one point.

"Well, one guy, a friend of Jim's, gave me this little orange ball and said it was the best kind of tackle," began Henry. "So I put it on the hook and, ya know, it really worked! So I asked him where it came from and he started laughing. He said it was bubble gum! They laughed at me all weekend that time. But I got the last laugh. It worked, so next time I came with orange bubble gum and used it as a tackle. Best kind there is!"

At some point during the afternoon, Kathy joined us by the river with her fishing equipment. She explained to me that casting the reel over and over again relaxed her, even

if she caught no fish. She also asked me why I hadn't started a fire to dry my pants and keep myself warm earlier since I had matches in my pocket. Once again, I only stared dumbly. Something that was so obvious to her had completely escaped me.

On our way back to the camp that evening, we ran into Jim and Antonio and their supply of dead geese. They were taking a smoking break before heading back to the camp. We sat with them until they decided to get on their way. The two men stood, picked up their geese by the necks and slung them over their shoulders, reminding me of the way Santa Claus carries his bag of gifts.

The sight of them walking along at a relaxed pace with about three geese each hanging over their shoulders was surprisingly unremarkable and yet I tore away my gaze with great difficulty. They made it seem like the most natural of things and, in fact, they did not seem to give it a second thought. The act of carrying dead animals, so alien to me, was just another step in the process of obtaining food.

I must point out that I am not a vegetarian. I eat meat with pleasure and, like most Western meat-eaters, I do not give much thought to the animals that are the source of the meat that I eat.[4] I had therefore previously been oblivious to the process that occurred between the time an animal was alive and the time its flesh was put on grocery store shelves.

While I had not been a witness to the actual killing of these geese, I could now see their lifeless bodies swinging back and forth in rhythm with the steps of the two men. It did not scare me or faze me but it gave me a different perspective on the relationship between people and animals, the source of food. Of course, I had just spent the afternoon watching fish get killed and gutted. Somehow, this was different. Gerard and Henry, in my eyes, had an

antagonistic relationship to the fish they caught. They treated the remains of the fish with callous disregard. Jim and Antonio, on the other hand, treated the bodies of the geese with grace and a sort of tenderness. Their big hands grabbed the necks of the geese firmly but without roughness. They displayed no contempt for the animals.

Back at the cabin that afternoon, the four men continued their mock rivalry. While the two white men would occasionally get a laugh at Jim's and Antonio's expense, most of the taunts were directed from the Cree toward Gerard and Henry. They usually consisted of remarks about the white men's questionable bush skills and their inability to find their way. In fact, that morning's episode of getting lost on the way to the river was a source of great amusement for the Cree.

Another cause for amusement and criticism was the way Gerard prepared the fish. As he went about the business of cutting fish from that day's catch on the steps leading up to the cabin, Jim and Antonio looked on with incredulous faces. "What are you doing?"asked Jim.

"Making fillets," replied Gerard nonchalantly.

"But you're wasting half the fish!" persisted Jim, as Antonio shook his head and went back to chopping wood nearby.

"Well, Jim tell me how you want yours cut and I'll do it your way," answered Gerard. After he gave Gerard his specifications, Jim rejoined Antonio as he chopped wood.

While the constant wisecracks thrown back and forth between the white men and the Cree men amused me at first, I became increasingly uncomfortable. Although I can be a joker myself and many of the conversations between Jim and myself consisted of friendly banter, I did not know where to situate myself in this scenario. I was here with the Cree, not with

the Whites but I was White, not Cree. Who was I allowed to tease and how? Instead of getting involved, I withdrew. Jim, noticing this, discreetly inquired about my withdrawal from the group.

"Why is it always about Crees and Whites?" I pondered aloud to him. "Can't you ever tease each other about anything else? Isn't there anything else about people that you notice other than whether they're Cree or White?"

Surprised by my questions, Jim tried to reassure me. "Ahhhh, it's only joking. You know, it relieves tension. They know we're just kidding around. What do you want us to do, sit around all serious and stare at each other?" His eyes bulged out as he did an impression of someone staring stupidly. I laughed and attempted in vain to articulate what exactly I meant. I soon gave up, realizing that I needed to think about the issue before I could explain how I felt.

Kathy, unlike her husband and her friend, remained quiet for most of the afternoon. She would occasionally join in the ribbing but her taunts were mostly directed toward her fellow Cree. "You see, Nancy," she began as she stood at the sink with Gerard and Henry bustling around her performing various tasks,[5] "this is what bush life is all about. The women do all the work and the men sit around and do nothing."

"Why do you think we bring the white boys along?" quipped Jim, who was sitting at the table with me and Antonio, smoking a cigarette. The Cree men laughed heartily as Kathy shook her head. Gerard looked up slightly, appearing unsure of what to say, and went back to what he was doing. Henry vaguely smiled in our direction.

That evening, goose and fish were served for supper. "Tu va l'essayer, en?"[6] Jim asked,

pointing out the goose. ("You'll try it, won't you?") I nodded and said that I was looking forward to trying it. A few moments later, I was given a whole fish by Gerard. I ate my fish and felt full. I could not eat another bite. Comments were made, once again, about how little I was eating. "I worry about you, eating so little," Gerard commented when I declined more food.

"I just ate a whole fish," I replied, feeling defensive and wanting them all to leave me alone.

The next morning, I had the opportunity to explain to Jim that my stomach had gotten used to eating very little because I was on such a restrained budget. In fact, I only needed a small meal in the morning, such as two pieces of toast and a fruit, and a regular meal in the evening. I wanted to add that fish was very filling compared to the food I usually ate. However, there seemed to be little I could do to avoid the feeling that I had insulted Jim and Antonio by not eating any goose.

Sunday, the last full day at Jim's camp, was relatively uneventful. Out of respect for his parents' Christian upbringing, Jim declared that no hunting was to be done on Sunday. Kathy had the chance to pluck one of the geese killed the day before and to pick some blueberries nearby. Unfortunately, a bear had gotten to the blueberry patch before her and she did not get as many as she had wanted.

In the afternoon, Jim said he was going to clean out a few of the hunting blinds on the tundra nearby as many of them were littered with old garbage. I offered to help and we rode off on the snowmobile.

"Why is there so much garbage?" I queried.

"Ahhh, some people don't give a sh*t," he replied.

We filled a big garbage bag with old cans and pieces of paper that had been left behind over the years. After about an hour, Jim decided it was time for a break. We sat in a blind near the lake and he built a fire to burn some of the garbage. Again, I felt at peace, enjoying the silence, the view of the water, the warmth from the fire and the smell of burning spruce branches.

"When you see Antonio," Jim said, "Tell him 'injeekudwanan.' It means, 'we made a fire.'"

"Yeah, right!" I replied suspiciously. "You're just trying to make me say something dirty. He's gonna think . . .well, ya know."

"No, honestly, it really means 'we made a fire!'"

Eyeing him, I tentatively tried out this new phrase. "In-jee . . . , "I began.

"Kud-wa-nan," he finished.

"In-jee-kud-wa-nan."

"That's right! Don't forget to say it to Tony!"

"I'll see. Maybe."

When we left the blind, we saw Kathy and Antonio in the distance. Kathy was attempting to pick more blueberries without much success. She jokingly remarked that the only way she could get more berries was to pick them out of the heaps of blue bear dung that were scattered throughout the area. These piles were, in fact, the only sign of a bear I had seen that weekend and the only thing that made me believe the men's taunts about the presence of bears in the area.

Jim cleared his throat, looked at me and said: "In-"

Resigned to my fate of being humiliated in front of Kathy and Antonio, I feebly said: "In-jee-kud-wa-nan."

Antonio asked me a monosyllabic question in Cree. Jim said excitedly: "He's asking you where. When someone asks you that, you point over in that direction, but we don't point with our fingers, we point with our lips, like this." Both Jim and Antonio demonstrated the Cree way of pointing by curving their lower lip into a u-shape and tilting their chin in the appropriate direction.

Still paranoid, I asked: "You mean I said it right? In-jee-kud-wa-nan? It's OK?"

"Well, he answered you didn't he?" remarked Kathy, still bent over a meager blueberry patch. Jim and I laughed. He had played a trick on me after all; just not the trick I was expecting. He went on to tell me the names of the different lakes surrounding us. "We have to give them names, otherwise we'd be there 'lake number 1, lake number 2 . . .'" Jim was in his element as he explained all these things to me. Unfortunately, I would not get the opportunity to see him that relaxed again.

On Monday, it was time to head back to Chisasibi. It was cold and wet on the bay and Kathy was constantly attempting to cover me with a tarp so that I would not get too cold. She motioned me to get underneath completely but, wanting to see the bay again, I kept my head above the tarp. My stubbornness was rewarded with the sight of a big, beautiful seal sitting on a rock.

"It's a baby seal," Jim yelled to me over the roar of the outboard motor.

"Is it waiting for its mother?" I asked.

"No, it's just hanging around," he replied.

The rest of the trip was uneventful except for the occasional canoe headed in the other direction. When we reached Longue Pointe, I was relieved and yet a little sad that this adventure was over. It was now time to head back to town and contemplate that weekend's events.

I had spent a good portion of my time in the bush being afraid of offending people by doing or saying the wrong thing. I realized early in the trip that cooperation was essential and yet, usually a helpful and efficient person, I froze whenever it was time to do something as a member of the group such as push the canoe out onto the water.

The only time I felt completely comfortable was when I was doing dishes with Henry. This was something I knew how to do. All other activities were foreign to me and I felt inadequate and useless. I mentioned this to Kathy who replied: "When something needs to be done, we just do it."

Feeling defensive again, I answered: "But I'm not used to the way things work here so I don't even know *what* needs to be done."

"Nobody is expecting anything from you. Just observe and report back accurately what you're observing."

At a loss, I felt like a teenager again, confused and angry without knowing why. Except for two brief interludes of serenity, I felt like an intruder in this northern paradise. Nobody had done anything to make me feel this way. It was more a case of me having a strange reaction to this new, life-changing experience in the same way that a newly pregnant woman has a strong physical reaction to the presence of her future baby.

Meanwhile, my hosts were either insulted by my behaviour, unaware of it or unconcerned by it. To this day, I cannot be sure of what they thought of the whole situation. I can only assume that they were too preoccupied by their own enjoyment of being on the land to worry about my behaviour.

In spite of this general malaise on my part, Labour Day weekend was a positive experience. In some inexplicable way, I had grown a little. Back at the house later that week, Antonio asked me: "So . . . what did you learn on Labour Day weekend?"

I was making a stir-fry at the time and took a long time to reply while I stirred and thought. "I can't explain it," I finally admit with a mixture of shame and honesty.

"Can you drive a car?"he asked.

"Yeah," I answered, more than a little baffled by his question.

"Can you explain how a car works inside?" he queried further.

"Not really . . . I never thought about it," I replied.

"So . . ." he trailed off with a knowing shrug.

"Don't try to analyze it to death," I could see written in his look. "Just accept."

The subject was then closed for the time being. "*Agudah*," I thought as I looked back at him.

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Labour Day weekend, then, was a both a source of frustration and growth as blatant cases of inter-cultural tension and misunderstanding reoccurred throughout the time spent in the bush. Issues of identity, belonging and friendship resurfaced on a regular basis. Interestingly, this particular series of events was situated outside of Chisasibi, and therefore

outside of the social system which is actually the focus of this research.

They remain relevant, however, and provide insight into the ways in which the Cree cultural system helps shape the social system contained in Chisasibi. Just as the non-Native cultural systems which act upon Chisasibi's social life extend beyond its borders and allow for a flow of people, ideas, thoughts, values and experiences back and forth from Chisasibi to southern Canada, Chisasibi's Native cultural systems extend into the bush and allow for a similar flow to occur between the town and the bush.

While a non-Native arriving in Chisasibi, a social system with several active cultural systems, for the first time has a repertoire of ideas to which s/he can refer (hir own cultural system), the non-Native taken into the bush with the Cree is thrown into a whole new social *and* cultural system. My hosts, however, let me experience first-hand the feelings and sensations associated to silent co-existence with the surrounding landscape without imposing their own views on me (cf. Goulet 1998). It is in situations such as these that the individual *habitus* acts to incorporate new ideas and, in this case, the new ideas would help me better understand events that were to happen back in Chisasibi.

For example, the incidents of cultural tension that occurred in the bush allowed me to gain a different perspective on the Cree/white dynamic. In Chisasibi, the intersection of various cultural systems largely contributes to the general social dynamic of the town. In the bush, however, the Cree cultural system is the most efficient and necessary system. Under these circumstances, one is better able to see how certain Cree reactions are directly related to this system.

Having experienced a very short glimpse of bush life therefore gave me insight into the

words and actions of my Cree friends back in Chisasibi. I could better understand, for example, why the drunk men in the restaurant suddenly became coherent when the conversation turned to goose hunting. I could also appreciate the importance of falling silent when the opportunity for a friend to shoot a partridge occurred (see chapter 7, page 140). In brief, my *habitus* had been slightly modified and this enabled me to connect with existing and potential friends on a different level.

Chapter 7 - Sharing Time and Space: Commonality and Friendship

Uncommon Channels

When I arrived in Chisasibi, I had been hoping to integrate into Cree social life to the greatest extent that I could do so in three months. I had little intention of associating with non-Natives, out of fear that doing so would place me in the same category as the other non-Natives. I feared that, if the Cree thought that I was like the other non-Natives in the community and if they saw me fraternizing with them, they would believe that I was uninterested in associating with the Cree.

I gradually realized the fallacy of this approach. As I was interested in learning about Cree/non-Native relations, it was imperative that I also hear the non-Native point of view. In addition, I felt that isolating myself from other non-Natives was a form of racism in and of itself and that my judgements about non-Natives and their supposed attempts to distance themselves from the Cree were rather hasty.

I therefore began to follow the seemingly natural course that social networks offered me, even when this course led me to associate with non-Natives. Not only did this new approach lead to a wealth of information, it led to the discovery of several kind and warm people whom I would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet.

What I had also failed to realize earlier is that social networks in Chisasibi run courses that are not always limited by cultural and social boundaries. In spite of appearances, and of the broader tendencies of Chisasibi residents to associate with their own social groups,

whether they be family-based or work-based, there are several non-Natives who, because of different factors, are connected to people from various other groups. Therefore, by establishing connections with certain non-Natives, who had been referred to me by Cree or Inuit friends, I was able to meet other Native people whom I might not met through strictly Native networks.

The rate at which I met new people increased dramatically once I began to network through channels offered by other non-Natives. I was not a complete stranger to the people that I met: I had been told by someone else to call them. This created an aura of familiarity which made people more at ease. It also gave people a reason to talk to me. Finally, it was not only through networking that I was able to meet new people. My association with non-Natives led me to participate in activities which allowed me to directly interact with different people in situations where we had reasons to talk.

People in Motion

When I told Jim, that I had changed my project and that I was now interested in learning about Native/non-Native relations, he urged me to call his friend Ken, an English Canadian hospital worker with whom he frequently hunted and fished. I followed his advice and called Ken, who amiably agreed to meet me in his apartment in one of the buildings reserved for hospital workers.

Ken had just returned from a trip to Montreal and, as he unpacked his luggage, he described his opinions on the topic at hand. As I prepared to leave, he gave me a list of approximately seven or eight names, mostly of other non-Native hospital workers, and

assured me that these people would be happy to talk to me as well.

When I called Alberto, one of the people to whom Ken had referred me, he enthusiastically invited me to have supper with him, his wife Ingrid, who is also a hospital worker, and their two children. I accepted and had the chance to partake in Ingrid's excellent cooking. Interestingly, one of the first questions they asked me that evening was: "So . . . how did you meet Ken?"

"Well, I met him through Jim H.," I answered.

"But how did you meet Jim?" Alberto queried once again.

"He's a friend of the people I'm staying with, Kathy and Antonio S.," I replied.

"Hmmmm . . . I don't think I know them," Alberto mused as he glanced curiously at Ingrid. "Wait a minute! I met Kathy on the plane once. I think I met her husband too." After a brief pause, Ingrid asked the obvious question: "How did you meet them?"

I told them the story of how I had contacted Kathy and how she had offered to let me stay in her house. "And that's how this all started," I concluded.

After we had eaten, Alberto suggested that I go see the square dancing competition with them at the arena. These competitions are held periodically in Chisasibi and people come from many places to watch or participate in them. I had not yet had the chance to attend one and their offer was tempting. However, I honestly told them that the five-dollar cover charge was beyond my means as I was on an extremely limited student budget. They insisted and graciously offered to pay my admission. I accepted and we were on our way.

The atmosphere in the arena that evening was jovial and exciting. People alternately watched the dancers and gathered in groups of various sizes to chat. As we attempted to find

a seat, Alberto was continuously stopped by people wanting to talk or wanting to tease him about his participation in a previous competition. I was amazed at how popular he was with Cree people and noted Ingrid's exasperation toward the end of the evening when she was waiting to leave and he was still busy talking to a group of people.

Before I left, Alberto told me that there were soccer games at the school every Sunday and that anyone could play. "It would be a good chance for you to meet people," he added. Appreciating his kindness and generosity, I thanked him and told him that I would probably go watch the game the following Sunday. "You can play too!" he stressed.

"Well, I haven't played in a few years, so I'll wait and see how good you guys are before I jump in," I joked and went on my way.

The following Sunday, I watched an eclectic group of Chisasibi residents join together, play soccer, banter with each other and go their separate ways. There were Cree, Inuit and non-Native men and women from different occupational fields. The next Sunday, I played with them and felt that team spirit prevailed during the game although the teams were formed anew at each game and they disintegrated once the game was over.

During the intermissions, I had the chance to meet and talk with several people about my project. Interested to varying degrees, they expressed their opinions guardedly in front of the rest of the players. However, a few people agreed to meet at a later time to discuss the topic in more detail.

It was also at one of these games that I met Calvin, an Inuit whom I had seen driving his car several times during my daily walks around the town. We finally had a chance to speak and we became fast friends. Sad that we had not spoken before, we attempted to make

up for lost time during the rest of my stay. He introduced me to his wife Nicole, a French Canadian woman from southern Quebec, and their two sons. He and his family became an almost daily part of my life.

Interestingly, I found out that another Inuit man, Johnny, whom I had befriended, was Calvin's brother. Happy to finally be an integral part of a circle of people that was intertwined with various other groups, I began to feel a sense of belonging and felt more at home than I had felt thus far. Although I had made other friends, I felt a particular commonality with Calvin, Nicole and Johnny. Their friendly and relaxed demeanor was similar to my own and we had common musical tastes. We also shared the experience of poverty and understood each other's difficulties.[1] Upon noticing my financial distress, both Calvin and Johnny brought me food. It was because of them that I had my first tastes of goose, caribou and moose meat.

My involvement in this family's life afforded me the opportunity to meet many other people. Calvin, for example, introduced me to his cousin Dan, his Cree friend Jessie and a husband and wife couple who worked at the school. The width of his social circle was breathtaking. During our afternoons spent hanging out in and around the commercial building after he had finished work, myriad people from all of Chisasibi's social groups would greet him and occasionally stop to chat.

As my own social circle widened, I discovered that friends I had met through different channels were often friends themselves. Don, for example, who I had met on my own a few weeks before, surprised me one afternoon as I was sitting in Calvin's uncle's house (a popular hangout) with Nicole. He walked in with the standard Chisasibi habit of knocking, entering

without waiting for someone to open the door, and making himself at home.

"Oh, hi Nancy. How are you?" he asked casually without a hint of surprise at seeing me there.

"Uh . . .good. And you?" I replied, dumbfounded.

"Good! You look surprised to see me here," he grinned as he rubbed his hands together in an attempt to warm them.

"Well, yeah, a bit."

"I hang out here all the time," Don claimed and went about his business.

I realized then, that the contacts that I had made on my own by meeting people on the streets and in the commercial and/or Mitchuap building, formed a network which intersected and merged with the social circle I had joined through deliberate networking. I thought that if I stayed in Chisasibi for a year or more, I would eventually know almost everyone in town by following the links from person to person.

Through networking and through participation in various activities, such as the soccer games, I also realized that Native/non-Native relations followed very different lines in different situations. If casual contacts in public spaces such as the commercial building or the community centre were guarded and tense, in a context such as a soccer game, they were amiable and playful.

Road Tripping

I described the process, above, whereby it is possible to follow established networks of people in Chisasibi to gradually integrate into various social circles. I would now like to

illustrate the complementary process where people form relations based on individual social contact. I previously mentioned Don as someone I had known before I had become a part of Calvin and Nicole's circle. I now show how I became acquainted with him and his friend Alex.

I met Don and Alex one day as I was walking to the grocery store to run errands. They were driving by as I walked along the road that leads to the hospital from the house. They had slowed down and called me over. Friendly and jovial, Don asked me the usual questions and told me that they had seen me around town. They were on their way to a hunt and assured me that I would be seeing them again.

Both Cree men were in their early thirties. Alex was rather tall with thick wavy hair while Don was shorter with thinning hair and a moustache. Although Alex was not very talkative, Don had a friendly and approachable demeanor. He reminded me of an old friend from Montreal and I was more than willing to join him for a coffee that afternoon. In fact, I was looking forward to learning more about his life and his ideas.

One sunny afternoon, I left the house once again in search of an adventure. Not to be disappointed, I ran into Don outside of the Mitchuap building. "Hey Nancy! How are you?" he called, waving me down.

"Alright, and yourself?" I replied.

"You wanna go have a coffee at the Mitchuap?"

"Sure!"

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After he had finished his cheesecake and coffee and I had finished my iced tea, we

walked to his sister's house. Shy but friendly, she giggled as Don fussed over me, trying to make me feel at home. After he had chatted with her in Cree for a few minutes, we left her house and wandered aimlessly between the houses. Soon thereafter, Alex drove up. He stopped in front of us and got out.

"So, are we going to Radisson or what?" he asked Don.

"Yeah, let's go," Don replied. "Nancy, you coming with us?"

"Sure," I said, in spite of warnings from Jim not to accept rides to Radisson with any men.

"They'll bring you there, get you drunk and then if you don't provide, they'll just leave you there," he had warned in fatherly tones. "Don't do anything stupid like that." However, I trusted Don and Alex. I had an intuitive feeling that they would not behave the way Jim had warned me and that I would enjoy that day's outing.

We climbed into Alex's van and drove away. Before leaving town, however, Alex needed to pick up some things at his house. We went inside. It was then that I saw his collection of AC/DC compact discs. Being a big fan of this hard rock band, I began to talk about their music. His eyes lit up and, for the first time, he spoke to me excitedly.

"Yeah, a bunch of us went to their show a couple of years ago in Montreal," he said.

"I was there too," I exclaimed.

"We had seats near the front. There were a bunch of girls there with really long hair like yours and they were smoking and banging their heads . . . it was crazy, man!"

"That was probably us! I was with three friends and we were in the front row. We went pretty wild that night." Don seemed to feel left out as Alex and I rambled on about

AC/DC and other bands but I was glad that Alex had finally warmed up to me.

We were eventually on our way to Radisson and Don controlled the conversation again. Alex became quiet once more but would occasionally glance at me and make a mocking gesture at one of Don's comments. Once we were in Radisson, the men went about the business of buying considerable quantities of beer from two different stores. Soon, we were ready to go back to Chisasibi.

Alex decided to take the scenic route and drove down a few of the dirt roads that criss-crossed the main highway. Looking forward to an evening of drinking, both men sang and joked around. Suddenly, the van came to a halt. Alex had spotted a partridge in the middle of the road only 400 metres in front of the van.

He made a hushing gesture at me and motioned for Don to go and shoot the bird. Don rummaged in the back of the van for a rifle and got out slowly. With an intent look on his face, he crept along the side of the van, reminding me of Elmer Fudd tiptoeing through the woods hunting for a 'wabbit.' I suppressed a nervous giggle and wondered if he would get the bird. While part of me dreaded seeing the animal die, another part of me was looking forward to tasting something new.

Don finally reached the spot where he could aim at the bird. As Alex and I watched, he aimed, fired and missed. The bird quickly disappeared and both men swore in Cree and in English. During the next few minutes of the drive, the mood was considerably more sombre than it had been before the partridge ordeal but the two men soon became their laughing selves again.

As we approached the gate about an hour later, Don and Alex began to fear that we

would not be able to get back into town with so much alcohol in the vehicle. They decided to drink half of it before crossing into town. They knew of a spot where we could drink in peace, they told me, and asked me if I minded. I agreed and we were soon travelling down another dirt road.

It was almost dark by the time we found a spot to park the van among the trees. Alex turned the light on, put an AC/DC tape in the stereo and we began to drink the beer they had purchased in Radisson. At first, the general topic of conversation was music. Alex and I banged our heads to the songs that were playing on the tape deck and made various comments in between as Don looked on with a bemused expression.

Later in the evening, the two men became inquisitive about my research. "So, what is it you're doing again?" queried Don as he lit a cigarette.

"Well, I basically want to learn about how . . . Crees and Whites get along in town. Like, how they get along outside of work, if they hang out together. Stuff like that," I replied.

"Why?" asked Alex. "What do you want to know that for?"

"I don't know. I guess I thought that maybe if I wrote something like that, it might help people know more about why it's hard for people to get along when they're from different cultures, ya know? Like, maybe it would open people's eyes and help people figure out ways to make people more comfortable with each other. I don't know, maybe if people who came to work here knew more about what the Crees are going through, maybe they'd be more . . . alert. Or sensitive. Ya know? I want to do something helpful."

"Well, if you really want to help the Crees, we're gonna help you," affirmed Don solemnly. "The Whites came and tried to destroy us, but we're always gonna win. We're

stronger that he is."

"You see what they did here?!" exclaimed Alex. "Look, they f***ing destroyed everything. We used to hunt and stuff and now we can only hunt in certain places."

"Yeah, and the water's all f***ed up now," added Don.

The two men were getting angrier at every word. The van was almost shaking with the intensity of their rage. They continued to shout at each other about all the problems that had been caused by the arrival of Whites and seemed to forget that I was there. After a few minutes, Alex looked at me.

"You know, we know it's not you and that you want to help," he said softly. "But we get pissed off when we think about these things."

Don continued: "But we'll fight them! We're always gonna win in the end. The Cree is strong and will always survive. The White man is weak. He'll lose when we really start fighting back." He stopped as his voice had become hoarse from shouting. "But we're having a good time tonight aren't we Nancy? Hey, you look worried. What's wrong?"

"Nah, I'm not worried. Just thinking about what you were saying," I said reassuringly. "I'm just thinking is all."

"Ah, stop thinking. Have another beer. Are you relaxed yet?"

"What he means is, can we take advantage of you yet?" quipped Alex.

"No, no, we're not gonna take advantage of her. I just want her to have a good time and relax," Don replied angrily.

"Don't worry, you're the one that's worrying now," I said, giggling. "I trust you guys and, anyway, I can defend myself. I'm not as drunk as you guys. I've only had three beers."

"Well, let's go back to town and play some pool," suggested Alex, relieving the tension.

"Are you sure you're OK Nancy?" asked Don again as we drove off. "You still look worried."

"No, I'm just tired," I answered in an annoyed tone.

"But you look worried," he persisted.

"She's not worried, she's just tired! Leave her the f*ck alone!" interrupted Alex suddenly, temporarily ending the ongoing debate about my mental state.

Before we crossed the gate into Chisasibi at around 11 PM, the two men half-heartedly hid the remaining beer between the seats. "Ah, they never check anyway," Alex stated confidently, in spite of his earlier fear of being caught with the alcohol.

The man at the gate simply waved us by with a knowing look as Alex nonchalantly called out something in Cree. We were free! We drove into town and headed to Alex's cousin's house, where there was a pool table in the basement. I had expected Alex's cousin to be male and when I was introduced to a woman in her late twenties named Rachel, I was pleasantly surprised since I had not had many opportunities to associate with Cree women.

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Rachel was of medium height, slightly plump and wore her long black hair in a pony tail. She smiled at me drunkenly and got out the pool cues. It was decided that we would start by playing men against women. Rachel broke and managed to give our team a head start.

In the meantime, Alex had put on a Fleetwood Mac CD. As we played pool in a more or less competitive mode, Alex and I sang along to the music. Meanwhile, Don gazed at us moodily and Rachel ignored us. Enjoying the music, I gave little thought to what Don was

possibly thinking until I listened to the lyrics of my favourite Fleetwood Mac song:

But listen carefully to the sounds
Sounds of loneliness
Like a heartbeat drives you mad
In the stillness of remembering
What you had
And what you lost
And what you had
And what you lost . . .

As these words echoed, my mind followed a tangential train of thought. I remembered the earlier conversation between Don and Alex. They were two seemingly happy young men and yet they became so angry when they remembered what they had lost: the chance to live a lifestyle described by their parents and grandparents as ideal.

I felt saddened by the despair I had heard in their voices as they angrily affirmed their ability to block further intrusions on their lives and the lives of their children. I also felt afraid that this anger, combined with ignorance on behalf of non-Natives, would forever impede social relations between the two groups. It was then that I realized, as I looked at Don's glum face, that what he, and many other Cree, really wanted was for non-Natives, myself included, to admit that damage had been done and that we need to be a part of the solution.

As I opened my mouth in an attempt to articulate my thoughts to Don, he spoke. "So, how are you going to do this research of yours? Are you gonna tell me? Are you gonna explain to me how you're gonna do it?" His tone was sarcastic and pointed.

"I don't owe you anything," I replied defensively.

"You owe us plenty," he spat. "You're staying in our town. You're exploiting us. You're just gonna use us too."

"No, I said I wanted to help. I don't want to exploit anyone," I answered, flustered and hurt by his accusations.

"O.K., O.K," he said as he walked to the other side of the pool table. "We'll help you too, then. We'll help you."

At that moment, Alex asked me where I had left the pool cue, even though it was in plain sight. "Right th . . . ," I began, and curled my bottom lip into a vague 'u' shape. At Alex's perplexed look, I added proudly and drunkenly: "I'm pointing like a Cree."

After a brief moment of contemplation, Alex burst into hysterical laughter. He doubled over, clutching the pool table for support as he clapped his left knee. Rachel and Don, who had not seen my gesture or heard my comment, looked at us curiously.

"She . . .she . . .," Alex attempted to explain. "She said . . . she was pointing like a CREE!" His voice squeaked on this last word and gales of laughter overtook him once more. Rachel and Don smiled and shook their heads.

The tension was relieved for the moment and I decided to call it a night. "I'm going home," I said.

"We'll drive you," said Don.

"No, I'll walk."

"Are you sure? It's late, it's like 2:30 in the morning!"

"Yes!"

Alex gave Don a warning glance and Don left me alone. As I began to walk home, I could hear Don shouting in the doorway: "Nancy! Are you sure you don't want a ride?!"

"Shut up!" I shouted back. "You're gonna wake everyone up!"

He laughed, went back inside and I was on my way. I was glad that I had Don and Alex as friends and felt that I had obtained a glimpse of some of the issues that they thought about but rarely discussed in the presence of non-Natives. The channels of communication had somewhat opened up and I looked forward to further conversations with them and, hopefully, with their cousin.

That day's experience demonstrated to me the multi-stranded nature of inter-cultural friendships. Our conversations had flowed between casual commentary about shared interests and socio-political issues facing the Cree and Native people in general. Reticent at first, Don and Alex became comfortable enough to voice their opinions and I had obtained a glimpse into the ways in which Cree youth perceived the political situation surrounding their home and their people.

What is interesting here, though, are the different processes whereby I was able to become their friend in spite of our differences in gender and culture. Don had an outgoing personality and had shown a willingness to be friends from the beginning while Alex had needed a reason to befriend me. Time and commonality had allowed Alex and me to become closer.

However, my relationship with the two men did not progress much further after that day. For the remainder of my stay in Chisasibi, they spent a large portion of time in the bush. Don had offered to come back to town to get me for a weekend so that I could go to their camp but I declined his offer, feeling that a weekend alone in the bush with two men and a lot of beer was asking for trouble. When they were in town, other factors came into play, such as the presence of their families and/or friends, and we had little opportunity to

reconnect the way we had on the day of our trip to Radisson.

While the main point of this thesis is that inter-cultural friendships are possible and that there are different processes which allow them to take place, it is nevertheless important to remember that these friendships are fraught with inherent difficulties. As discussed above, tensions inevitably arise when social or political issues are raised and circumstances such as different lifestyles and values may conflict with the relations that individuals attempt to build.

By adopting alternate stances of openness and reserve, however, people involved in such friendships are able to manipulate these relationships in such a way that they surface in appropriate situations and are kept at bay when necessary. For this process to work in Cree-White friendships, it is necessary for the Whites to accept certain Cree qualities whether they like and/or understand them or not. For instance, Jim explained to me that many Whites were put off by the fact that the Cree do not have the tendency to greet each other every time they encounter one another.

"They expect us to say 'good morning,' 'good afternoon,' 'good evening' . . . When you live in a long house, you see the same people day in and day out. Are you gonna say 'Hi' every time? It's not our nature," he explained.

From the non-Native perspective, this tendency can be confusing. Louise, a hospital worker, expressed this sentiment to me when she described her own attempts at befriending Cree co-workers: "Un jour, y disent bonjour, le lendemain y disent rien. Pis si on les voient à l'extérieur de l'hopital, c'est pas sûr qui vont réagir." ("One day, they say hi, they next day they say nothing. And if you see them outside the hospital, they won't necessarily react.")

These issues also came into play in my friendship with Don and Alex as well as with

other Cree individuals. Having had a pleasant time with a Cree on one occasion, I would feel miffed at their lack of recognition on subsequent occasions and confused when they would reinitiate conversation at a later date. With time and with the help of explanations such as that offered by Jim, I came to see that my friendships were not diminished by quiet interludes such as these and that being involved with Cree friends[2] entailed adjustments on behalf of all parties.

My exchanges with Don and Alex, like my exchanges with Scott and Jerry, showed me that progress in friendships with Cree youth and adults, is not a linear process. Instead, it follows a winding path that hits an occasional *plateau*, a period during which one might feel as though s/he were going nowhere, particularly if s/he is accustomed to White-style friendships.

In addition, it appeared to me that the Cree, unlike many Whites, do not need to follow elaborate procedures to reinforce and affirm their friendship. Instead, it may be understood that individuals remain friends as long as the compatibility that allowed the friendship to form remains. In Jim's words: "Just because I don't talk to Tony everyday . . . I mean, sometimes we can go for weeks without seeing each other, or we'll see each other briefly but have no time to talk. It doesn't mean we're not friends. If I don't see him for a year, when we pick up the phone a year later and talk to him, we're just as much friends as we ever were."[3]

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It is clear, from the events described in this chapter, that there are elements that, in certain contexts, override cultural differences and enable people of different backgrounds to develop a stronger rapport than one might expect. These elements include positioning in

social networks, age and common interests. In the first part of the chapter, I showed how networking allowed me to come into contact with people in a way that made them feel more comfortable. I had been referred to them by a friend or acquaintance and was therefore "safe" to talk to.

In the second part of the chapter, I described how common interests and shared time placed Don, Alex and myself at ease and allowed us to forge a tentative, but interesting, friendship. The sharing of these interests, and of this time, led to more intense discussions in which they shared deeper feelings about the events that shaped their lives and, by extension, their *habitus*. Although the initial commonality was steeped in my own cultural system (rock music), in which they were also immersed at different points in their lives, further discussions involved issues that were directly related to clashes that had occurred between their cultural system and my own. My brief experience with their cultural experience (ie. the weekend I had spent in the bush) had nevertheless equipped me with a tool that I could use to better understand their viewpoint. Having experienced the peacefulness of bush life, if only for a weekend, made me realize how important the "Cree way of life" was to these young men. We can see, then, that no matter how a friendship initially develops between individuals of different backgrounds, their life experiences can enable them to reach common ground in different cultural contexts.

Chapter 8 - The Young and the Old

"The Hearts and Minds of our Elders"

Cultivating relationships with Cree seniors[1] proved to hold inherent difficulties, the largest of which was the language barrier between them and myself. Most seniors spoke little or no English and my stay in their town was too brief for me to grasp the Cree language to any great extent. Moreover, seniors tended to associate mainly with other seniors when they were not in the company of family members.

However, I was able to establish contact with two seniors over the course of my stay. In one case, I was introduced to the individual in question and, in the other, a friendship was formed through daily contact over the period of several weeks. In both cases, I learned valuable lessons about inter-cultural acceptance, belonging and understanding.

As mentioned in chapter 1, many Cree seniors sat in the commercial building for a large portion of the day. The women tended to cluster together along the wall and the men were grouped in the middle of the building where there were several long benches. Some of the men would occasionally gather around a game of checkers to one side of the building.

It was on one of these occasions that I first saw Randall. He was one of the half-dozen men intently watching a game of checkers on my first day in Chisasibi. When I saw the group of silent men that day, I stood watching for several minutes. Not one man looked up from the game during that time. As I prepared to leave, a short old man with a beige jacket and a baseball cap glanced in my direction. I smiled at him and he hesitantly smiled back. Over the next three weeks, I saw this man nearly every day in the commercial building. He would smile and occasionally wave to me as I entered or left the building.

One day I decided to approach this man. On the spur of the moment, as I wandered through the building and noticed him sitting on one of the benches next to a group of men, I walked in his direction. I sat next to him on the bench, smiled broadly but shyly and said: "Wachiya!" He greeted me with a grin and, addressing me in English, asked me my name.

"Are you French or English?" he asked me after I had told him my name.

"Both . . . but mostly French," I replied, surprised at his question since it was one of the first times anyone had raised that particular issue.

"We have both here. Me, I like French people better," he added with a smile. "I worked for French people a long time ago. They were OK."

I found out that his name was Randall, or Randy for short, and that he was related to Jerry (see chapter 4). He spent time in the bush whenever he had the opportunity but he had lent his guns to a relative who had not yet returned them. "That's why I'm here now," he told me matter-of-factly. "I'm waiting for my guns so I can go to the bush and hunt."

From that day on, Randy and I would have short talks almost every day. In his seventies, he had a very different life experience than my own. He had witnessed many changes in his society and in Canadian society in general. He was a hunter and trapper who had occasionally needed to engage in wage labour and who had managed to learn enough English and French to converse with his employers. In spite of his life's many upheavals, or because of them, he was a gentle man with a wry sense of humour and much knowledge about a wide range of issues.

Although his life experience was much broader than my own, we shared a sense of openness toward each other's experiences and were both eager to learn from them. I would

tell him about my life as a student and he would tell me anecdotes about his past work experiences or about life in the bush. He expressed contempt for some of the wealthier people in the community and commented on the careless way they spent their money. In spite of our differences in age, culture, gender and experience, then, we managed to find common ground in our mutual interest and respect.

I learned the extent of his pride on the day of the funeral held for three children who had died in a car accident. The church was filled to capacity and most of the villagers, Native and non-Native alike, stood outside during the ceremony. Like everyone else, Randy and I stood leaning on a parked car, chatting and laughing in spite of the occasion for which we were gathered.

Randy told me of an episode in his youth when he had been labelled as White because of his relatively pale skin and the possibility that he had a white ancestor. He had been mocked and ridiculed and had come away indignant. "I'm a red-blooded Indian!" he told me with pride. He then smiled gently and I understood that he was not disparaging whiteness or Whites. He was affirming his identity and assuming the respect which it entailed but his acceptance of difference was without question.

"Did you ever eat duck?" he asked, on a lighter note.

"*Shiship*? No, I never tried it," I replied. He giggled upon hearing me use the Cree word for 'duck' and spent the rest of the afternoon teaching me various Cree words, most of which I forgot since I did not have a notebook in which to write them at the time.

Shortly after that day, Randy obtained his guns and left for the bush. Luckily, he returned for a brief stay in town before I left. The last time I saw him, I was on my way out

of the commercial building after having obtained a James Bay phone book from the band council office. "I'm leaving tomorrow," I told him sadly.

He smiled and assured me that we would meet again. "What's that?" he asked, lightening the mood.

"It's a souvenir," I said, grinning as I showed him my phone book. We laughed, said our goodbyes and I left the building.

My only other contact with a Cree senior was short lived but insightful. On my second weekend in town, Kathy has taken me, Allie and her two daughters, and her friend Fern to the Bay to pick berries and to fry bread over an open fire. Kathy's uncle Peter was there with his wife, Diane. Kathy had told me that Peter would be there and that I should speak to him about my project since he was an Elder with a great deal of knowledge.

I was too shy to approach this tall man in spite of his friendly smile and demeanor. I circled around, occasionally picking and eating a berry, as he sat on a rock talking enthusiastically with his family. Kathy would glance at me from time to time, apparently wondering why I was stalling. I approached her as she prepared mixture for the bread. "How . . . well, how do you address someone politely who's older than you?" I asked her nervously.

"We just call everyone by their first name," she answered. "If you say Mr. or Mrs. So-and-So, it's like you're putting on airs."

With this in mind, I resumed my circling. I now knew that I could address him as Peter but I still had no idea what to say to a Cree Elder. Finally, in exasperation, Kathy said: "Nancy, sit down and talk to my uncle."

Peter looked at me, chuckled and patted the rock between himself and his wife. I came forward with a shy smile. "Don't be shy that way," he told me. "Don't forget, you are one of us. If you look at it that way, you don't need to be shy." I felt grateful at his acceptance of this stranger and understood that he was referring to the underlying commonality that we shared by virtue of being human at the same time and place. I felt honoured to be included in an 'us' that also included such a distinguished yet humble man.

Peter asked me about my project and, when I told him I was interested in Cree gender relations[2], he told me that, traditionally, girls and boys were raised by their parents to fulfill certain roles and that marriages had been arranged by parents. "The strongest marriages are those arranged by parents," he stated.

He went on to discuss knowledge in general. "I like to meet white people and all other kinds of people," he said. "I travel and I meet people and I read." He then told me about the time he was at his hunting camp and a helicopter landed nearby. A woman came out, asked questions and left. "She arrived, just like that. She looked for me in town and they told her I was here. I'm not sure what she wanted . . ."

I sat, listening intently as he spoke for the next ten or fifteen minutes. He spoke with passion and happiness about bush life, Cree culture and religion and described his desire to help Cree youths cope with a changing world. When his nephew had been disillusioned with the educational system, Peter had taken him to the bush and let him gain that knowledge. With a kind gaze he explained: "To keep our culture alive, we have to find and preserve our teachings. Those teachings are in the hearts and minds of our Elders."

"I Spy with my Little Eye . . . Something White"

Like the seniors I encountered, Cree children were outspoken about, and accepting of, cultural and ethnic differences. They did not shy away from these topics and were willing to joke about them in an offhand manner which adults tended to avoid unless they were in the company of old friends. As was the case with seniors, then, my relationships with children shed light on issues of culture and acceptance.

When I arrived in Chisasibi, I had had very little experience dealing with young children. It therefore came as a surprise to me that I was able to communicate with, and learn from, Cree children with relative ease. My relationships with various children were light-hearted and insightful and I was amazed by their openness and honesty. Compared to Cree adults, Cree children appeared much more at ease with my presence from the beginning, although some of them were a little shy.

The three children with whom I interacted the most were Tommy, Cassie and Annie, aged 10, 6 and 4 respectively. They were all related to Kathy and Antonio in some way and could frequently be seen playing in between the houses nearby. I had met all of them on different occasions throughout my stay but had the opportunity to know them better one evening when a wake was held at the house.

Despite the sombre mood, the eight or nine children who were present were busy playing in one section of the house and would occasionally get too loud. I was therefore placed on 'kid patrol' and was asked by Kathy to make sure none of the children got out of hand. I was not alone in this endeavour: one or two teenagers also kept a watchful eye on the children.

Having no idea how to keep little children entertained and occupied, I sat quietly nearby, ready to react in case of trouble. Annie and Cassie however, noticing my long and loose hair[3], decided that they were going to give me a new look. Annie sat on my lap and authoritatively began to fix my hair to her liking while Cassie found a brush, climbed on the chair behind me and began to brush my hair. Slightly peeved at first, I gave in to their demands, thinking that it was a good way to keep them quiet for a considerable period of time.

As their parents and other adults occasionally gave amused glances in our direction, the two girls diligently went about their task. Not having the patience to braid my hair, they simply brushed it away from my face in a manner that made it appear as though my hair was tied back. Given the thickness and length of my hair, it was a long and arduous task and Cassie eventually moved on to other activities. Annie persisted, however, and eventually obtained the result she desired.

Once she had fixed my hair, she looked at me in a puzzled way. Something was not right. She gazed pensively for several moments as I held my head steady to avoid dishevelling myself. In a burst of enlightenment, she finally realized what was missing. She excitedly reached for my face with both hands and, before I could realize what her intention was, placed them on either side of my eyes and pulled sideways so that my eyes became slanted. She smiled with pride at her *chef-d'oeuvre*: against all odds, she had managed to make me look like a Cree!

Several days later, when I was alone in the house, Tommy and two of his friends came to play inside. Cassie and Annie soon followed and, once again, I was faced with the prospect

of entertaining a group of children. Tommy and his friends decided that they wanted to play a game called "I spy with my little eye." The rules were simple: one at a time, we would choose an object without telling the others what the object was. We would then say: "I spy with my little eye, something . . ." and say the colour of the object we had chosen. The others were to guess what the object was and whoever guessed correctly would start the next round.

After a few rounds, it was Tommy's turn. "I spy with my little eye . . . something white," he said mischievously. White things were abundant in the house yet the other children and I were hard pressed to locate the one particular white thing Tommy had chosen. After all the white things had been named, there was a lull in the guesses. "It's in the kitchen," hinted Tommy.

I looked around. The boys were sitting on the opposite side of the counter and were therefore in the dinning room. Cassie, Annie and I were in the kitchen. Upon realizing this, I had an idea of the white thing to which Tommy was referring. "It's me, isn't it? I'm the white thing?" I asked. Tommy giggled and confirmed my suspicion.

Tired of the game, Cassie wanted to play something else. She and I would teach each other Cree and French. We took turns saying English words which she translated into Cree and I translate into French. "Lunch box," she said. "Boîte à lunch," I told her and she told me the Cree word. Once again, I was stranded without a notebook to write down the words she told me. Not to ruin the mood, however, I chose not to get one out of my room, a mere ten feet away. We continued our game for a few minutes until the children decided to return outside to play.

Before she left, she gave me a small gray stone with a purple hue. "It's for you," she

said.

"Thanks!" I said. "Wait, I have something for you too." I ran to my room to get a pretty white stone I had picked up by the road a few days earlier.

As Cassie and Tommy put their shoes on, Tommy told me that Cassie was his sister and that Annie was their cousin. "We have a sister who's two, and there was another, but she didn't make it," he said matter-of-factly.

"That's really sad," I said as I sat on the stairs and watched them get ready to follow the other children.

"We're going to Montreal tomorrow. Will you still be here when we come back in two weeks?" he asked hopefully.

"Probably not," I told him sadly. "But I'll come back and visit O.K.?"

In a short time, the children and I had gotten to like each other very much and we were all sad at the prospect of leaving each other. However, I knew, from my own memories of childhood, that the next day's activities would soon take precedence over their memories of such a short-lived friendship and that, even if I was to meet them again the next year, they would have, at best, a vague memory of who I was.

Like my encounters with seniors, this brief contact with children left me amazed and puzzled. In both cases, the relationships were imbued with innocent curiosity, gentleness and a tacit understanding that the heart of the matter lay more in our similarities that in our differences. The diversity of our life experiences complemented our mutual interests and we were able to find affinity in our shared desire for knowledge of another way of being.

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The purpose of this chapter was to elaborate on how the age factor affects inter-cultural bonds. In previous chapters, I discussed how I developed bonds with adults ranging in age from their early twenties to their mid-forties. While I briefly discussed the particular dynamic associated with my relationships to other youths, I focussed mainly on other factors that informed these bonds, such as common interests and shared time.

In this chapter, I wished to show the different dynamic that was present in my bonds with seniors and children and which complemented those found in bonds with young and middle-aged adults. In spite of the relative depth of these bonds, simplicity, innocence and a genuine desire to "know" reigned in the course of my interactions with seniors and children.

The seniors, who had experienced various shifts in the social fabric of their community throughout their lives, accepted me without question into their environment. The children, who were just beginning the life-long process of learning and incorporating new elements into their repertoire, also accepted me with little reticence. Individuals at either end of the spectrum of life proceeded to accept a foreign element into their lives in very similar ways.

While friendship bonds with adults were facilitated by mutual interests and/or social networking, a common desire to learn about the other person was sufficient to fuel similar bonds with seniors and children. The children, who were perhaps too young to articulate concepts of culture but old enough to perceive cultural differences, had a seemingly instinctive urge to learn new things that they could incorporate into their *habitus*. The seniors, on the other hand, after a lifetime of exposure to contrasting and conflicting cultural systems, had perhaps become adept at ignoring the limitations that these systems potentially impose on individuals.

At my end, a strong desire to form bonds as well as gain knowledge about inter-cultural relations helped foster my willingness to engage with these individuals and to learn from them. By incorporating the knowledge gained from my dialogues with them into my *habitus*, my repertoire of ideas became richer.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to delineate different factors that come into play in casual contact between Natives and non-Natives in Chisasibi. Due to the various historical, political and social factors described in chapters one and three, there is a seemingly inevitable unease between Natives and non-Natives in Chisasibi, as in many other Native communities in Canada. Several authors, for example, have outlined various elements that influence relations between the two groups and shown that there is a long-established tendency on behalf of their members to avoid social contact outside of their cultural and/or social groups.

Using Goulet's (1998) experiential approach in my fieldwork, I investigated this dynamic among Native (mainly Cree) and non-Native (mainly white) residents of Chisasibi. By immersing myself in different social networks, I was able to experience the complexities of Native/non-Native relations (from an inescapable non-Native point of view) and to hear accounts of these relations from members of both groups.

As a result, the thesis offers readers a first-hand account of one non-Native's access into these networks as well as a summary of the accounts given by various short and long-term residents. After giving the reader a summary of the views held on the topic by various members of the two main groups, I described the experiences I had which I felt were best suited to exemplify some of the ways in which age, gender, class and commonality interweave with culture and life experience to produce social relations with varying degrees of comfort and unease.

It is now necessary to compare the results of the two approaches that were used in the

research to shed light on the dynamics that have been discussed and on the extent to which the lived reality and the explanations fit into the theoretical framework that I outline in this thesis. Since I used Jean-Guy Goulet's approach in the field, it is appropriate to begin with an examination of this material in light of the ethnomethodological concepts he describes in his work (Goulet 1998).

As I discussed in chapter 1, Goulet uses the concepts of indexicality, reflexivity and competency to analyse his experiences in the field as well as accounts told to him by his informants. As the acquisition of competency may be seen as problematic in cases of short-term fieldwork, I will begin by acknowledging the impact this has had on both the fieldwork and the resulting ethnography.

The concept of competency, according to Goulet, is crucial to a coherent description of events and requires learning the correct ways to characterize things (beliefs, events, etc.) from the people who live in the setting in question. In three months, it was unfeasible for me to gain the amount of competency in Cree culture that would be required to produce an account from a "Native point of view."

However, being fluent in the cultural attitudes and mannerisms of most of my non-Native informants (ie; English and French Canadians), I was able to gain a sense of their perceptions of the experience of being outsiders in a Cree community. I therefore feel that I have been able to produce accounts from a perspective that corresponds, to a great extent, to that of many of the non-Native workers in Chisasibi and to the framework within which they function in their daily lives. For this reason, as well as those described in my introduction, this thesis is written primarily from a non-Native viewpoint.

The concept of indexicality that Goulet describes requires that I examine the contexts within which conversations with my informants occurred, the backgrounds of the informants, and so forth. For this reason, I have provided, in most cases, the linguistic, ethnic or national identity of each informant as well as hir occupation, where applicable. I also describe, in the methodological section of chapter 1, an explanation of the contexts within which conversations with informants were held. Similarly, the accounts contained in the ethnographic section of the thesis describe specific situations where knowledge and meaning were created, shared and learned.

Accordingly, I must acknowledge here that, as a student and researcher, my position was inherently different from that of other non-Natives in the community. Although I was also an outsider in a Cree community as are most non-Natives in Chisasibi, I was also an outsider *vis à vis* other non-Natives. In addition, it was clear from the beginning that I was short-term resident with no obvious stake in the well-being of the community and its members. As Hugh Brody (1975) and Niels Braroe (1975) describe, for example, the positionality of the social scientist creates an additional dynamic that greatly influences the nature of the information that is gained by the researcher as well as the ways in which this information is gained.

Finally, the concept of reflexivity ties together the information gleaned from interviews with informants and the first-hand knowledge gained in the experiential part of my fieldwork. The ways in which informants described Native/non-Native relations inevitably affected the way in which I interpreted my own experiences. In turn, these experiences influenced my interpretation of their accounts since I was comparing their experience with my own.

It is therefore through a combination of accounts by Chisasibi residents of the nature of Native/non-Native relations and of descriptions of my own experiences that I have presented a description, albeit cursory, of the social dynamics that permeate casual contact between members of the two major social groups in Chisasibi.

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As discussed in chapter 2, the prevalent viewpoint of Chisasibi residents regarding the existence of an inter-cultural malaise is that tension is unavoidable. The primary factor that comes to light in this situation appears to be a difference in the way members of the two groups form alliances. According to my informants, Native people are said to be family-oriented while non-Natives are said to associate based on professional affiliation.

Whether this is simply a difference in cultural traits or a pragmatic effect of placing unrelated non-Natives in a town where their primary function is work-related is unclear. Since non-Native residents are a culturally eclectic group, it is impossible to apply any specific cultural trait to them as a whole. However, several non-Native informants stated that they adhere to this method of affiliation in their places of origin as well.

That being said, this pattern of association found among non-Natives should not, in theory, preclude friendships between themselves and Natives since the latter are to be found in their working milieus, not only as clients and patients, but as co-workers. However, there remains the Cree tendency to associate mainly with family. Therefore, many non-Natives claim, surface friendships are formed at work but these do not extend outside the workplace since Cree co-workers go home to their families.

While this may appear to explain the alleged lack of casual interaction between Natives

and non-Natives, there are things that contradict this scheme. First of all, in spite of bold statements by various Chisasibi residents that there is little friendly contact between the two groups, I heard of, observed and experienced such contact in abundance. In interviews with informants, a non-Native individual would often begin talking about a Cree friend just moments after lamenting the lack of possibilities for forming such friendships. I also witnessed Natives and non-Natives rubbing elbows in a conspiring way at different social events and in public places such as the commercial building. Although this was not the norm, it was a frequent enough occurrence that no one reacted to it in any particular fashion when it did happen. Finally, my own experiences abound with cases of friendly conversations, joking and sharing between myself and various individuals in the community, both Native and non-Native.

Could it be, then, that tension persists more out of a differential interpretation of the function and meaning of friendship or possibly out of an impatience on behalf of non-Natives? As I discuss in chapter 7, non-Natives involved in friendship with Cree need to adjust their expectations to the fact that the latter often express their friendships in ways to which non-Natives are not accustomed. Saying 'hello' everyday is not forcibly an element of friendship for the Cree (Bobbish Atkinson & Magonet 1990). In addition, the rate at which friendships are formed may differ greatly in Chisasibi from the rate at which they are formed in an urban area such as Montreal, home to a significant portion of Chisasibi's non-Natives.

There also appears to be a generational difference in the way the Cree interpret and form friendships. Younger Cree individuals, who have been influenced by popular "mainstream" culture, and middle-aged Cree, many of whom have spent a significant amount

of time living among non-Natives, may adhere to Euro-Canadian notions of friendship to a greater degree than seniors.

In any case, a gap in the expectations that Natives and non-Natives have of friendship may actually be one of the main causes for disappointment and disillusion when it comes to inter-cultural friendship. Many of my informants' statements point to this. For example, several non-Natives commented on the feelings of bewilderment they had when a co-worker who had been friendly the day before would appear to snub them on the street. Conversely, many Natives may feel betrayed when their non-Native friends disappear from Chisasibi never to be seen again after one or two years of friendship. If individuals have felt betrayed or disappointed by inter-cultural friendships in the past, they may certainly be hesitant in forming such bonds again.

One possible conclusion to be drawn is that the inter-cultural tension in Chisasibi may result from a certain choosiness in deciding on the extent to which an individual will become involved in friendships with members of a different cultural group. The fear that they will invest time, energy and emotion into a transitory friendship may lead Natives to become friends mainly with non-Natives who appear to have a desire to spend several years in the community. On the other hand, the fear that they will be spoken to one day and ignored the next may lead non-Natives to develop friendships mainly with Natives who appear to be the most comfortable in southern, or 'white' ways of relating.

Nevertheless, friendships do exist among Natives and non-Natives in Chisasibi. They often oscillate between Native and non-Native styles of friendship in the sense that friends

may interact according codes stemming from either a Cree or White cultural system depending on the circumstances. In other words, individual and group *habitus* allow friendships to travel between different cultural systems. This may create tensions as well as excitement.

The same factors that originally act to inhibit the actualization of casual contact continue to place strong tensions on this actualized contact; however, they may also serve to enhance it. As I discuss in chapter 3, for example, strong family ties among Natives may hold contact with non-Natives at bay and possibly infringe upon those contacts that are established. However, once a friendship is formed, those same ties may help the non-Native become entrenched in the very networks that originally appeared to impede the friendship.

It is nearly impossible to accurately delineate all of the factors that are involved on an ongoing basis in the lives of Chisasibi residents without becoming a permanent resident oneself and witnessing first-hand the changes that may occur in the town's social fabric due to high personnel turnover, seasonal changes, and so forth. However, I feel that I have made preliminary steps toward the production of a basic scheme that documents the major influences that bear upon Native/non-Native social interaction and the possibilities of cross-cultural friendship.

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In this thesis, I have mainly focussed on the factors which allow friendships to form and survive between Natives and non-Natives in spite of tensions arising out of the historical and political situation within which Chisasibi residents are located. I certainly do not wish to minimize the importance of these factors or trivialize the effects of colonialism and

globalization on inter-personal relations between members of different cultural groups. In fact, the history of colonialism in Canada still has an impact on the ways in which Natives and non-Natives perceive, and interact with, each other. History, politics and socio-economics are therefore unavoidable factors in a decidedly complex situation.

However, the social dynamics in Chisasibi are also coloured by the events of the past few decades, such as disputes with various levels of government, Hydro-Quebec and logging companies, which have moved the Cree to take steps toward self-determination and self-representation. While these events arose out of an oppressive colonial situation, they irreversibly altered the ways in which Natives and non-Natives interact with each other. Non-Natives entering Chisasibi are not necessarily in positions of power over the Cree even though they come from a dominant "mainstream" society. They are not there to change the "Cree way of life"; they are there because they were hired to work for the community in various facets.

I therefore chose to focus on interactions between individuals, myself included, as a basis for knowledge about the factors which help overcome tensions arising out of a difficult historical and political situation. The existence of these tensions serves to prove that there is a need for this focus and for people to explore new ways in which to interact with each other. Although there are, and always will be, individuals who choose to follow the tide of antagonism promoted through various means by history textbooks, media images and political institutions, I hope that my experience will help show that there are alternatives for people who choose, instead, to seek out ways to achieve a deeper level of respect for individuals, and groups, of a background different from their own.

This work is primarily aimed at two groups of people: academics who are interested in Native/non-Native relations and/or the James Bay area, and residents of Chisasibi or any other community where Natives and non-Natives reside and work together. For the former group, I hope that this thesis can serve as a reminder that ethnographers have a social responsibility toward the communities into which they enter and an obligation to respect the desires of those who do not wish to serve as objects of study. For the second group, I hope that this thesis can be used as a form of encouragement for those who feel that they cannot move beyond the seemingly immovable factors of history, cultural and ethnic difference and political stress. For this reason, I wrote the ethnographic section in narrative form so that non-academics would be able to enjoy, and benefit from, the knowledge gained from my experience and the experiences that Chisasibi residents shared with me.

With this work, then, I have begun to explore the possibilities of a "post-colonial" ethnography which avoids objectification and opens the lines of communication through reflexivity and dialogue[1]. Accordingly, I believe that the practice of experiential anthropology can help ethnographers fulfill the responsibility, mentioned above, toward the people who allow them into their lives. By directly participating in their lives, taking their accounts at face value and appreciating the value of what they teach us, we are helping to build mutual trust and respect. By writing about what we have learned in a way that does not portray people as mere subjects but as friends, teachers and kindred spirits, we enter the cycle of sharing that begins when they open their homes to us.

Notes

Introduction

1. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants of this research, fictitious names have been given to all Chisasibi residents mentioned in the thesis, with the exception of the chiefs mentioned in chapter one.

Chapter 1 - Field Site and Methodology

1. I was to find out only a few days later that knocking on the door before entering someone's house is not the norm in Chisasibi.

2. I would later learn that this building was called *Mitchuap*, which is the Cree name for teepee.

3. I assumed that this was in reference to the Cree man named Job who inspired Boyce Richardson's film *Job's Garden*, which dealt with the drowning of Cree hunting and trapping lands by Hydro-Quebec's dam building projects (Richardson 1975).

4. I am, of course, describing the town as it was during the time of my stay. At the time of my departure, there was already some construction underway in one part of the town and I have since heard of other changes, such as the planting of grass between the houses and the openings and closings of different businesses.

5. The Cree name for this river is Chisasibi, which means Big River.

6. This building did not have an official name. Everyone I met simply called it the commercial building, or the "commercial" for short. Toward the end of my stay, however, I met a man who dubbed it "Moscow International" since he claimed it had the same look and feel as the airport in Moscow. Northern stores are the present-day incarnation of the Hudson's Bay Company stores.

7. One teenager led me to believe, near the beginning of my stay, that it was called "Chinatown" because Chinese people lived there. Since I had already taken note of the cultural variety of the town, I believed what she told me until she said; "Nah!"in a teasing tone of voice.

8. There were actually no lawns as such: the spaces between houses consisted of sandy patches of land interspersed with wooded sheds. I have been informed by a friend that grass has since been planted in these areas.

9. Many other people often went in and out of these houses but I do not know which of these people lived there and which did not.

10. To protect the privacy of non-Native informants, I identify them only as hospital workers or school workers. Several of these people are well-known in the community and to label them more specifically would make them too easy to identify.

11. My thesis supervisor gave me the name of a professor that she knew who had worked with the Cree, who in turn put me in touch with a member of the Grand Council of the Cree.

12. During my stay, there were elections and Violet Pachanos became the chief. Elections are held in Chisasibi every three years.

13. I would later find out that she was unaware that her phone number was on the Internet and that she even had an unlisted phone number.

14. Kathy, in fact, was a total stranger when I called her for the first time and it took me a long time before I could work up the courage to call.

15. See also Chapter 5 for a more elaborate discussion of how I came to associate with people to whom my hosts, among others, thought I should not talk and wound up learning things I would not have otherwise learned.

16. Not all non-Natives in the village were French or English Canadian but those who were not had usually worked for a while elsewhere in Canada or had a similar cultural experience (ie: Western urban industrial.) This also brings about the issue that many Cree people have had extensive cultural experience in the Western industrial world and are capable of "being white,"as they call it. This dynamic and the issue of shared cultural experience is discussed later in the thesis.

Chapter 2 - Friends and Strangers: The Talk of the Town

1. I also include comments which were made during short, but often enlightening exchanges with people on the street or in the commercial building.

2. Family links seemed to extend as far as people wished them to on both the maternal and paternal sides. People would often speak of cousins, uncles and aunts on both sides and of people related to them by marriage. They also spoke of people who were called 'brothers' or 'sisters' and who lived in different towns but who had no obvious blood link to them. They considered them as kin insofar as they had been instructed to do so by their parents. I did not, however, go into the topic of kinship with anyone and do not elaborate on the topic in the thesis.

3. I was told that the Cree tend to be wealthier than the Inuit due to the Income Security Programme (ISP) for Hunters and Trappers, which guarantees income for full-time Cree hunters.

4. By the time I spoke to any Cree people specifically about Cree-Inuit relations, most people knew that I had befriended two Inuit people and that I spent a lot of my free time with these friends. This is very likely to have had an impact on what they disclosed about the topic.

5. I was, in fact, introduced to one of my Inuit friends by a hospital worker with whom he was friends and he, in turn, introduced me to other White people that he knew.

6. In this thesis, I use the term 'non-Native' when referring to the segment of Chisasibi's population that is neither Cree nor Inuit. When I use the term 'White,'it is in reference to white people as a hypothetical group as described by individual informants or groups. When referring to an individual, I describe their specific background only if the distinction is relevant in the context of the discussion.

7. To protect the privacy of my non-Native informants, I will identify them only as hospital workers or school workers according to whether they are nurses, doctors, hospital or school administrators or teachers. Several of these people were very well-known in the community and to identify them more specifically would make them too easy to identify.

8. The remainder of this chapter deals mainly with Cree and non-Native groups. I did not converse with enough Inuit people to form a cohesive synthesis of the views held by Chisasibi's Inuit population about their own, or another, culture.

9. Cree is taught in Chisasibi's only school until the third grade, after which parents may choose to have their child schooled in either English or French.

10. For a poignant account of life in residential schools, see Jane Willis' autobiography (1973).

11. While the past few decades have seen a resurgence of the concept of culture among Francophone Quebecers, only three of my non-Native informants were French-Canadian and, although Chisasibi is located in Quebec, the issue of *québécois* culture arose only briefly in my conversations with them.

12. I would like to point out that I did not ask people to comment about specific individuals. I asked people to comment, instead, about their general impression of the other cultural group, what characteristics they ascribed to its members, etc. While I went to great lengths to avoid the occurrence of commentary about individuals, the nature of

the discussions often led to various degrees of it. However, any information I learned in these instances are off record and are not considered as data for this thesis or any other work.

13. My own observations both proved and disproved this. While some Whites were friendly and ready to converse the first time they saw me, others were very reluctant to even say 'Hello.' In fact, one or two people even scowled at me.

14. Whenever possible, there is a preference for hiring Native people, even if they come from other communities around Canada.

15. Obviously, there is no real way to know whether Cree people actually talk about White people amongst themselves to the extent postulated by White residents.

16. The people who were rumoured to be the most ardent bigots were mostly inaccessible to me. Many of them kept a low profile and did not readily mingle with anyone else in the community, regardless of their origin. Others simply did not want to talk at all and told me, with different degrees of firmness, that they would not talk.

17. Interestingly, when I pointed out to Alex that many Cree people had come up to me to talk to me on the street, he laughed and said sarcastically: "Ben, oui, t'es une femme!" ("Well, of course, you're a woman!")

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Considerations

1. The pluralized spelling of "Crees" here is in accordance with official usage. See the Grand Council of the Crees' web site: http://www.gcc.ca .

2. This information was obtained from a personal communication with Brian Craik of the Grand Council of the Crees in March 1998.

3. According to Anderson *et al* (1981) there was also a distinction between coasters from the north and from the south, according to the location of hunting and trapping areas relative to the river.

4. This information was found on the GCC website mentioned in note 1.

5. For the sake of argument, let us assume that these two people are similar in ethnic and cultural background, age, gender, sexual orientation, class etc.

6. I use "hir" as a generic term for him/her or his/her. It is formed by removing the 'm' or the 's' from "him" or "his" and the 'e' from "her".

7. See chapter 2 for a discussion of this trait among Chisasibi's non-Native population.

8. Ironically, in my case, being a woman made conversations with Cree women nearly impossible but eased my friendships with men.

9. 'Subject' is a problematic term and I use it sparingly.

Chapter 4 - Shifting Gears: Acquaintance and Acceptance

1. Like Martin Hayes (1998), I define youth as ranging from the late teens to the early thirties.

2. "Clean-up day" occurred on my second day in Chisasibi. Band council members called upon residents to gather by the arena and spend the day picking up litter around the town. I was unable to find out whether or not this was an annual event.

3. Of course, this is not a factor only among the Cree and is common to most initial encounters among people.

Chapter 5 - Wet Sundays

1. I use the term 'drunk' throughout the thesis for lack of a better term. However, I would like to point out that, contrary to popular usage, I do not use the term in a derogatory fashion and that the drunks commonly used it to describe themselves.

2. It is not my intention to trivialize the problem of alcoholism. However, I feel that it is not my place to comment or criticize those who choose to drink or who, because of the circumstances of their life, have become addicted to alcohol or other substances.

3. I was still a few weeks away from calling Kathy and Antonio's house 'home.'

4. Most of the houses in Chisasibi were surrounded by sand. Kathy and Antonio, however, had a fenced off back yard with an actual lawn and a little garden.

5. Tess was a 12-year-old friend of Janice.

6. *Agudah*, my favorite Cree word, means OK.

Chapter 6 - Cree and White: A Weekend in the Bush

1. As time went on, I got the impression that the main reason Antonio wanted me to keep in contact with Jim was the fact that he and Kathy would be away for a large part of the time that I was to spend in Chisasibi. He may have wanted Jim to keep an eye on me to

make sure I was safe, especially after the events of the first week described in chapter 5.

2. Goose hunting is an important activity during the fall and spring migrations.

3. It was warm enough outside to go without a coat if one was wearing a sweater.

4. This is not to say that I am unconcerned with issues of animal rights. My concern is not with the killing of animals for food as such but with the way farm animals, for example, are treated in slaughter houses.

5. Although there was a sink, there was no plumbing underneath as there was no running water in the cabin. The water used for cooking, drinking and washing was brought in a big pale from a nearby lake.

6. Jim was fluent in French as well as in English and Cree. We spoke mostly in English but an occasional French word or sentence was spoken.

Chapter 7 - Sharing Time and Space: Commonality and Friendship

1. The Inuit in Chisasibi do not benefit from the financial aid accorded to Cree hunters and trappers through the Income Security Programme for Hunters and Trappers.

2. One of the factors that added to my confusion was my friendship with Calvin and Johnny. The two Inuit brothers were similar to Whites in the way they maintained our friendships. I saw both men nearly on a daily basis and we were in almost constant communication. This differed greatly from the ways my interactions with the Cree.

3. During a recent telephone conversation during which I reminded Jim of that particular conversation, he reiterated that: "when you're friends, time and space don't exist."

Chapter 8 - The Young and the Old

1. I use the term "senior" instead of elder to avoid confusion. It was explained to me that, in Cree society, the term "elder" refers to individuals who are wise beyond their years and to whom people look up when in need of making a decision. Elders can be of any age. Conversely, not all seniors are considered to be elders.

2. I had not yet changed the topic of my study at this point.

3. Most Cree women kept their long hair tied with a large barrette in the back or in a ponytail or braid. I only saw one or two women with loose hair. Most non-Native women, on the other hand, had short hair. I therefore appeared to be an oddity in that respect and frequently heard the comment that I should braid my hair.

Conclusion

1. The term "post-colonial" ethnography was coined by my thesis supervisor, Dr. Sally Cole.

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