CULTURE, POLITICS, AND SCHOOL CONTROL
IN SHESHATSHIT

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by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the significance of school control for the Labrador Innu of Sheshatshit. An historical overview of pre-settlement life is followed by an analysis of existence in the community today. It is argued that recent adaptation to year-round life in the community of Sheshashit has created a tension between "country" values, associated with traditions of the past, and the exigencies associated with modern life. It is within the context of this tension that the issues related to school control can best be understood. School control is presented here as primarily a cultural and political issue. As part of a broader struggle for Innu self-government, political leaders are attempting to gain control of the local all-grade school. School control is portrayed by the leaders as a symbol of cultural and political empowerment. However, as the thesis shows, control poses multiple challenges for the community. This is mainly because Sheshashit comprises heterogeneous and conflicting views of what the school should be and do; a monolithic "community" perspective does not exist. On the one hand, there exists a competent and empowered group of political leaders, committed to attaining nation status for the Innu. For this group, school control is a means, symbolic and material, of achieving self-government. On the other hand, many community members feel increasingly marginalized as Innu knowledge and skills fade from their lives leaving gaps in their identity which nationalist rhetoric is not able to fill.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Setting

Peenamin Mackenzie School in Sheshatshit is a large brick building on the northeastern edge of the community. When not occupied by teachers and children it appears to be a deserted institution, a ghost from the past, barren and exposed in blowing sand or blowing snow. Despite the school's marginal location and image, it is one of the most influential institutions in the community, since it provides an educational foundation, albeit a controversial one, for its Innu students[1].

Shortly after my arrival in the community in August of 1992, I attended the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Innu Nation[2] which took place at Northwest Point, four kilometres by road from Sheshatshit. Several Innu families had set up camp here for the summer to get away from the intensity of

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[1] The population of Sheshatshit is over 1,000. There are approximately 19 families in Sheshatshit, out of maybe 150, which have one non-Innu parent. All these families have children attending the school. In addition there are 3 non-Innu families living in the community with some children attending school. These racial differences are at times targets for teasing and bullying. Though I will describe the community and students as Innu, this is a generalization.

[2] The Innu Nation is the political and administrative organization which represents the Labrador Innu. Its head office is located in Sheshatshit.

village life. The Point is surrounded by long sandy beaches and abundant with berries. A large canvas tent was set up by the Innu Nation, the floor covered with boughs, and a sound system installed for better acoustical coverage. The tent sides were open and people came and went, or stood around outside chatting; children moved freely between playing with friends in the sandy shrubbed landscape and the comfort of sitting on the knee of a parent or relative in the tent. Here, as in many aspects of life in Sheshatshit, tradition and modernity co-exist.

Outside the tent, children playing with plastic guns and bow and arrow sets from Woolco provided a metaphor for the changes occurring in their world. Trips into the country are now done in bush planes which carry in skidoos, boats with outboard motors, television sets and nintendo games. The old ways are changing, some traditions are being revived, while new technologies and skills are being adopted.

A discussion on strategies for securing full control of the local school was on the agenda for the AGM. The year before representatives of the Innu Nation had bolted the school doors in protest, demanding that the provincial department of education transfer school control from the Roman Catholic School Board in Happy Valley to the Innu Nation (Cleary, Evening Telegram, October 19, 1991:3). Following this protest, community control seemed to have been assured by the

provincial government. However, the Innu Nation later rejected the provincial government's proposal which was to transfer administrative control to an "Innu Education Authority", but required it to be financially accountable to the Roman Catholic School Board. The Innu Nation insisted that the Innu Education Authority, to be established, must have comparable status to a school board and be solely accountable in _all_ areas of administration to the provincial department of education. Community members present at the AGM were asked by Innu Nation leaders if they would support radical action like blockading the school again if control was not transferred through bureaucratic means. Everyone present agreed to resume a blockade if necessary. The blockading strategy has been effective for the Innu in the past and has resonance for them: it is non-violent, direct, and makes a strong, definite statement.

Over the last ten years, direct action for change has been a consistent political strategy for the Innu. Throughout the 1980s, in response to a proposed NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) training base in Goose Bay, 30 kilometres away, the Innu, along with peace activists and supporters from Canada and abroad, launched a campaign to stop low-level military flight testing over Nitassinan (meaning "our land" in

Innu-aimun)[3]. Through their protests against low-level flight training, the Innu have come to represent what Tanner described as a "striking example of indigenous nationalism turned against the modern state" (1993:75). Collective political action in opposition to legislation by the provincial and federal government has provided a catalyst for community solidarity and acts of resistance over the past ten years.

Though support was expressed at the aforementioned meeting for community school control, many people were not well informed on school related issues. Nevertheless, the symbolic act of taking control of the school seemed to hold powerful connotations for people at the meeting. Publicly Innu school control is portrayed as an important step towards greater community autonomy and self-government. In the course of my research however, it became clear that the majority of people within the community lacked a clear, and cohesive idea of what an "Innu" education would involve. The school, like so many aspects of life in Sheshatshit, is infused with a pervasive dilemma that lies at the core of every issue; the dichotomy between country and community values. This dichotomy brings to the fore questions of what it means to be Innu in

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[3] Ashini (1989), Armitage (1989), Crump (1988) and Wadden (1991) have written about the Innu struggle to halt military expansion in Nitassinan.

the modern world and where the emphasis of an Innu education should lie.

1.2 The Dilemma

In doing field work one tries to anticipate the problems to be encountered in the course of the study, but an anthropologist going into the field never knows what the central issues really are until he or she gets established in the community. Prior to my arrival, the proposed focus of my research had been to look at the way Innu culture and political ideology would be expressed in the take-over of the school and the establishment of an Innu curriculum. Because the school was scheduled to open under Innu control in September 1992, I had anticipated being able to examine how Innu culture would be integrated in the school system and what form community participation might take. However, I arrived in the village to discover a stalemate in negotiations over school control. Though participants at the AGM had agreed to support protest action, in the months following the AGM no one in the community on the school was informed as to what stage the negotiations were at or what strategy the Innu Nation was employing in these negotiations. The Innu and non-Innu staff at the school continued working, not knowing from one day to the next what the future held.

Through my contact with the Innu Nation I was informed that meetings with the provincial government had resumed in

September 1992. A new agreement was reached between the Innu Nation and Premier of Newfoundland. By early October, the Innu Nation was led to believe that the transfer of school control would take place in January 1993. The Innu Nation then decided that a community protest and blockage of the school would not be necessary. However, the expectation that control would be transferred to the Innu Nation in January 1993 was not made public and the status of the decision remained somewhat precarious.

The Charlottetown Constitutional Accord put forward to the Canadian public in late August (see Globe and Mail, August 28, 1992:A1, A10) recognized the inherent right to Native self-government, but was voted down in the October, 1992 National Referendum. In response to the failure of a slim Canadian majority to support the Accord, Native groups across Canada who had backed the Accord began protest actions. The Innu Nation's spontaneous response to the failed Accord was to remove hydro meters from several Innu houses. Later this action was also portrayed as a means of denouncing the proposed Lower Churchill Hydro Development project. In what became a year long protest, the Innu Nation demanded from the provincial government a compensation package for Innu elders who had lost belongings in the flooding of the Smallwood Reservoir. This area had been an important hunting territory and the Innu had not been properly informed when the Churchill

River hydro electric dam was constructed. In 1973, 1,300 square kilometres of forest went under water (Wadden, 1991:46-50). When the removal of hydro meters began to draw extensive media coverage, the momentum of the protest accelerated. Soon meters were removed from all Innu houses. Everyone was excited by the symbolic implications of this action (which had now changed from being a reaction to the failed accord to a protest against inappropriate resource development strategies taken by the provincial government without informing or consulting the Innu). In brief, many people held the view that the Newfoundland Government had flooded traditional Innu hunting grounds, taken unlawful control of Nitassinan and was now making a profit. If the government would not pay for its wrongs, the Innu were not going to pay for electricity generated through unlawful expropriation of their lands. The hydro meter protest led the provincial government to suspend all negotiations with the Innu. School control was put on hold and remained that way for over a year.

In light of these protest actions, my research focus had to be altered. School control remained a central interest for me, but it was soon evident that school control was only one of several issues concerning people in Sheshatshit. In the interviews I conducted, the issue of school control nevertheless raised important concerns for community members. One of the dominant concerns at the heart of the community is

the perplexing question: Where does the past fit into the present? I began to see that the take-over of the school was in part an attempt to institutionalize an answer to this question.

Generational differences in the perceptions of what Innu culture is today and how it should be expressed in the curriculum create divisions and obstacles to the establishment of a "community" school. Several people I spoke to expressed concern regarding the political implications of having the Innu Nation control the school and others wondered how a locally run school might reflect the changing expectations for cultural knowledge, and white and blue collar jobs.

This thesis then sets out to examine the historical period prior to settlement, the predicament of community life and the rise of ethno-nationalism. It then analyzes the institutional, cultural and political dimensions of school control from the perspective of community members. The concept of change in Sheshatshit is laden with ambiguity. The majority of Innu are acutely aware of the negative impact change has had on their community. Attitudes towards the school and its potential role as a propagator of Innu culture highlight the diversity which exists in Sheshatshit and reflect the divergent and dynamic expressions of Innu identity today.

The questions raised in this thesis are also part of a larger and more general issue which has been a classic focus

in anthropological literature: How does an aboriginal society, thrust into the modern world, survive and adapt? Are the actions being taken by the Innu and the ensuing political and cultural changes acts of resistance, adaptation or survival?

The Labrador Innu are one of the last aboriginal societies in North America to be settled and the trauma of settlement continues to reverberate. Now the marrow of the cultural past is being replaced with the values of industrial society. The material changes are evident but the question of identity continues to haunt the people.

1.3 Notes on Fieldwork and Methodology

In my childhood and youth I had spent over ten years living in the North. While living in Labrador, Sheshatshit had struck me as a depressing and confused place. In my late teens and early twenties I eagerly left Labrador to work in East Africa and travel in India and Nepal. Now, more than ten years later, after having spent several years living and working in Africa and Asia, I found myself returning to this familiar yet foreign place. African and Asian cultures had always seemed so much more "exotic" and unusual, but I was now coming back to an old home to find in the familiar and ordinary one of the strangest and most inaccessible societies I had ever come across. It was surprising to find myself in a geographically familiar setting but in a community in which I felt totally alienated from everyone. I was clearly "the

other" in this place. I sensed this was going to be difficult.

I spent four months doing fieldwork in Sheshatshit from August to December 1992. The first few weeks were spent house-sitting, being entertained by children with warm smiles and faces bursting with an enthusiasm for life, wandering around town, trying to meet people and just generally "hanging out". I was confronted with what seems to be an unavoidable and difficult trial of fieldwork. To be a stranger in a strange place is hard, but when you do not have a defined role to play, the beginning is made even more awkward. Trying to look as though you are doing something when you are not sure what to do is challenging, especially under public scrutiny. I wonder if it is this often painful process that for many fieldworkers produces a humility which later becomes an asset to doing sensitive research.

After I had been in the community for a few weeks I was invited to come and live with a family. This was a great blessing. Basile and Angela were close in age to me though at times I think they regarded me more as their daughter because of my relative naivete. I learnt a great deal about the challenges confronting the Innu of my generation through them.

The Innu approach outside visitors to the community with an air of reservation and caution. Trust in others is not quickly granted. I soon realized that this was a community in

which many people were suffering and spent a lot of time just "being", trying to survive the emotional trauma, poverty, addictions and abuse that has permeated their lives and identities since permanent settlement.

Participant observation in the first month was hampered by the fact that there was not much going on. Many people had left town by car and plane to go to an Innu folk festival and visit friends in Mingan, on the Quebec North Shore. August was a bad month for drinking and many possible informants were either out of town or out of commission. After some reflection on how to approach my research, I concluded that for the first month or so I should just be present. This seemed to produce a momentum of its own.

Upon my arrival, I quickly discovered that I was following a stream of researchers who had spent time in the community collecting data for their M.A.'s and Ph.D's. Being a Euro-Canadian anthropologist, conducting yet another study in their mmunity, my presence provoked a combination of respect and cynicism from both Innu and non-Innu residents. However, I also encountered a degree of honesty and a willingness amongst some people I met to share, on a fairly intimate level, their thoughts and experiences. From the beginning I had hoped that, since I was studying such a current and important issue, my research might serve some purpose. To this end I sought to work in conjunction with the

Innu Nation, and the affiliated Innu Resource Centre, on a survey of eighty adults. Broadly, the survey was aimed at finding out what parents wanted for their children's education, what role culture would play in a community run school, and whether or not people supported the Innu Nation's take over of the school and the establishment of a local board separate from the Roman Catholic Board currently in control (see Appendix B).

Upon my return to St. John's, I organized and compiled the interview data into a report which was sent back to the community. In June of 1993, I returned to Sheshatshit for 10 days to discuss the survey results. During this follow-up visit, I broadcast on the local community station a summary of my experience of living in Sheshatshit and provided an overview of the survey responses. This was followed by an evening meeting to discuss the survey results. That evening about a dozen people attended the meeting held at the Alcohol Centre where the concerns and expectations people had for a locally controlled school were discussed.

In addition to the interview project: I worked as a volunteer at the Innu Nation; participated in meetings held regarding school control; observed classes in each of the primary and several of the elementary and high school grades; attended community meetings and women's gatherings; visited families and spent a weekend with an elderly couple in their

road-side tent. While four months of participant observation and extensive interviews enabled me to gather a sufficient base of information from which to weave together a thesis, it also raised more questions than I am able to answer. The survey results, in conjunction with my fieldnotes and profiles of local institutions, comprised the majority of my own data. However, relevant sources on Innu history, politics and culture are used throughout the thesis.

My own cultural heritage has undoubtedly served to limit my ability to both see and understand many aspects of Innu society. It is with this knowledge of my own limitations that I struggle to be honest and clear about the data. A great limitation was my inability to speak Innu-aimun. English is widely used in Sheshatshit, but Innu-aimun is still the first language of most of the inhabitants and through it much of Innu reality is expressed.

For a long time I felt trapped by the confusion and contradictions which constantly scratched me like the wild raspberry bushes and the broken glass in Sheshatshit. Upon my return, I could not write. How was I to make sense in a social-scientific form, of the turmoil that I witnessed in the lives of so many people. Explanations are hard to find. Once you step outside the safety of the empirical world, the dance of multiple truths begins. My hope is that this study will be a resource for people in Sheshatshit, in so far as it

describes some of the contradictions and dilemmas people are facing and, to some extent, tries to explain them.

Truth, in this context, is nothing more than an honest reflection, another representation of the Innu by the "other". But at best, this thesis may shed a little light, from a different angle, on the complexity of the changes facing the Innu.

Chapter 2

The Past: In the Time Before Community

> ...cultural realities are always produced in
> specific sociohistorical contexts and ... it
> is necessary to account for the processes that
> generate those contexts in order to account
> for the nature of both the practice of
> identity and the production of historical
> schemes (Friedman, 1992:837).

A shared sense of the past, of historical experience with others of the same family or ethnic group, provides a strong sense of identity, of belonging to and connection with the land where that history was lived and with the culture that binds the Innu. The Innu conception of the past and culture is potently associated with life in the country.

The Innu word for country or interior is <u>nutshimit</u> which historically was seen in opposition to the coast, <u>uinipekut</u>. Uinipekut, was seen as the "domain of the Euro-Canadians" (Mailhot, 1987:50). It is in the country that the language, history and beliefs of the Innu are passed on to the children and where contact with <u>Innu-assi</u>, their land and territory is renewed (Mailhot, 1987:51).

Map 1. Labrador   Source: Plaice, 1991

Map 2. Hamilton Inlet   Source: Mailhot, 1993
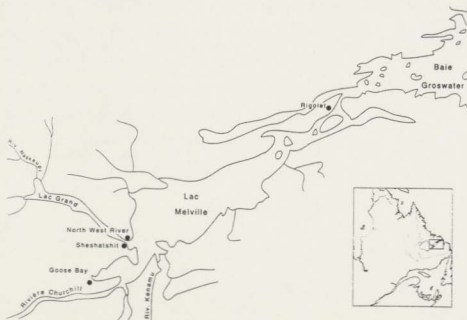
Today Sheshatshit, on the shore of Hamilton Inlet is surrounded by Settler and Euro-Canadian society. When Innu speak of the past, it is envisaged as being synonymous with life in the country. Community life is set in an extended sense of the present and is contrasted to life in the country which for the Innu represents a continuity in their cultural heritage. Today the definition of the past as well as country life is defined in its juxtaposition to the present, life in the community with its inherent troubles and tensions.

The Innu of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula make up a total population of about 13,000[4]. In Labrador about 1,000 Innu reside in Sheshatshit and 500 live in Utshimassit (Davis Inlet). Prior to the fairly recent employment of the term "Innu" this group was known as the Montagnais-Naskapi Indians. The Montagnais-Naskapi, Algonkian and Cree Indians have traditionally inhabited the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula, and together they form the Algonkian cultural and linguistic group. Mailhot (1986b:388-392) suggests that the terms Montagnais-Naskapi came into use at the turn of the nineteenth century and prior to this the Naskapi were often regarded either as a sub-group of the Montagnais or the two terms would be used interchangeably. Since the nineteenth century

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[4] The Innu communities of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula are: Sheshatshit, Utshimassit (Davis Inlet) in Labrador and Schefferville, Saint-Augustin, Musquaro, La Romaine, Natashquan, Mingan, Betsiamites and Sept-Iles in Quebec.

Montagnais, from the French word for "Mountaineers", has been used to refer to the Innu living closer to the coast and trading post, who were thought to be more acculturated. The Naskapi were viewed as the inland Indians who had less contact with the trading post and had not yet adopted Christianity and were therefore less civilized (Mailhot, 1986b:398). Today the term Naskapi does not carry these connotations, and is generally used to refers to the "Barren ground or Mushuau Innu" of Utshimassit on the North Coast of Labrador. More recently, <u>Innu</u>, meaning "human being or the people" has been used to refer to all the Montagnais-Naskapi of the Quebec Labrador Peninsula, who "stress the fact that they are one people" (Armitage, 1989:7)[5].

The Labrador boundary is "inextricably tied to history since the arrival of Europeans" (Budgell and Stavely, 1987:2) and has traditionally held little meaning for the Innu of the Quebec-Labrador peninsula. Today, the established boundary of Labrador contains a triangular area of 112,000 square miles. Its western and southern boarders cut an L shape through Northern Quebec. The eastern North Atlantic coastline of 11,000 miles runs from Forteau on the Strait of Belle Isle up to the northeastern tip of Ungava Peninsula. Included in this coastal stretch is the Hamilton Inlet (also known as Lake

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[5] "Innu" will be used through out this thesis except in quotes or references which employ Montagnais and/or Naskapi.

Melville), which reaches approximately 170 miles into central Labrador. Northwest River and Sheshatshit are located on the northern shore on the western edge of Lake Melville, in the interior. The abundance of wildlife and rich vegetation along the shores and tributaries of Lake Melville has been an attraction for Innu bands, Inuit, and more recently Settler populations for hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of years. Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and Mud Lake also lie at the head of this Inlet, 30 kilometres from Northwest River and Sheshatshit. The combined population of these communities established around the head of Hamilton Inlet today is approximately 9,000, (Plaice, 1991:xi). The remaining population is spread out in smaller communities along the coast and in the larger interior towns of Labrador City and Wabush (see Map 1). The Innu living in Labrador today make up less than 5% of the 40,000 inhabitants which today includes, Inuit, Settlers[6], and Newcomers[7].

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[6] Settlers are descendants of the early Europeans from Scotland, Britain and France who came to Labrador on fishing or trading vessels, or to work at a trading post. These men married Inuit, and in some cases Innu women and set themselves up as independent trappers.

[7] Newcomer refers to people from other parts of Canada (or the world) who have come to work in Labrador and settled here. The settlement of Newcomers in Labrador is as recent as this century. The majority have arrived since the construction of the Goose Bay Air Base.

2.1 Historical Overview

Until the late 1960s a tendency existed among anthropologists to view hunter gatherer societies as being relatively untouched prior to settlement, and existing in isolation from the rest of the world since the beginning of time. However, Carmel Schrire (1984) argues that these assumptions and images of the pristine past of hunter gatherers are inaccurate and misleading.

> There exists today in hunter gatherer studies a marked gap between observed facts of the existence of contemporary groups and inferences drawn about prehistoric people. It is as though contemporary hunter gathers have been catapulted from a timeless and stable past into a turbulent, labile present, with ancient adaptations crammed into a dissonant framework (1984:1).

The Innu were undoubtedly overwhelmed with the impact of rapid changes occurring prior to and at the time of permanent settlement. However, for hundreds, maybe thousands of years they have been affected by patterns of trade with Europeans or interactions with other Aboriginal groups and changes in patterns of harvesting animals throughout the world. Schrire points out that different configurations of trade, hunting and fishing in one area would have reverberations in trade and animal populations in other parts of the world. A "broader perspective will help release hunter gatherers from the frozen tableaux of our thoughts and integrate them into the wider world of which they have always been a part" (1984:20).

Archaeological research in Labrador and the far north more generally has changed our assumptions of cultural stasis by demonstrating that

> cultural adaptation in the north has a much greater time depth than had originally been suspected and a greater degree of social flexibility and dynamic cultural adaptation to changing social and environmental conditions than previously presumed (Loring, 1992:2).

Linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological data from the arctic and sub-arctic regions of Canada suggests that prehistoric groups of Indian and Inuit hunters and fishermen have never been "significantly autonomous" (Loring, 1992:24).

The glaciers covering coastal and interior Labrador receded between 9,000 - 10,000 years ago. Archaeological research indicates that the Strait of Belle Isle on the southern Labrador coast was first occupied by Indians of the Maritime archaic tradition as early as 8,000 B.P. (Tuck, 1975:11). Hamilton Inlet has been home to Inuit and Indian groups since 6,000 B.P. (Fitzhugh, 1977:1). Loring (1992:514) established that a link exists between the Naskapi-Montagnais of the historic period with the pre-historic cultural continuum that reaches back "at least 2,000 years".

> Beyond that there are chronological breaks, stylistic discontinuities, dramatic settlement-subsistence differences, and historic precedents that make deriving a direct historical connection between the Innu and the Intermediate Period Indian groups and/or Maritime Archaic populations tenuous (Loring, 1992:513).

Loring's thesis runs counter to the current claims of the Innu to have lived in Nitassinan since the glaciers receded 9,000 years ago (Loring, 1992:514). Whether or not the Innu were descendants of the earliest occupants of Labrador, they were not alone in Labrador for long and nor was their occupancy limited to one region. In response to other cultural groups, the historic and prehistoric Indians of Labrador were compelled to "perfect the social strategies necessary to provide access to resources and information on a large geographic scale" (Loring, 1992:54). This was achieved through the development of social institutions and practices that allowed for interaction with distant neighbours. These social forms may have enabled interaction with foreign groups of Inuit and possibly Europeans. Loring argues that survival for early Indian groups depended not only on an inherent flexibility in adaptation to changing environmental and social conditions but also on the maintenance of a strong ethnic identity in relation to Inuit hunters (Loring, 1992:28).

At the turn of the eleventh century (according to saga accounts) a Viking expedition lead by Thorvald Erikson on a voyage from their base in Vinland (L'anse aux Meadows on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland) to Markland (meaning 'Wood Land' referring to Labrador) sailed into Hamilton Inlet. Here at the mouth of English River Thorvald Erikson was killed by an Indian arrow (Fitzhugh, 1972:208). This was the first known

contact between Aboriginal inhabitants and Europeans in Hamilton Inlet. This early encounter between Norse explorers and Indians was most likely passed on in the oral histories of the late Prehistoric Period Indians (Loring, 1992:97, Zimmerly, 1991:35) (first published in 1975).

Innu bands in the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula were already familiar with European interests in the fur trade by the time Cartier arrived on the shores of the St. Lawrence in 1534 (Leacock, 1980:25). Due to the expansive presence of Europeans and Inuit along the Labrador coast during the 1500 and 1600s, the Innu population left their coastal habitations and moved further into the interior where they "developed a specialized interior adaptation based on the exploitation of the large barren ground caribou herds" (Loring, 1992:4).

Written accounts of the Innu began in the early 1600s. The first were the diaries and reports of Pere Le Jeune, a superior of the Jesuit mission in Quebec who spent a winter among the Montagnais, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1633-34. His early accounts were written both to convey his observations of Innu life as well as to stress the need for religion, education and the forces of "civilization" necessary for their assimilation and control (Leacock, 1980).

In 1702, Seigneur de Courtemanche was granted a concession in New France by the King of France. The area granted included Hamilton Inlet. The French had already

established trading posts along the coast North of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. He recorded in his diary a description of the abundance of animals on land and salmon in the rivers. The 'Esquimaux', he describes as

> becoming more sociable and are beginning to trade with the French who are settled there and who trade in their commodities. I have also attracted in the interior a tribe of Indians who had not as yet come into contact with the French. They are very intelligent and a missionary would have no trouble to implant Christianity among them (in Zimmerly, 1991:36-37).

In other historical accounts from this period and up until the early 1900s, the Indians appear to be aloof and are usually described as being off in the distance, paddling by in their birch bark canoes[8]. The distance between Europeans and Indians was physically changed when, around 1743, a French trading post was established near Northwest River and believed to have been maintained until 1763 when Labrador was placed under the jurisdiction of a British Governor. From 1774 until 1809 Labrador was part of Quebec until 1815 when it was finally placed under the jurisdiction of Newfoundland (Zimmerly, 1991:47)[9].

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[8] Harper wrote that the "history of the Northwest River Band is somewhat vague and incompletely documented. We have only a meagre knowledge of its origin, composition, wanderings and shifting territory"(1964:44-45).

[9] The perception that Euro-Canadian administrations actually controlled Labrador has largely been the product of an ethnocentric imagination. As long as Aboriginal groups have been the primary

In 1777 two British men established themselves as independent settlers in the Northwest River area. Both married Inuit women and adopted a combination of Innu, Inuit and European technologies in order to survive. They were the first of a small group of mostly English and Scottish Settlers who began to populate the shores of Lake Melville as trappers and traders (Zimmerly 1991:45). In 1784 two French Canadians established trading posts, one in Northwest River and the other across the channel in Sheshatshit. In 1799 these two men, Marcoux and Dumontier, united their interests (1991:44). Reports from them in 1821 indicate that trade in furs with the Montagnais-Naskapi was strong and Hamilton Inlet had a well established Settler population (1991:49).

In the mid-1800s Newfoundland fishermen began to settle with their families along the shores of Hamilton Inlet to fish during the summer. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) set up posts in the area in 1836 beginning "a new period of immigration and cultural innovation" (Zimmerly, 1991:70). Drinking was common amongst the Indians and the Settlers at this point. The Indians were described as being "insufferable drunkards" and the trading companies were already in the habit of supplying alcohol (Zimmerly, 1991:74). The Settlers were equally

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inhabitants of the territory, the land has ultimately continued to rest under their jurisdiction (Peter Armitage, personal communication 1993).

predisposed to drinking. A permanent Protestant mission was not established until 1884 in Northwest River, because the Settlers had a bad reputation for drinking and showing disregard for the visiting preachers (Zimmerly, 1991:51).

An American tourist who visited Northwest River in 1860 described the settlement and the Indians camped there: "A little apart from the houses are the frame poles of numerous Nascopi lodges, disposed in a large circle. These are covered with skins and occupied when the Indians come down to trade" (Hallock in Zimmerly, 1991:97). Hallock also provides an interesting description of their physical characteristics and dress at that time.

> They are tall, straight, graceful, of light complexion and pleasing features... The men are passionately fond of dress; and their native garments, of softest buckskin, are of most faultless cut, and fancifully decorated with pigments of various colours, and wrought with silk, in designs representing birds, flowers, canoes, etc. Their yellow dye is obtained from the spawn of trout. a scarlet sash, which girds the coat is worn about the waist, the flowing ends reaching to the knees. The women affect the Bloomer costume-- petticoats and trousers; but their dress is far inferior to their lords' and masters'. Tall conical caps of gaudy flannel are invariably worn, ornamented with beads, and sometimes with bears' and eagles' claws. The style of dressing the hair is unique. The women, parting theirs behind, draw it forward and do it up in egg-shaped bunches on either side of the head; while the men wear theirs in queues, decorated with beads, and terminating in a bead tassel. An indispensable article of dress is the fur gauntlet, which is made to reach above the elbow. These are held in place

> by a thong passed over the shoulders. A few
> have adopted the dress of the whites in part,
> but will wear only the finest cloth, and that
> of the gayest colours (Hallock in Zimmerly,
> 1991:99).

The Hudson's Bay Company during this period was eager to maintain the flow of incoming furs from the Innu hunters. In 1873 a clinic was held by the HBC to vaccinate the Innu against smallpox. Zimmerly (1991:107-108) suggests that though there may have been humanitarian motives behind this gesture, it is likely that the HBC's more powerful desire was to maintain a high turn over in the fur trade. The HBC Post Records in Northwest River from 1865-1883 (see also Roche, 1992) refer to the various ways the Indians were involved with the company:

> some worked as labourers hauling goods to the
> inland posts, some were outfitted by the
> Company and worked on the "share" system,
> while others merely came to the post and
> traded their furs for ammunition and supplies
> on an irregular basis (Zimmerly, 1991:109).

These records also reveal the degree of independence the Innu exercised in their earlier trading relationships. In contrast the HBC Post was at times dependant on the Innu for supplies of caribou meat and furs upon which the Post's existence relied. The HBC often employed Innu hunters as guides (Roche, 1992). The Labrador Innu were able to maintain their independent ways despite the colonizing tendencies of the HBC, as long they were able to hunt caribou which furnished most of

their needs. But the transition from being independent hunters to becoming increasingly dependant on ammunition and supplies available from the HBC eventually occurred over several decades beginning in the mid-1800s (see Cooke, 1981 and Roche, 1992).

Many Labrador Innu were converted to Catholicism during the 1800s (Mailhot, 1993:29) and would often travel to trading posts in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in order to see the mission priest who performed baptisms and marriages. The visits by the Catholic missionaries to Sheshatshit were somewhat variable during the late 1800s (Mailhot, 1993:29-37). The Innu continued to visit the trading post in Northwest River, but the frequency of visits and the number of Innu who came to the post was reduced and irregular (Roche, 1992:42-70). In an attempt to bring back the Innu traders to the post, the HBC offered financial aid for a priest to visit Northwest River in the summer of 1858. George Simpson wrote to inform Donald Smith, the HBC manager in Northwest River in March 1858,

> ...I have rendered aid to a priest, the Rev'd
> Pere Arnoud, who proposed making a tour during
> the summer from the Gulf of St. Lawrence by
> the way of the River Moise to Northwest River.
> ...I trust that the visit of the missionary to
> the Nascopies in their own country   may
> satisfy their desires in that respect and that
> they be content to remain steadily at their
> post (Roche, 1992:65).

Pere Arnoud did not make it to Northwest River that summer and it was not until 1866, that Pere Babel eventually

came to Northwest River (McGee, 1961:130). Competition between the trading posts was so acute that the Hudson's Bay Company was willing to meet the conditions the missionary had set forth as essential to opening a mission in Northwest River (1961:131). These conditions included financial assistance, provision of a suitable building; suspension of all alcohol sales to the Innu, and assistance from the HBC in separating the Innu from the Settler population (1961:131). In the end a permanent Catholic mission was not established in Northwest River until 1952.

Periodic visits by a priest brought some Innu families back to the Northwest River post, though the majority of family continued to travel to Mingan and other coastal missions. Thus the absence of Innu hunters and trappers in the Lake Melville area opened the way for local trappers to expand into the Innu hunting territories. When the Innu hunters returned to their territories in the early 1900s they began to complain to the trading companies of the encroachment by trappers into their hunting grounds. A number of potentially violent encounters ensued between the Settlers and Indians

over hunting territory.[10] (See for example Bert Blake's story in Zimmerly, 1991:127).

The Settler community by this time had established its own set of laws and customs. Tracts of land were trapped in lines and trapping lines were passed on by ultimogeniture or in the case of a trapper's death they would be leased to other trappers by the trapper's widow. The Settlers saw their law as rational and applicable to everyone, and did not recognize Innu rights to the land. If the land was not being trapped with established lines, then it was open territory, as far as the Settlers were concerned[11]. A trapper left his family to trap his line as a means of economic survival, trapping for the Settlers was seen as an occupation.

The patterns which governed Innu land use and occupancy were in stark contrast to those of the Settlers. For the Innu hunting on the land was integral to their religious beliefs and social organization as well as their livelihood. The Sheshatshit band traditionally hunted in six territories to the southeast, south, southwest, west, northwest and north of

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[10] Though the confrontation between Bert Blake and the Innu was potentially violent, the relationship that Bert Blake had with the Innu more generally was described by Merrick (1987:70) as being very amicable and he also states that Blake was fluent in Innu-aimun.

[11] The appropriation of human property in this manner also occurred in Australia where "whites sought to acquire land on the basis of Aborigines' failure to understand the idea of possession" (Youngs, 1992:30).

Northwest River. Mailhot (1986) argues that the occupancy of Innu hunting territories in Labrador is not fixed. The territorial mobility of the Labrador Innu resulted from matrilocal residence and band exogamy. The land use patterns were based on "structured mobility" enabling families to change hunting territories from year to year according to their kinship connections (1986:100). Mailhot's research, on the terms in the Sheshatshit dialect used in reference to hunting territories, demonstrated that no concept of individual land ownership existed (1986:94).

The increase in the Settler population, which tripled between 1901 and 1941, intensified the extension of trap lines into Innu hunting grounds (Zimmerly, 1991:192). In 1937, animals like the marten and beaver started to disappear. By the 1940s, the Innu were suffering not only from the on-going invasion of their hunting grounds, but also from a sharp drop in fur prices as well as a drastic decline in the caribou population in the area (Armitage, 1991:48). They were hesitant to return to the country in the fall due to the

> fear of starvation and the deadly diseases that struck at this time and took many lives. By their own standards, the Indians were living in extreme poverty. In order to survive, they increasingly had to seek assistance from the government of Newfoundland (Armitage, 1991:48).

An American and Canadian military base was established at Goose Bay during World War II. Construction began in the

summer of 1941 and the face of Hamilton Inlet was changed forever. Within a short period of time, a large airport and city for 8,000 people had been built (Zimmerly, 1991:200). The development of the base in Goose Bay was a welcome relief for the Settlers who looked forward to the security wage labour provided. The Innu and Inuit were not able to respond to the expectations of wage employment and did not fare as well, though a few managed to get jobs on the Base (Zimmerly, 1991:206-207). Many settlers from all over Labrador moved to Happy Valley, a town five kilometres from the airport, that had sprung up to house the civilians working at the base. When the year-round settlement of Sheshatshit was first established in 1952, it was hoped that if Innu youth went to school and learned to read and write in English, they would then get jobs on the Base and adopt a modern lifestyle. However, this expectation, held by both the missionaries and government officers, was never met and the majority of Innu families continued to spend the winter months hunting in the interior up until the late 1960s.

In 1949 the government of Newfoundland joined Confederation, but the Labrador Innu did not become status Indians like their counterparts in the rest of Canada. Instead the two governments decided that the Innu would remain non-status and have the same rights as citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador. Shortly after confederation, the federal

government entered into an agreement with Newfoundland. The agreement, which has since been renewed several times, involved the transfer of federal funds to the province for specified services for the Innu, such as health and social services. As a result of this decision, the Innu did not have access to the federal programs for status Indians (Armitage, 1991:48)[12].

By the early 1950s, the situation of the Labrador Innu was so desperate that both the federal and provincial governments actively undertook to establish communities with government-built houses for year-round residence. The two government officials appointed to implement this project had great visions of industrial development for the region. But the "Indian's traditional practices of hunting and fishing were seen as incompatible with this vision" (Armitage, 1991:49). To this end, provincial games laws were later enforced among the Innu who then found themselves arrested, their game and guns confiscated, for hunting caribou or other animals out of season.

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[12] The Innu recently made an appeal to the Canadian Human Rights Commission contesting this agreement and the discrepancy between their treatment by the federal government and the economic resources which have been awarded them in contrast to Native groups in the rest of Canada. McRae's Report (1993) for the Human Rights Commission recommends federal acknowledgement of its constitutional responsibility towards the Innu and the instatement of direct federal funding to the Labrador Innu (the Quebec Innu are status Indians) in compliance with the Indian Act.

John McGee, an anthropology student lived in the Lake
Melville area while doing research on the Innu for a total of
three years between 1942 - 1953. During this period, the
Sheshatshit Innu, with a total population of 150 people,
continued to spend the short summer months camping together in
Sheshatshit. The summer was a period of rest and preparation
for the fall and winter expedition back into the country. It
was during these gatherings that marriages and baptisms were
performed. Several Innu worked on the American Base in Goose
Bay or for the Grenfell Mission in Northwest River which
allowed them to buy supplies for the fall and winter months
ahead. In September and October the band in Sheshatshit would
split up into family groups and travel 40 or 50 miles up the
rivers and lakes in the direction of their hunting grounds, to
build and repair canoes, pick berries and get tents and
clothing ready for the winter months (McGee, 1961:79-86).
During the late fall and early winter the Innu lived in the
bush, moving when necessary to follow game. These small family
hunting groups, related by blood or marriage, would sometimes
be camped in close enough range to visit occasionally (McGee,
1961:86). McGee notes that once the mission was established in
Sheshatshit along with a few houses, about twenty-five percent
of the band came back in December or January. These families
set up their tents up next to the houses of relatives and
friends who were unable to go into the country. They escaped

the coldest months in the bush and were able to collect welfare and send their children to the mission school (McGee, 1961:57). The remainder of Innu families stayed in the bush through the winter, returning to Sheshatshit in June after breakup[13].

McGee argued that, despite hundreds of years of contact with Europeans and the products industrial society had to offer, the Innu seemed to incorporate what they needed, make some practical adaptations to their seasonal activities, yet maintain their primary existence as hunters.

> Although the indigenous natives of the Labrador Peninsula have been directly or indirectly in contact with European culture for at least three hundred years, and probably much longer than that, most of them have remained in roughly the same socio-economic condition which preva..led at the time of first recorded contacts with Europeans (McGee, 1961:vii).

Found in many earlier writings and more recently in those of McGee (1961) is a portrayal of the Innu as strong and proud people whose life as hunters equipped them with all their needs.

> Lake Melville Indians appear to be imbued with a will for happy survival. In other words, their aim in life seems to be to live happily and peacefully as long as possible, just above the bare subsistence level. That is, they realize that certain minimal requirements in

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[13] Breakup refers to the breaking up of ice in lakes and rivers which makes travel by sled or canoe almost impossible during the months of April and May.

> the way of food, clothing, housing, warmth,
> sleep and mental satisfaction are essential
> for survival in their milieu. Formerly, these
> Indians depended completely on themselves and
> nature. Today, survival is to some extent
> contingent on the fur trade, as it has been
> for the last three hundred years or more
> (McGee, 1961:54).

McGee expresses a rather romantic notion that changes since contact were minimal, and the Innu merely incorporated what they needed, maintaining throughout this period the central social and religious practices associated with survival in the country. However, it appears that contrary to McGee's observations the Innu were undergoing fairly major changes. Today, McGee's thesis appears to be over-simplified. He underestimated the now visible, longer-term effects of these changes on the stability of Innu society.

2.2 The Social and Spiritual World of the Past

Innu society was originally perceived by outsiders to be markedly egalitarian. Though men and women had separate spheres of activity, these became interchangeable when necessary. Le Jeune remarked on the "great power" held by women (in Leacock, 1981:34-35). Leacock (1981:43-62) argued that the later manifestation of structured inequality between the sexes was predominantly a consequence of the Jesuit program for colonization. The internalized obligations of new Christians to be submissive to the will of God included submission of men and women to the hierarchy of the Church,

and the submission of women to men and of children to their parents.

Lucien Turner (1979), who spent time among the Naskapi of the Ungava Peninsula in 1882-1884 also observed that men and women each had separate spheres of activities. Women, he pointed out do the majority of manual labour around the home. They are considered inferior to men, and "in their social life they soon show the effects of the hardships they undergo" (1979:107).

In examining religious practices of the past, Speck wrote, the "Montagnais-Naskapi have no formal religion any more than they have a nationality" (1935:18). McGee, on the other hand, describes the Northwest River Innu as having accepted *in toto* Catholicism (1961:vii). Perhaps both these interpretations hold some truth and are able to provide us with some insight. The Innu claimed to be Catholic and their commitment to having a priest perform marriages and baptisms is evidenced in the fact that they travelled to coastal missions during the summers that Sheshatshit was without a visiting priest (McGee, 1961:26).

A young Innu man would learn that there are two things essential to his existence. The first is to hunt, fish and trap and the second is to manage the force of <u>Manitu</u>, which Speck defines as the "universe, the natural law, the unknown, spirit-forces, supreme power" (1935:34). However, other

authors (see for example Horwood, 1981:27 and Harper, 1961) dispute this and suggest that the major and most powerful force was the Spirit of the Caribou. All aspects of Innu life, according to Speck, were permeated by the spirit world. As a consequence of the power of these spirits, in all the functional and practical aspects of life such as hunting, and crafts, "there is a tendency to dematerialize nature... in their systems of thought" (1935:19). Speck stresses that without recognizing the power of the spiritual forces in Innu life, large parts of the ethnographic picture would be left out:

> In accordance with the idea that hunting is a holy occupation and that game animals are holy as well, we see how the entire aboriginal life and being of this people is held in a holy light. This simple statement explains the whole economic and social doctrinal program of the natives. The distinction between the meat of wild and domestic animals is wide. The diet consisting of wild game was to the ancients a sanctified medicinal one (1935:20).

The Innu separate animals into the following categories: four legged, waterfowl, birds, fish and insects (animals found elsewhere are considered European and have no role for the Innu). Each species belongs to a kingdom and each kingdom has a chief spirit. The caribou spirit has the most power and governs over the others (Armitage, 1991:77, see also 1992). Relationships with the animal spirits determine the spiritual and material well-being of the community. Hunting is done in cooperation with the animal masters or chief spirits. Animal

bones are handled with the utmost care as they are used by the animal masters to replenish the animal stock (1991:78-79). Through dreams, drumming, scapulmancy and the shaking tent ceremonies, the Innu can communicate with the animal masters and receive "invaluable information about the world around them as well as the world of the spirits" (1991:79).

The makushan feast is perhaps one of the most significant Innu rituals.

> The ceremony begins with the crushing and boiling of caribou leg bones. This process is supervised by a *utshimau-ushkan*, or "first man of the long bones." When the meal is ready for consumption, a *menatshitsh makushan* (he who looks well after makushan) takes over the supervisory role. He makes sure that proper disposal and other feast rules are followed... that most of the caribou bone marrow, cakes of caribou fat called atiku-pimi, and caribou meat be eaten indoors... and none of the caribou be given to the dogs.
> During *makushan*, the oldest men eat first, then the other men, then the women and finally the children. On some occasions, a dance is held after the feast during which an older man drums and sings quietly in a subdued, candle lit corner of a tent or house (Armitage, 1991:83-84).

Innu acceptance of Christianity was based on practical considerations. Though it did not provide guidance for the hunter as did Innu religious practices, it did however, promise a bountiful afterlife, providing certain commitments were adhered to (Speck, 1935:32). Christianity was fairly well accepted among the Innu and yet it did not radically alter

their spiritual, social or economic base. Armitage suggests
that a probable reason for this is

> that they see no contradiction between belief
> in God and Jesus and their belief in their own
> traditional deities- the animal masters and
> the forest spirits. God is responsible for
> overseeing the activities of human beings and
> the animal masters watch over the activities
> of animals and their treatment by human beings
> (1991:77).

The summer visits with the missionary established the
settlement as the centre for the practice of Christian rites
such as baptism, confession, communion, marriage and funerals.
Non-Christian practices such as paying respect to the animal
masters became reserved for the country (Armitage, 1992:67).

Both Speck and McGee seem to agree that despite the
influences of Catholicism and the fur trade, there was
essentially little change in the pattern of Innu life. McGee's
analysis of conditions among the Innu at the eve of semi-
permanent settlement, was that the "economic aspect of their
culture has remained relatively primitive and their socio-
religious culture has remained relatively stable"
(1961:125)[14].

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[14]   David Turner (1993:40) suggests that material advancement
among the Australian Aborigines was not given priority over the
maintenance of peace and social order. Though they possessed the
necessary technical and environmental knowledge to further exploit
the resources available to them, this knowledge was never applied.
"Having solved the problem of living together through transcendent
Forms, material advancement seems to be have been arrested at a
particular stage, although material well-being was ensured under
the arrangement" (1993:40).

Speck wrote that,

> There has been...little alteration in the
> *spirit* of Montagnais-Naskapi culture, despite
> the many material innovations which have been
> acquired from Europeans. Their culture has
> continued largely in its original pattern-
> hunting and wandering. And the elementary
> religious associations of this phase of
> existence cannot be conceived of as being
> likely to change, as long as the culture-
> pattern holds firm. Radical change would only
> ensue upon change of their cultural base,
> *e.g.*, from hunting-nomadism to agriculture, to
> pastoral life or to civilized employment
> (1935:30).

2.3 The Transition to Permanent Settlement

The cultural base of the Innu underwent a radical shift

when they moved off the land and were forced to abandon their

traditional means of subsistence. The eventual shift to

settlement life, despite promises and dreams, never provided

an alternative cultural or economic base for Innu residents.

Village life was at the same time incapable of sustaining the

conditions under which traditional values could be preserved.

A permanent mission was established in Sheshatshit in

1952, but it was not until 1968 that the majority of the

population made this their year-round base. Prior to 1968,

Sheshatshit remained a summer and occasional winter residence

for many families. Housing was initially limited to the

elderly, widows and the disabled who could no longer accompany

family members into the country for the fall and winter
months. The majority of families who continued a semi-nomadic
existence would live in their tents while visiting the
settlement. Those who remained in the community were able to
collect welfare and government pensions (McGee, 1961:30).

By 1959, fourteen houses were built, twelve with
government assistance to house the old and disabled, and two
by men who provided the lumber and labour to build houses for
their families (Mailhot and Michaud, 1965:11). Until 1959, the
school remained part of the mission. After 1959, when the
first school was built, a few more families took up year-round
residence. The eventual settlement of the remaining Innu, who
had maintained an semi-nomadic and independent existence, took
place in 1968. This final component of sedentarization was
influenced in part by enforced school attendance upon which
government assistance became conditional (McGee, 1961:31). In
addition, a large housing project responsible for building 51
houses in Sheshatshit between 1965 and 1968, helped sway the
last semi-nomadic families into permanent settlement
(Armitage, 1990:10). The government-built houses were all
without water and sewerage facilities. It was not until late
in the 1980's that the majority of residences were equipped
with indoor toilets and running water.

Settlement introduced structural changes which made
adaptation particularly difficult. Traditional forms of

egalitarianism and economic control were no longer relevant.
Leadership models which existed primarily in relation to the
caribou hunt and other means of subsistence could not be
sustained in the social and economic environment of the
community. The Innu were subjected to the coercive influence
and leadership of the missionary, traders and government
officers. The dominant attitude of these Euro-Canadian
missionaries and government officers towards the Innu was that
of superiority and control.

Education was seen by the missionaries and government
officers as the key to sedentarization. McGee suggested that

> compulsory school attendance may well become
> the chief factor conducive to a change of
> Montagnais outlook and culture. This is partly
> because through school the Indians are forced
> to learn English, which is certainly a means
> to their being employed above the menial level
> (1961:147).

Though McGee saw the school as a means of improving the
situation of the Innu, he also pointed to aspects of the
school which were quite inappropriate for Innu children.

> The curriculum of required studies,
> established in accord with what is suitable
> and necessary for white children in the
> capital city, shows little relevance to the
> needs of children, Indian or white, in the
> remoter areas. The required language of
> instruction is English and the texts and other
> class materials are virtually useless in the
> Lake Melville environment. This means that the
> missionary, in conjunction with the local
> school board, must make heroic efforts to
> maintain some semblance of instruction and to

try to meet rather ridiculous standards
(McGee, 1961:145).

Despite that fact that the incongruence of a Euro-Canadian education system with the language, values and culture of the Innu students was recognized, the struggle to rectify this dichotomized situation obviously had little success as these conditions persisted for decades. A government officer, Walter Rockwood, advocated that the foundation for social evolution was education and it was essential that the Innu children begin this process through schooling (1959:4).

The rapid increase in the non-Innu population of the area beginning in Northwest River in the early 1900s and then accelerating in the 1940s with the construction of the Base in Goose Bay, further entrenched the social system of class and status. The racist attitudes of Whites, the paternalism of the government, church and education system all contributed to the diminishing of self-esteem among the Innu.

Spending less time on the land resulted in the consumption of less "wild" food. Caribou, considered "real" Innu food for the body as well as the soul, ceased to be a staple in Sheshatshit. Like other country foods, it began to play a less prominent role in the daily Innu diet. Chips, cheesies, french fries, carnation milk, cold cereal, beef, chicken, coke and pepsi were incorporated into a diet which

was occasionally supplemented by wild foods like salmon, trout, caribou, ptarmigan, hare, geese and beaver.

The process of procuring food in the community was transformed into a unidimensional activity regulated primarily by the flow of cash. Families were now living in separate houses, receiving separate cheques to buy food which was to be shared and eaten primarily with their immediate family.

Henriksen (1989:ix-xi) (first published 1973) suggested that the "fundamental interdependence" of the Innu was required by the environment in which they lived and hunted. Settlement did not command the equivalent degree of sharing and dependence upon one another and thus gave people the freedom to exercise their autonomy in ways never possible in the country.

The physical health of the Innu suffered under the sedentary conditions of village life. Regular access to alcohol in combination with a bad diet and inactivity brought on weight gains and poor skin conditions. The lack of clean running water in the village caused gastroenteritis, impetigo, and related infections. In 1966, the conditions in the village were described as being "horrible" (Budgell, 1984:43). In 1967 water wells were drilled in Sheshatshit; prior to this, clean drinking water had to be obtained from the mission house (1984:46).

Fur prices had dropped by 1968 so that trapping was no longer a viable means of subsisting. More importantly, the imposition of Newfoundland provincial hunting laws severely restricted their access to caribou. The delivery of social services, upon which everyone became dependant, restricted their movements into the country as cheques could not be obtained if people were not residing in the village. Distribution of government cheques was made conditional on school attendance, in an effort to increase low rates of attendance. Compulsory schooling and an increasing dependency on social assistance restricted trips into the country and caused a breakdown in the traditional transmission of knowledge and skills from older to the younger generations.

Village life had initially offered a sanctuary for the Innu who, at the time of settlement, were suffering from poverty, disease and were in need of assistance (Armitage, 1989:12). At the time, many were eager to settle and to send their children to a Catholic school (Armitage, 1989:12, McGee, 1961:142). Yet the conditions of community life, with institutional controls exercised by church and government served to sabotage the ability of the Innu to adapt to settlement life. The Innu found themselves settled in the domain of the Euro-Canadians, removed from _Innu-assi_, from contact with their land and their Innu identity.

Map 3. Community of Sheshatshit
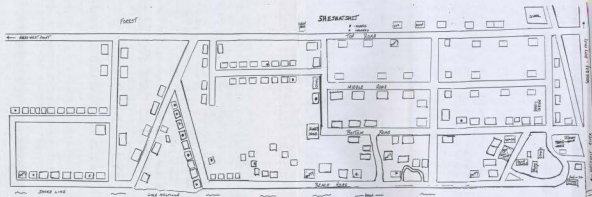
Chapter 3

The Present

3.1 Sheshatshit Today

The settlement sits on the south side of the channel that flows out of Grand Lake and Little Lake into Lake Melville. Northwest River is located on the north bank of the channel facing Sheshatshit. Both communities had been incorporated under the name of Northwest River until 1979 at which time the towns were formally divided and Sheshatshit was incorporated under its Innu name. The Innu name Sheshatshit refers to the coming together of the shores of two lakes, Lake Melville and Grand Lake (see Map 2) (Mailhot, 1993:18). This location has been used by the Innu for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. The name Sheshatshit appeared on topographical maps as early as 1703 and was referred to in a document by Louis Jolliet in 1694 (Mailhot, 1993:17).

Prior to 1979, a cable car transported residents and visitors to the north side of the channel. Today the town of Northwest River is accessible by a bridge that connects the two communities. Northwest River has a population of approximately 750, the majority of whom are Settlers. There are also several Inuit families and a number of Newcomers. Here, there is a post office and a large department and

grocery store, a cafe and take-out, a school, a community college, a clinic, an alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre, various recreation halls and three churches. The town is relatively affluent in appearance. It is landscaped with gardens and trees, and there are street lights and signs marking the paths and gravel roads.

On the south bank of the channel, across the bridge, lies Sheshatshit. The population of Sheshatshit is about 1,000 with a birth rate of 5.6 percent[15]. Though historically intertwined, these communities have maintained very distinct cultural identities, and these differences have served to reinforce a sense of each community being ethnically defined in relation to the "other".[16]

Sheshatshit lies along the beachy shores of Lake Melville and faces east towards the Atlantic ocean which lies beyond the horizon (see Map 3). The community itself is spread out, with houses running along more than two kilometres of beach road and lining the steep hill side which rises above the shoreline, providing most residents with a view. There are 151 houses in town, several of which are currently uninhabited and in need of renovations. Sheshatshit has a small store with

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[15] Based on population statistics from the Mani Ashini Clinic records 1990.

[16] Evelyn Plaice in The Native Game (1991) describes how the ethnicity of people in Northwest River has been defined in relation to their Innu neighbours.

inflated prices run by an entrepreneurial Settler family, a
school, a church, a clinic and a Social Services office that
serves both communities. For other services, residents of
Sheshatshit go across to Northwest River or to Goose Bay.
Northwest River is a popular option as many residents in
Sheshatshit do not have cars. Every day people from
Sheshatshit cross the bridge to go to the stores, take-out or
post office. This flow is not reciprocated by residents of
Northwest River who rarely set foot in Sheshatshit.

Many of the government attempts since the 1960s to
promote economic growth have not been successful (Armitage,
1991:51). Unemployment has remained high, leaving many
families on social assistance. Traditional values are being
replaced with the material values of the secular consumer
society which now surrounds the community. Television is
watched regularly and is constantly on in many homes.

The majority of families in Sheshatshit are struggling to
cope with problems of low self-esteem and the experience of a
family life overshadowed by alcoholism and violence. The
stress which accompanies these conditions often hinders an
individual's ability to participate in the formation and
administration of community organizations.

Alcoholism and more recently bingo addictions have become
pervasive. In Innu-aimun the word for alcohol is "spirits"
and drinking for many people is felt to be means of

transcendence in a community which, in contrast to the country, is without spirits. Alcoholism is seen by many Innu to be caused by community life, loss of autonomy, and anomie, but historical data reveals that drinking for the Innu and the early Settlers was already a strong addiction in the mid - 1800s long before settlement. However, drinking patterns have changed with village life. In the past, the Innu and Settlers who enjoyed their drink were able to sever this addiction at least temporarily by virtue of having to hunt and trap for most of the year, during which time they had no access to alcohol.

Alcohol today is purchased in Goose Bay. For people without cars or access to a "lift", taxis are available. The director of the alcohol centre informed me that over 90% of the adults in the community are alcoholics. Alcoholism manifests itself in different ways. Broadly speaking in Sheshatshit there are three types of alcoholics[17]: 1) Binge drinkers are those who may go for long periods without drinking and then go on a drinking binge, usually with one or two other people. This type of drinking can go on non-stop for several days to be followed again by a dry period. 2) Dry alcoholics are people who do not drink but have alcoholic traits from either growing up in a home where people drank or

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[17] These "types" and the terms I have used to describe them are commonly used in the community.

giving up drinking without receiving treatment. 3) Alcoholics in "recovery" are people who have given up drinking through intensive treatment and who continue to work on overcoming addictive behaviours [18].

Related to alcoholism is the problem of a high suicide rate in Sheshatshit. In 1988, a total of 21 people, the majority of whom were between the ages of 15-24 attempted suicide (Armitage, 1989:29) [19]. Wotton's (1984) analysis of suicide rates among native people in Labrador reveal rates that are twice as high as native suicide rates in the rest of Canada and five times higher than the national average. Many accidental deaths and skidoo accidents have been alcohol related.

The effect of alcoholism on individuals and on the lives of families is quite obvious in Sheshatshit and for the most part, the Innu do not attempt to hide or deny its existence.

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[18] The causes of alcoholism are complex and controversial and will not be reviewed here. For a summary of reasons for alcohol and chemical abuse among the Innu see Armitage (1989:32-34). See also Savishinsky (1991) and Henriksen (1993) for an analysis of the social meanings associated with drinking in native society. The Innu Nation and the Mushua Innu Band Council (1992) published The People's Inquiry Gathering Voices: Finding Strength to Help our Children which exposes the tragic effects that alcoholism has had on the lives of the Innu of Utshimassit.

[19] News of a suicide or attempted suicide are fairly common. During my stay there was one attempted suicide and just after I left I heard news of another, this time a successful attempt. A young man in his late teens, the boyfriend of my host's niece, hung himself. His girlfriend had just given birth to their second child, and they had split up shortly before he took his own life.

During my first month of fieldwork, the level of drinking in the community was very severe. Several people suggested that this was a result of the boredom of summer and that people who usually go into the country in the spring had not gone because the outpost program had run out of funds that year[20].

Efforts have been made by community members to start a healing circle and other support groups which could address the problems of alcoholism, bingo addictions, suicide, abuse and neglect in families. Differing views exist as to where community priorities lie. Some people feel the problems related to abuse and addictions must be given priority before the community is able to take on larger and more practical development projects such as school control and self-government. Others believe that personal changes must go hand in hand with institutional and political change.

Coloured by addictions and the breakdown in family relationships, much of the social experience in the community revolves around coping with life day-to-day. Some people have quit drinking without treatment and then turned to bingo. The bingo games are held in Happy Valley- Goose Bay every night of the week between 7 and 9 pm. The community has now instituted the 'bingo bus' which ferries people to and from the bingo

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[20] The outpost program was instituted in the late 1970's. It is administered through the Band Council and provides transportation and subsidies which enable families to go into the country for up to three months in the fall and spring (see MacEachern, 1984).

games. Bingo has become a serious addiction for many people and the effects of this are visible on individuals and families whose entire income gets consumed by this game.

Government funding has supported the establishment of an Innu alcohol program centre. The centre is run by the Innu Nation and staffed by Innu counsellors who hold Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) meetings twice a week with as many as 30 to 40 people attending each meeting. The staff at the centre have helped with the formation of community healing circles. They have also helped to establish women's groups and men's groups which focus on overcoming addictions and dealing with scars from mistreatment received and/or inflicted. Unfortunately, efforts to establish support groups like the healing circle have often failed due to internal conflicts, which the group members are unable to resolve effectively.

A great source of discouragement and sometimes a cause of deep resentment is the demise of values which were integral to life in the country. Sharing which once characterized the nature of the relationship between hunters and their families did not transfer into settlement life. The ethic of sharing is sometimes renewed within and between immediate family groups when caribou and other wild meat are brought into the community. Though the expectation that people share what they have lingers, this practice collapses when individuals and families struggle to manage within the constraints of a cash

economy. The economic environment of community life does nothing to reinforce sharing. One informant lamented the loss of caring and sharing between community members and pointed out that the lack of sharing has deteriorated relationships of interdependence and become a divisive force between family groups.

Innu leaders and community members have somewhat ambiguous views on the presence of non-Innu institutions. The Roman Catholic Church, despite its enduring influence historically, is now becoming increasingly marginalized. Its influence became more pervasive when year-round settlement began. Previously, the long periods of separation from the mission and the priest allowed the Innu to return to their traditional religious practices when they returned to the country every fall. In the early years of settlement, the priest actively condemned the practice of the shaking tent, drumming and other sacred Innu rituals. They were instructed by the priest that these rituals were evil and that when practising them they were acting not in accordance with God but with the devil. Physical punishment by the priest for disobedience and not attending school classes in the early years of settlement has left many adults with sour memories.

The Church has admitted to some of its mistakes in the past. The changes being instituted by the mission today seem to have come too late. Though weddings, funerals, baptisms,

and Christmas celebrations remain popular, regular mass is not well attended. The Church has more recently become the locus of blame for the erosion of the culture and many traditional values. The Church and the school have become concrete representations of Innu colonization. Part of the dark history these institutions symbolize for the Innu is linked to physical and sexual abuse perpetrated in the domain of the Church and school. However, today these problems are not confined to the Church and the school.

The Innu Nation is in the process of taking over the administration of several non-Innu institutions in the community. Sheshatshit has established its own radio station which broadcasts for 10 to 12 hours a day. The station plays primarily Innu pop and rock music by Quebec and Labrador musicians. A phone-in line is operated for people to air their views, deliver messages, and make announcements. The radio is listened to regularly in most homes and has become an important means of informing people of local events. The radio has also been used as a means of facilitating communication on community concerns.

A component in the effort to "indigenize" local institutions has been the Innu Nation's lobby to involve more Innu staff in administering social services to the community. It is hoped that the greater participation of Innu staff will ensure a delivery of programs which can more effectively

address the specific cultural needs of Innu families. However, this is proving to be a complex and difficult process[21].

A large number of non-Innu people live and work in the community; many are married to Innu men and women. There is a fair degree of ambivalence towards non-Innu "outsiders" regardless of whether or not they have Innu spouses and children. The presence of non-Innu residents is a contentious issue; as residents they have access to the same subsidies as the Innu residents do. Several Innu have expressed indignation over this policy of resource distribution to non-Innu members of the community and wish to see the non-Innu residents ousted from the community altogether. It is not uncommon for a non-Innu person living or working in Sheshatshit to be harassed with racist remarks by an Innu person (for example see footnote 30 p. 135)[22].

The run down appearance of Sheshatshit in contrast to Northwest River may, in part, signify a symbolic assertion of difference. Schwimmer (1972) suggests that marginalized

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[21] Lyla Andrew (1992) prepared a study on the delivery of social services in Sheshatshit which points to the historical relationship between the Innu and Social Services as being one of domination and control. She argues that it is difficult for the Innu to recommend changes because the philosophical framework from which the Innu would recommend changes is fundamentally different from that of Social Services.

[22] This racism towards Whites is not so surprising when you witness the racism that residents in Goose Bay and Northwest River express towards the Innu.

Aboriginal groups may present themselves in opposition to the dominant White society through what might be seen as competitive acts which assert difference in relation to the perceived value system of others (1972:117-155, see also Kennedy, 1982). In Northwest River people are seemingly more affluent and take pride in their lawns, gardens, houses and cars. In Sheshatshit people are poor, and the services limited. The message conveyed here may be one of resistance to an imposed value system. An Innu informant explained that if he wears clean, new clothes other Innu might think he is "trying to be White". Another person said that he had a brief-case which he never used for his work because using recycled plastic bags was more characteristically Innu. His briefcase looked very new and sophisticated. Though he held an important position which involved a lot of travel and meetings with high level government officials, he went everywhere with plastic bags, a symbol of his Innu-ness. Sheshatshit, in its run down state may also be a symbol of Innu-ness and non-conformity, a statement of resistance to the dominant middle-class values of "White" society.

The word "community" has primarily negative connotations for the people of Sheshatshit. One day I asked an elder who was living in a tent in the woods between Goose Bay and Sheshatshit, "What's missing in the community?" "The country" she replied.

The elders, who lived most of their lives on the land, still prefer to remain in their tents for most of the year. These tents can be seen from the roads radiating out of town. Staying in the tents brings back a strong sense of the past and of an identity very much connected to the forest and the life within it. In the community, the signs of collective despair are everywhere, the vitality of country life is lost.

3.2 The Meaning of Community

Both the experience and concept of living in a fixed community were foreign to the nomadic Innu. Since year-round settlement began in the 1950s, Innu community life has been problematic. Today, the concept of community for most adults is one associated with social and political divisions along the lines of territorial sub-groups; the imposition of foreign institutions and values; and with social and cultural breakdown.

In the past, territorial and inter-band mobility allowed for a dynamic pattern of social organization (Mailhot, 1986:106). Historically, Innu communities were composed of social units which held a coherent self-identity, but had shifting social and geographic boundaries.

> A basic attribute of group identity [among the
> Innu] is the shared perception of a commonly
> used environment and a shared knowledge of its
> resources. Such a knowledge would be as
> flexible as group membership. At any specific

> instance the perceptions of group identity and
> land use would vary depending on the group's
> composition and the pooled knowledge of
> experience of individuals (Loring, 1992:30).

Community life introduced a form of social organization
in complete opposition to what had previously been known to
the Innu. The concept of community is an idea linked to a
state of consciousness. The "consciousness of community is,
then, encapsulated in [the] perception of its boundaries,
boundaries which are themselves largely constituted by people
in interaction" (Cohen, 1985:13). This consciousness of
community is developed through shared values and symbols of
meaning. The nomadic life of the Innu hunters was profoundly
connected to a very different consciousness of "community",
the boundaries of which were affirmed through rituals such as
makushan and later Holy Communion (which the Innu perceived as
being essentially the same as makushan). During these rituals
the Innu hunters collectively communed with the Caribou Spirit
and/or Jesus Christ, affirming their culture and the symbolic
boundaries of their community (Cohen, 1985:47, See also
Henriksen, 1989).

Although the idea of community has often been associated
with wholeness and integration, Cohen (1985) addresses the
meaning of community from a different angle embracing its
complexity and dualistic nature. The community of Sheshatshit

has developed what Cohen would describe as a public and private face.

> [T]he boundary as the community's public face is symbolically simple; but as the object of internal discourse it is symbolically complex. Thus, we can all attribute gross stereotypical features to whole groups: but, for the members of those groups such stereotypes applied to themselves as individuals would almost invariably be regarded as gross distortions, superficial, unfair and ridiculous... In the public face, internal variety disappears or coalesces into a simple statement. In its private mode, differentiation, variety and complexity proliferate (Cohen, 1985:74).

The private face of Sheshatshit is a divided one as it is composed of four distinct territorial sub-groups. Mailhot suggests that the establishment of these sub-groups is as recent as this century and the crystallization of social and political divisions between these groups occurred at the time of settlement in the 1960s. Though similar social groupings existed in the past, the corresponding social stratification did not. The emergence of a hierarchy of sub-groups within the community has its genesis in the contact period, during which time certain groups remained more isolated from trading posts, missions and the forces of modernization, then others. The degree of acculturation through contact with Euro-Canadian society was a primary influence in the formation of these sub-

groups (Mailhot, 1993:54-81)[23]. These internally ent... ...hed divisions have had less impact on the Innu youth today, who may be the first generation to share a community consciousness in contrast to identifying primarily with a specific territorial group (Mailhot, 1993:81).

This system of class and social position, which among other things determines access to political leadership, lies in contrast to the assumptions that many Canadians have of native communities as being socially cohesive and egalitarian. For most adults in Sheshatshit the experience of community has been shaped by these political and social divisions, as well as three decades of poverty, dependence, alcoholism and physical violence. Internally, the sense of community shared by its members is "refracted through all the complexities of their lives and experience" (Cohen, 1985:74). The consciousness many people in Sheshatshit have of their community is sometimes very dark and antagonistic towards its own wounded existence.

Year-round life in Sheshatshit has given rise to an internal community consciousness which exists, fundamentally in opposition to community. I refer to this as an "anti-community" consciousness. Though a consciousness of community

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[23] This is a brief summary of a complex social and political pattern which has emerged over the last century, for a detailed description of these groups and the manifestations of their stratification, see Mailhot (1993:54-81).

does exist both internally and in relation to the public world. Within this consciousness is an antagonistic force which is against its own existence. This paradoxical condition exists in many social relationships. For example in a relationship between two individuals living together, there may exist an intense degree of resentment and negative emotions which cause the couple to dislike each other and the relationship; however if they remain together, they still have a relationship which may be publicly regarded as being coherent. But internally the consciousness of the relationship is actually opposed, in part, to its own existence. The situation in Sheshatshit is somewhat more complex as in addition to an anti-community consciousness, there are currents of hope and expressions of healing and change.

Nevertheless, overall the lives of many people in Sheshatshit have been fraught with angst and pain, with a sense of loss and divisiveness. This sombre aspect of community consciousness has been encapsulated in the perception of its own boundaries, and the interactions between people living in this context, have served to constitute several of the symbolic boundaries of Sheshatshit.

Several fundamental problems have given rise to an "anti-community" consciousness: 1. The deep divisions and conflict created by the existence within the community of the four distinct territorial groups between whom differences of status

and prestige exist, each maintaining, to some degree, a consciousness and identity related to the location of its associated hunting territory. 2. The rituals, sharing, interdependence with other Innu and relative independence from non-Innu which characterized life prior to settlement no longer exist. Life in Sheshatshit today has few rituals, individualism and the nuclear family have replaced practices of sharing and interdependence. Although individualism has more scope for expression in the village, its expression is also countered by the frustration of being dependent on government and non-Innu institutions. 3. Village life is boring for many people, there is high unemployment, drinking, conflict, physical and sexual violence within and between families abound.

Political action over the past ten years has revived several concepts of Innu-ness from the past which have helped to create a growing sense of the potential an organized community has in bringing about social and political change. Cohen writes that myths and memories of the past can often serve as a "'charter' for contemporary action whose legitimacy derives from its very association with the cultural past" (1985:99). Political action has produced a new set of symbols which have served to constitute a more positive public presentation of a community consciousness. The meanings that individuals within the community attach to symbols, whether

they be from the past or otherwise, may differ, but what is important to the construction of community is the sharing of the same symbols. A concept of community regardless of its coherence internally has become necessary in order to secure political gains. In the public political sphere the concept of community holds some positive meaning in so far as symbols of Innu-ness from the past and are being employed. The caribou, country, land claims and self-government provide people in Sheshatshit with shared symbols and common markers of their Innu-ness. These symbols of ethnicity and of future goals have infused some positive meaning and solidarity to a concept of community which has for the most part been constructed on a consciousness of resistance to its own existence.

3.3 Loss of the Sacred

Several of the destructive social forces of community life can be understood by looking at the change Innu religious life has undergone since permanent settlement. The provincial game laws drastically reduced access to the hunting and consumption of Innu animals. These activities were the basis of an interdependence between Innu family groups as well as between individuals and the animal spirits. The loss of hunting rights impeded the persistence of several religious practices and ritualized social forms. The cultural and religious forms of the past were practised and reinforced through an interactive relationship with the animals and the

environment. The material culture of the past existed in equilibrium with the sacred spirits of the forest and animals. Through these forces, the natural world was explained and a context was provided for survival. Life was held in balance, and infused with a sense of the sacred. In Innu cosmology "nature and society coalesce... . The spirits are everywhere in nature and the Innu interact with the spirits all the time" (Henriksen, 1993:6).

Settlement created a dichotomy in which life in the country began to be perceived as representing in its entirety, the world of the Innu. Life in the community came to be seen as the antithesis of Innu reality, uninhabited by the sacred forces which infuse life and social relationships in the country with meaning.

The breakdown in social relationships in Sheshatshit can in part be attributed to a loss of the sacred forces which in the past provided a charter for the concept of self in relation to others and to that which is sacred. As Pandian explains:

> Human beings acquire their humanness by becoming symbols to themselves and others; they exist as subject and object, and as self and other, in an interactional relationship in a world of symbols that involves taking the role of the other and organizing thoughts and feelings in a culturally coherent and appropriate manner (Pandian, 1991:2-3).

Culture is largely a process; constantly being created by people through their interaction with each other. This conception of culture as a dynamic process is apparent in the way in which people "perceive meaning in or attach meaning to social behaviour" (Cohen, 1985:17). Religious practices determine different configurations of culture in so far as they regulate social relationships.

> Cultures everywhere have symbols of the self
> that convey the characteristics and meaning of
> human identity and cultures everywhere have
> symbols that convey the characteristics and
> meaning of supernatural identity; in other
> words, symbols that signify "who am I" or
> "what am I" and "who or what is supernatural"
> are universal (Pandian, 1991:3).

Religion provides symbols through which the "super-natural" elements of human identity can be recognized, and through which people experience "self" in relation to and as part of a greater sacred whole. Pandian suggests that different cultural formulations can be examined through the cultural representations of the supernatural, the "sacred other" and cultural representations of human identity, the "symbolic self". The identity of self is constructed through its relationship with the sacred other.

Innu religious forms had provided a means through which the "symbolic self" interacted with the "sacred other". Sometimes mediated by shamans, rituals or activities such as hunting would provide fertile ground for religious thought and

action while at the same time enabling the pursuit of the practical goals of everyday life (Tanner, 1989:208). Women, who did not necessarily participate directly in the hunt, were nevertheless mediums for the animals spirits as they dreamt about the location of the animals. Dreams provided the inspiration for the designs women embroidered onto hunting garments.

The presence of Euro-Canadian institutions, fixed residence in houses which inhibited social mobility, and participation in the cash economy of a consumer society has had "drastic repercussions for how the Innu organized their daily activities" (Henriksen, 1993:2). The social organization of community life has largely destroyed the ability of the Innu to "use their social relations and cultural apparatus as tools to maintain their self-respect and sense of self-hood" (1993:2).

The conception of the "sacred other" in Innu religious ideology has largely lost its role in the lives of many community members. It would be incorrect to suggest that there is no religious sense in the lives of the Sheshatshit Innu. But community life has deprived the Innu of their access to spiritual power and created a condition today of spiritual powerlessness (Henriksen, 1993:8-9). Much of the social breakdown occurring is a reflection of the breakdown of a culture, the basis of which was a religious ideology. The role

of the sacred other today lacks clear definition or understanding in the lives of many Innu. Thus the framework previously provided for the production of symbols upon which self-identity and social relationships were constructed is now hazy and not fully understood by the younger generations. The perceived meanings upon which social interactions are based, are in many instances uncertain as the old codes are mixed up with secular values. Many people in Sheshatshit still believe in the rituals and sacred forms of the past but lack the necessary knowledge to practice them. Since these rituals, the use of the drum and the shaking tent, were forbidden by the church, this knowledge now lies solely with the elders, many of whom have recently passed away.

It is important to note that two new religious ideologies have been introduced to the community which have provided several Innu families with a new coherent framework of beliefs. The members of the Pentecostal Church and active participants in the A.A. program stand out in the community in their ability to overcome addictive behaviours and in the maintenance of positive and constructive social relationships. Antze (1987:149) points out that "A.A. does far more than to help the compulsive drinker shake off a troublesome habit. It also draws him into a community that globally reorders his life". Though A.A. does not claim to be a religion, it teaches people that their recovery is dependant on the assistance of

a greater power and in the steps to recovery reference is made
directly to God. The Pentecostal Church in Northwest River has
provided several Innu families with a entirely different
perspective on life, and drawn them into a strong and cohesive
spiritual community which has provided them with a new road
map for their lives[24].

The narratives and myths of Innu religious traditions in
the past which used to accompany and inform the practices of
daily life are now silent in the community. The old maps of
reality have not worked here. New maps are gradually being
introduced; some people are finding guidance through A.A.,
others through the Pentecostal Church and many are looking for
political solutions. For some residents the political values
embodied in the fight for self-government and autonomy from
Euro-Canadian institutions are providing a new framework for
action. Through the struggle for independent nation status,
attempts are being made to integrate the past, overcome the
present, and work out a plan for the future.

However, the symbolic power of Innu ethno-nationalism is
relatively superficial in the private realm of community life
as it applies predominantly in relation to the "other";
outsiders, Whites, government, and the media. Internally, the

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[24] I encountered no prejudices expressed towards members of the
Pentecostal Church or the A.A. group, both of whom have had
something of a "born again" experience. There is a high degree of
tolerance towards the autonomy of the individual in this context.

meaning ethnic-nationalism holds for people is complex and produces a dissonance between how people feel about their Innu identity individually and how their identity is collectively portrayed by politicians. This dissonance is reflected in the issue of school control where community participation is often undermined by political apathy, divisions and antagonisms.

Chapter 4

Innu Nationalism: The Past in Pursuit of the Future

>...you see all of us I think, has a seed that
> is planted in us, we all know where we belong
> but sometimes we are confused about how strong
> that seed should be. We have to retrain
> ourselves to think that we can be strong and
> proud... (President, Innu Nation).

Politics has become a central part of everyday life in Sheshatshit. Many of the "webs of significance" in which the Innu are currently suspended are political webs. The political culture which has developed over the last fifteen to twenty years reflects a growing political consciousness and a strong desire on the part of Innu leaders to free themselves from the tutelage and control of Euro-Canadian bureaucrats and missionaries.

Innu leaders have, since post-settlement political activities began, espoused a highly ethno-nationalistic ideology which directly confronts the legitimacy of the state (Tanner, 1993:76). Tanner argues that this form of political expression is rooted in the cultural history of the Innu, who maintain that they have always had a concept of independent nationhood, albeit hard to verify (Tanner, 1993:77). Today the campaign for self-government is infused with symbols of Innu ethnicity that revitalize the memory of an Innu past and provide a general framework for a future which is distinctly

defined as "Innu". As illustrated in the previous chapter, the ethnic symbols being employed are effective primarily in the political arena; within the community the meaning these symbols hold is more complex.

The transformations in the political organization of the Innu over the past 100 or more years have been quite dramatic. Prior to settlement a primarily egalitarian form of political organization existed. During the early settlement years, overwhelmed by the rapidity of change and the Innu responded with relative submission to the imposition of a political hierarchy by the Church. Soon after the first generation of formally educated youth came of age, a new political body came into being. Today Innu Nation politics are forceful, highly independent and nationalistic.

4.1 An Overview of Political Development

Early structures of leadership and authority were, according to Mailhot and Michaud (1965:97-110) and McGee (1961:35-37) situationally determined. In the case of group caribou hunts, a different chief was selected each time and his authority was limited to a particular hunt. The older, more experienced hunters usually held these positions; they were never hereditary (Mailhot and Michaud 1961:97-110). The hunting groups were made up of bilateral kin and membership was fluid and flexible. The male elder was often the consensual leader (Tanner, 1993b:1).

During the large summer gatherings, a chief would be selected by the missionary, however this position of leadership would not necessarily be accorded recognition by other community members. Within the family tent the father was supposedly the boss and the chief carried no weight. The father "may be influenced by his cronies, by the will of his wife, and even by his children and other members of his household. The chief does not even enter into consideration. In effect there is no chief" (McGee, 1961:36).

A common misconception amongst ethnologists studying "primitive" societies was to view egalitarian societies as apolitical and devoid of power structures. This was due to the early conceptions of power as being based on relations of command-obedience (Clastres, 1987:7-26). A similar tendency occurs in Speck's accounts of Innu political organization prior to settlement in the early 1900s. In this account the Innu were described as totally lacking political and social organization and community ritual prior to settlement. He attributed this condition to the vast country, sparse population base and the seasonal separation into small family groups which remained primarily out of contact for most of the year (1935:16-21). To the extent that religious and political activities among the Innu pertained to flexible and territorially mobile groups, they did lack the type of organizational structure that might have existed within a more

fixed and bounded community. Speck's conception of the political hindered his ability to understand the forms of political organization which did exist outside of a fixed form of social organization.

Henriksen (1989) who lived among the Innu from 1966-68 provides some insight into the values and inherent tensions which existed within the leadership and social organization of the Naskapi hunters of Utshimassit. Leadership and social organization were characterized by the tension between autonomy and sharing. The distribution of meat and skins by hunters to families in their immediate camp and visitors played an essential role in assurance of their own survival. And in the case of sickness or a bad hunt, it assured greater mobility between camps and maintained a system of generalized reciprocity. The ability of a hunter to provide meat and skins to camp members was an expression of his strength and competence as a hunter (1989:41). Given the equal distribution of material wealth among the Naskapi, the role of wotshimao or "leader of the hunt" was determined by skill and reputation and not by material status. Every man who had a wife and ammunition (signs of autonomy) was able to compete for this position (1989:48). The role of leader was always changing and would often depend on who left the camp first in the morning and who decided to follow. There always had to be a leader in a group hunt, but hunters would occasionally go out on their

own (1989:45). Leadership, was generally enjoyed in proportion to one's ability as a hunter, but a lesser hunter could also succeed in attaining the position of leader, if he so desired, even if only for one day (1989:48).

The egalitarian and consensual process used in the assignment of leaders did not reflect the lack of importance or status of this position. Henriksen wrote, "There is no doubt that it is extremely meaningful for a Naskapi to be a first man" (1989:47). The strong sense of competition in the hunt would be channelled into who could shoot and give away the most caribou (1989:49-50). The stress that the Innu put on the values of equality, independence and autonomy existed in tension with the position of the wotshimao and created a dilemma in Innu culture (1989:51-52).

Leacock commented on the relative lack of rank differences between individuals in Northwest River while she was doing fieldwork there in the 1950s.

> I was struck particularly by the unquestioned acceptance of and respect for each individual; by the fact that all persons, irrespective of age or sex were not only respected for their real abilities, but were accorded considerable tolerance for their weaknesses (1981:40).

She provides an illustrative example of this while trying to buy a canoe.

> I was surprised at the blunt way my informant derided his brother's ability to make one. Old Pien, he said, was the one who made a good canoe. Later I questioned the brother, to get

> the other half of the story-so I thought- and
> to my surprise he said as bluntly, "Me, I make
> a lousy canoe. Old Pien is the one who makes a
> good canoe." The brother made, however,
> beautiful snowshoes, and was calmly proud of
> his work (1981:40).

However, as pointed out in the previous chapter, differences in status have been attributed to the distinct family groups associated with specific hunting territories. Prior to settlement the four subdivisions within the band were distinct but closely connected kinship groups. Since then a lot of intermarriage has taken place, making the kinship networks in the community quite complex (Mailhot, 1993).

Today patronage among these groups dominates the political landscape in the community. One's post-secondary educational possibilities and access to jobs is largely determined by whether or not someone from your group or extended family has a position in the Innu Nation or Band Council. The higher-status groups who had aligned themselves with the Church were among the first to receive houses and their children were the first to attend school. As a result several members of this group have come to occupy many of the leadership positions.

Formal political organization in the community began with a period of symbolic chiefs, put into place by the missionaries. During the early years of settlement the Innu lacked a unified political ideology or a public voice with

which to espouse one. In 1969, when the Churchill Falls hydro-
electric project flooded vast tracks of their hunting
territory and left Innu camps and hunting gear under water, no
public outcry was heard from the Innu (Tanner, 1993:77). At
this point, very few Innu were fluent in English or familiar
enough with the government bureaucracy and the media to voice
any outrage they may have felt (Armitage, personal
communication). Prior to the 1970s, the Sheshatshit Innu were
more or less isolated from mainstream aboriginal political
groups in Canada (Tanner, 1993:78).

Innu political organization did not gain real momentum
until the mid-1970's. The early political leaders were young
men; the first generation to grow up in the community. They
were the first Innu to have received a formal education
in English and were able to read and write in Innu-aimun. In
1973, when government funding became available to Native
groups from the federal Department of Indian Affairs and
Northern Development, these young, educated leaders began to
take a prominent role in addressing what they perceived to be
the "real" interests[25] of the community.

Initially the Innu joined the Native Association of
Newfoundland and Labrador (NANL). In 1975, the NANL changed

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[25] I am referring to the interests identified by the Innu
leaders who were expressing the concerns of the Innu as
opposed to those defined by the Church.

its name to the Indian and Metis Association of Newfoundland
and Labrador (IMANL). Shortly after the IMANL was established,
the Innu leaders broke away and formed the Naskapi Montagnais
Innu Association (NMIA, later to become the Innu Nation)
(Kennedy, 1987:16-17). The break from IMANL was based on their
motivation to increase direct funding for their own political
agenda and also because the Innu were concerned that Mi'kmaqs
from island Newfoundland would dominate leadership positions
within IMANL. The Innu leaders claimed that their Mi'kmaq
partners were less aboriginal (Kennedy, 1987:17). Despite
their relative inexperience, Innu politicians proved to be
highly instrumental in their approach.

> In pursuing their own specific political
> goals, Labrador Innu leaders will often deal
> in an openly assertive manner with any others
> who express different aims to their own. This
> is even the case when dealing with leaders of
> the larger neighbouring aboriginal groups, the
> Labrador Inuit or the Quebec Innu, and it is
> also often the case when dealing with non-
> aboriginals. Even allies, if they do not agree
> with a leader's aim and strategies, may find
> themselves dealt with in an unexpectedly
> hostile manner (Tanner, 1993:81-82).

In the late 1970's allies from mainstream Canadian indigenous
groups as well as non-Innu consultants, social scientists and
political activists began arriving in Sheshatshit. Some of
these individuals were particularly influential in introducing
theories of dependency and decolonization to Innu leaders.
Many of these theories provided Innu leaders of the time with

a framework and a vocabulary through which their ideas could be expressed.

The period from 1977 to 1986 saw the growth and expression of a pan-Innu ethnic-nationalist ideology among the Innu leaders. Leaders from Sheshatshit and Innu communities in Quebec travelled to Geneva and elsewhere, meeting with the United Nations and other agencies to protest the treatment of the Innu by the Canadian government. In the early 1980s, the leadership began focusing their efforts on the use of Innu airspace for low-level flight training by air forces from Canada, the United States, Germany, Holland, and Great Britain. Supporters from Canadian peace groups, churches, the general public, as well as European peace groups, rallied around the Innu in their opposition to low-level flying.

In 1990, the NMIA changed its name to the Innu Nation. The Innu Nation has taken an aggressive role in negotiating for territorial and political rights with the federal government. Having never relinquished control of their lands by treaty or given consent to government use of Innu lands and resources, the Innu Nation demands that their aboriginal rights to the land and to self-government be recognized. Gaining control of Nitassinan is regarded as essential to retaining their culture, relationship to land, _Innu-assi_ and traditional spirituality.

Self-government is described by the Innu Nation as being:

the right of Innu to be self-determining now
and for the many generations of Innu to come.
It means an adequate land and resource base
and control of those lands and resources. It
means adequate jurisdictions to run our own
institutions such as schools and other
programs for our people that include the
special needs of children, elders and single
parents. It means adequate finances derived
from our lands and resources and compensations
for past and continuing illegal use of our
lands and resources. It means that we will
make the decisions about what other uses can
be made of our lands. If permits or licenses
for use of our lands are issued we will issue
them and decide on the royalties and terms and
conditions attached to the licenses (Innu
Nation, 1992b)

Statements like these have provoked conflicts with other

interest groups in Goose Bay. At stake is the livelihood of

close to 8,000 residents that may be directly or indirectly

affected by Innu government. Innu protest actions over the

last decade have enraged many previously supportive members of

the local non-Innu population, who currently bear little

sympathy or support for the Innu cause (see also Armitage and

Kennedy, 1989).

The broader Innu population span the borders of Northern

Quebec and Labrador and therefore have overlapping claims, but

are forced to work through their respective provincial

organizations. This has further complicated the land claims

process. The Innu Nation had previously rejected the land

claims process as it stood. They argued against the

extinguishment clause, and the disunity inflicted upon the

Innu by having the Quebec and Labrador Innu as act as separate participants (Tanner, 1992:153). The comprehensive claims process, the Innu Nation claims, is unjust as it now stands because self-government is not guaranteed as the outcome and the process also tends to be restricted to land and resource issues. The alternative routes to self-government agreements through other forms of negotiations "result in delayed powers which do not have constitutional protection" (Innu Nation, 1992b)

Innu protest actions resulted in the federal government offering to accelerate their land claims negotiations and begin the process of framework negotiations (Tanner, 1992:154). The Innu Nation is currently fighting for a "moratorium on all development and licensing of activities in the aboriginal claims territory unless there is consent by the aboriginal people..." (Innu Nation, 1992b:4). Other demands require that an independent body be set up to regulate who qualifies for negotiations, the level of loan funding, and whether or not funding gets cut off (Innu Nation, 1992b:4). As it currently stands the federal government can simply cut off funding if they are dissatisfied with the way a Native organization is conducting itself.

Characteristic of Innu leaders is their principled and independent approach to setting forth demands in negotiations

with both the provincial and federal governments. This
stubbornness often works in their interests.

4.2 Nationalism and Ethnicity in Innu Politics

Nationalism is perhaps the most powerful force in the
political world today. The passionate expression of an ethnic
identity which often accompanies nationalism has inspired
great emotional commitment and taken on manifold expressions
amongst peoples in numerous countries of the world today.
Nationalism, according to Gellner, is primarily a political
principle which maintains that the political and the cultural
unit should be congruent. "Nationalism as a sentiment, or as
a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle.
Nationalist *sentiment* is the feeling of anger aroused by the
violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction
aroused by its fulfilment" (1983:3).

Both Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1991) see nationalism
as a recent phenomenon which has grown out of the conditions
of industrial society. The concept of nation-ness or
nationalism "are cultural artifacts of a particular kind" ones
which today "command ... profound emotional legitimacy"
(Anderson, 1991:4). Gellner suggests that it is the
homogeneity imposed on previously specialized and distinctive
cultural groups by industrialization that gives rise to
nationalist sentiments. The setting of ethno-political
boundaries has proven to be necessary for the increasing

number of minority groups throughout the world who find themselves in the midst of a modern industrial society which seeks to assimilate them into its expansive and homogeneous melting pot. Innu society has been increasingly permeated by the forces and values of industrial society which are constantly conveyed, vividly and convincingly, on televisions throughout the community.

New technologies and literacy have influenced the recent expressions of ethno-nationalism among the Innu. It may be that similar political ideologies existed amongst the Innu in the past, however the current expression of Innu ethno-nationalism appears to be part of a global political phenomenon. Ethno-nationalist politics are integrally related to the existence of the modern industrial state and the struggle for control of political resources (Kellas, 1991:2). Within the current configuration of state politics in Canada, ethnicity is a key resource to be mobilized in this struggle and Innu have been particularly effective in their employment of this resource in the public domain.

The ethnic basis for nationalism is argued by scholars from both primordialist and contextual perspectives. Stack (1986:1), promoting the primordial roots of ethnic nationalism writes "ethnicity becomes an expression of a basic group identity, basic in that fundamental human attributes are passed down from one generation to the next". The group

identity provides cohesion through which individuals experience themselves to be part of a collectivity with distinct boundaries which separate them from "others" (1986:1). Geertz provides an interpretation for the "intangible dynamics of ethnicity or ethnonationalism" (Stack, 1986:1). His emphasis is on the strength and persistence of these primordial ties which he suggests stem from "the assumed 'givens' - of social existence" such as kinship ties, being part of a religious community and a language group with its accompanying social practices. One is not only tied to a collective, a culture and ethnic identity by the relationships to kin, neighbour, fellow believer, or "personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself" (Geertz 1973:259). It is however, paradoxical that, today "primordial" identities which are pre-modern in origin have become the hallmark of contemporary political movements (Kellas, 1991:53).

In his discussion of new social movements, Melucci (1989) characterizes recent forms of collective action as being not necessarily distinct from traditional class conflicts but emerging as new responses to complex contemporary social systems. He states that:

> Contemporary movements operate as signs, in
> the sense that they translate their actions
> into symbolic challenges to the dominant
> codes. ... Collective action affects the
> dominant institutions by modernizing their
> cultural outlook and procedures, as well as by
> selecting new elites (1989:12).

Melucci suggests two types of change produced by collective
action. The first is a "molecular" change which takes place at
the cultural level and affects ways of life, and the formation
of both personal and social relationships. The second type of
change is one which influences the development of institutions
and political systems (1989:77).

Parallel macro and micro manifestations of ethnicity
also exist. Ethnicity is primarily a label which describes the
process whereby social actors use symbols to provide an image
of "us" in relation to "them" as a means of identifying
oneself and organizing a social group (Wallman, 1979:3).
Micro-scale ethnicity is expressed through interpersonal
interactions which the Innu have when they encounter Whites
while going to the store, post office or taking a taxi in
Northwest River or Goose Bay, whereas macro-scale ethnicity is
"a strategic manipulation of symbolic resources by ethnic
elites .... it assumes an organized political form, and is
directed energetically at states and other collectivities"
(Armitage, 1991b:3).

Traits which have come to characterize Innu ethnicity are
canvas tents, country life, religious practices such as the

ritual sharing of the makushan feast, drumming, respect for animals and the environment, and the use of snowshoes and traditional clothing (Armitage 1991b:7). While these images serve as symbols for the expression of Innu identity through the mass media, other aspects of Innu culture are left out of the description. The unacknowledged aspects of Innu life today include activities like bingo, dances, rock music, watching television, skidooing, skating, playing hockey, broomball, going to school, attending A.A. meetings or services at the Pentecostal Church. There is a dissonance between Innu life in the community and the symbols employed to represent Innu identity in the media. It is upon this dissonance that political opponents of the Innu in Goose Bay focus their energies. But the dissonance has also become a mild irritant in the consciousness of many Innu who are questioning what it really means to be Innu.

In the winter and fall of 1993, a series of community meetings were held by the Innu Nation in Sheshatshit to address concerns expressed by community members on the growing dichotomy between the country and community. Broadly speaking, the community members who are closest to the land and the traditional lifestyle tend to have the least political input. Yet country life is consistently held up with reverence by political leaders as a symbol of Innu-ness. A few community members are now challenging some employees of the Innu Nation

who seldom go into the country and are therefore accused of losing their connection to the land; the essence of "traditional" culture. The Innu Nation as a political body may be out of touch with country life and there are several leaders who do not spend time in the country; however the president of the Innu Nation and several other leaders do go into the country for several months every year.

This dilemma is a perennial one for leaders of many social movements who are confronted by the need to seek political recognition and legal guarantees which then force them to participate in government administrations and bureaucratic systems, which in turn threaten their very autonomy and survival (Keane and Mier in Melucci 1989:9). The process of becoming institutionalized as a result of trying to bring about social change presents a real challenge for Innu leaders. Though it is an ongoing struggle to avoid the entrenchment of bureaucratization, the difficulties in doing so are reflected in the degree to which the language and organizational structures of the government administration have been adopted by the Innu leaders (see also Dyck, 1991:119-120).

The Labrador Innu have developed a more pronounced and forceful indigenous nationalist ideology than many Aboriginal groups elsewhere in Canada. Tanner suggests several contributing factors.

Although they have always been in Labrador,
they have effectively been ignored and have
become marginalized. They are a people who
are, in the eyes of the majority society that
surrounds them, 'hidden in plain sight'. This
social marginality can be seen in their
relations with governments and other groups in
the wider Canadian society, but also and
especially within Labrador society which has
virtually grown up around them, but which has
failed to find for them a satisfactory place.
To convey their concerns from within this
perceived situation of isolation has led them
to adopt more and more strident and extreme
forms of communication in their attempt to be
listened to and to be taken seriously (Tanner,
1993:94).

Tanner suggests that the recent and rapid loss of autonomy

amongst the Labrador Innu as well as social isolation from the

surrounding Settler and Euro-Canadian communities have

contributed to the emergence of Innu nationalism.

Nationalism may provide the Innu with a new forum for the

establishment of an Innu identity and autonomy in tune with

the values of the modern world of which they are now

inextricably a part. The only means for survival and

relatively peaceful existence for the Innu as a distinct group

now appears to be through the legitimate assertion of

political boundaries. And, as Anderson points out, "nation-

ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political

life of our time" (1991:3).

Despite the political and cultural validity of the

nationalist agenda of the Innu Nation, the leaders

nevertheless have to deal with a dramatic contradiction. At

the political level, they overtly advertise Indian identity:
language, culture and Indian-ness are displayed with strength
and pride. But subconsciously it is still believed that the
way to achieve social status is through either being born into
or marrying into more acculturated family groups who are "less
Indian" (Mailhot, 1993:119-138). Early Innu political leaders
who in the late seventies began challenging the legitimacy of
the state and asserting an ethnic nationalist ideology were
actually the first generation of Innu to have been raised
primarily in the community. These early leaders were educated
in the community, and some later finished high school in St.
John's. Many confessed to not having spent time in the
country and yet they are able espouse the interests of the
Innu who do remain close to the land and traditions. Another
paradox of nationalism is that the cultural symbols that are
used in the rhetoric to serve political agendas overshadow the
acknowledgment of new cultural practices, like dances, bingo,
shopping and television which are also an important part of
life in Sheshatshit today. Thus ethnic symbols which seek to
define Innu-ness on a collective level undermine the validity
of an individual's life experience which are not accurately
reflected in the ethnic rhetoric.

4.3 The Innu Nation and the Community

The Innu Nation's overall purpose, stated in their
constitution, is to work towards the fulfilment of sovereignty

and self-determination. The President and most of the administrative staff are based in Sheshatshit. The staff is made up of approximately fifteen people working in the areas of finance, health, social services, education, territorial rights, the environment, communications and administration. The Board of Directors is made up of six representatives from each community, half of whom are male and half female. Gender equity on the Board of Directors is now written into the constitution.

The president of the Innu Nation is in his second term of office. The term of office for the president has recently been extended from two to three years. The 1992 elections for the president and board of directors of the Innu Nation took place about six weeks after my arrival in Sheshatshit. This is an event which is charged with tension. For over a week prior to the vote everyone is preoccupied with the election. A lot of heavy drinking occurs in the period leading up to, during, and after the election. Due to the degree of patronage practised, different family groups have vested interests in who is elected as president and members of the board of directors.

There are complaints of too many 'Whites' working as consultants for the Innu Nation and taking away Innu jobs. Some people are concerned that as the Innu Nation brings the community closer to self-government the Innu Nation will assume too much control over community institutions, creating

a new structure of centralized authority. This is perceived as a problem for many people regarding the Innu Nation's take-over of the school.

The leaders are caught in a double bind. While attempting to revitalize the culture and economy by taking control of local institutions, the leaders often take on roles of tutelage and control previously associated with outside government agents or missionaries thus creating divisions, and giving rise to suspicions and resistance between community members.

Though Innu society did have traditional figures of authority in the context of hunting, this position was not static; and everyone had a strong sense of his or her own personal autonomy. People seldom asserted dominance over one another. A person would be free to speak his or her own mind despite the fact that the rest of the group may or may not be in agreement. If people disagreed they could move their camp elsewhere. (Tanner, 1993:82). The existence of distinct and established positions of leadership continues to be difficult to accept for many individuals who themselves are without access to political power. In order for individuals to maintain their leadership positions it is crucial that they continue to recognize and treat everyone in the community as leaders in their own right. This approach, however, is hard to maintain as Innu leaders today are confronted with the

bureaucratic structures, deadlines and pressures that reinforce a tendency to emulate the somewhat authoritarian practices of leaders elsewhere. Traditional models of leadership continue to determine the way in which leaders are evaluated by community members. However, in the public domain, Innu politicians are evaluated by a different set of standards corresponding with Western political values. Innu leaders are forced to negotiate between an internal leadership style which reflects their Innu-ness and a public style which reflects the degree to which they have mastered the language and form essential in their dealings with provincial and federal bureaucrats. The latter form tends to dominate as Innu leaders spend more and more time in their offices and travelling to meetings in other parts of the country.

Presently, the Innu Nation has a president who, in the opinion of outside observers and some community members, is a very responsible and visionary leader with a commitment to improving conditions in the community. However, as one informant pointed out, if a less competent person is voted in, all the financial resources for the entire community become vulnerable to mismanagement. Some people in Sheshatshit are bothered by the issue of accountability in the context of self-government. However, the problem of centralized financial accountability is one that every democratically elected government must face. While there is a distinct fear

amongst community members of having too much responsibility placed in the hands of one person or family group, at the same time the majority of people do not want to take too much responsibility for fear of making mistakes, being held accountable, and criticized. Thus the person in a position of leadership is covertly admired, but overtly criticized.

Sheshatshit, like communities elsewhere in North America, is a social and political terrain in which the very concept of community is shifting and contested (Fortmann and Roe, 1993:141). Community solidarity is produced in response to issues like school control, but quickly breaks down upon consideration of what an Innu-run institution would involve. School control represents the institution of a new group of Innu elites; the Innu principal and teachers will be faced with the problem of how to manage and delegate authority and control, as will the Innu Nation, which will be in charge of hiring an Innu staff team for the school, thus falling prey to accusations of patronage and nepotism.

The school as a symbol of Innu colonization has long been a source of discontent for the Sheshatshit Innu. Historically criticism has been expressed towards the school for its inappropriate curriculum, the disciplinary measures previously used by priests, sisters and teachers, and the pressure the school traditionally put on parents to remain in the community. Though these conditions have changed, the legacy of

school traditionally put on parents to remain in the community. Though these conditions have changed, the legacy of the school as a form of colonization has remained. Earlier research contracted by the NMIA (see for example Tyrnauer, 1983) documented some of the problems in the Sheshatshit school and the intention to change the system has been a seed in the minds of Innu leaders for many years. Native groups elsewhere in Canada have for several decades been struggling to set up band operated schools (see Barman et. al., 1986, 1987; Canadian Education Association, 1984; Dyck, 1983, 1991; Kirkness, 1992; National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Ponting, 1989). The long-term aspiration of Innu leaders to take control of the school eventually came to fruition in 1991.

The catalyst for the Innu Nation to begin the fight for school control was provided by Innu teachers. In 1991, a few high school students were asked to read a political statement to a group of visiting politicians. A non-Innu teacher objected to the Innu Nation involving students in the pursuit of their political agendas. An Innu teacher argued that non-Innu teachers should stay out of Innu affairs. The rest of the Innu teachers then complained to the Innu Nation that it was time control of the school be handed over to the Innu. They were tired of being told what to do by the Whites. This event was followed by the Innu Nation bolting the school doors and the entire community participated in a boycott which lasted

about six weeks before the provincial government entered into negotiations for the transfer of school control. The Innu Education Management Committee (IEMC) submitted a proposal to the provincial Minister of Education for the transfer of school control which advocated that "education is the most vital component in preparation for self-determination and for the survival of Aboriginal people" (IEMC, 1992).

Despite the general support for self-government, some people have voiced their concerns about the ability of the community to effectively run local institutions and make self-government work. As long as school control is conceptualized by the community as an issue of control in the context of attaining Innu self-government, three problems remain:

1. The issue of centralized leadership and control and the implications for self-government within the community remains unresolved and continues to be a source of dissent.

2. The attempt to have the community participate in redesigning and restructuring the concept of education will yield questionable results as long as the current structure remains.

3. The very process of the Innu Nation attempting to involve the community will become quite political and possibly will undermine the potential of effectively involving the community in creative and inventive approaches to transpose Innu cultural values onto a formal educational system.

Chapter 5

What is the Problem with the School?

Nobody has problems with the school, they just
drop out (Survey, 1993:B9).

When formal schooling began in Sheshatshit, the priest
held fast to the notion of the school as an effective means of
assimilating the Innu. When the first residents of Sheshatshit
started sending their children to school they believed that
education would be a means for their children to benefit from
the economic opportunities available to people who spoke
English. Neither of these dreams were realised. The
incongruity of the structure and content of a Western school
system with the values and lifestyle of the Innu left a legacy
of resentment and alienation. But attitudes towards the school
today parallel the many changes occurring in Innu society;
criticisms of the school are mixed with the recognition of its
importance for the future of Innu youth.

Many of the difficulties with the school are, in part a
result of the clash of cultures and values systems. However,
today the deeply rooted troubles associated with community
life permeate the walls of the school. The problem of formal
education is exacerbated by the confusion of change in the
cultural practices of the community and thus traditional

informal methods of education outside the school are breaking down as well.

5.1 The Establishment of the School

The missionaries first brought the Innu into contact with Western education and its implicit goal of transmitting values of language, religion and of Western civilization more generally. Prior to settlement, missionaries literate in Innu-aimun began to teach people hymns and to read the Bible during the summer. The present school is named after Peenamin Mackenzie, a strong matriarch, who gained a reputation among the missionaries for her dedication to teaching.

In 1952, when the first permanent mission was established, the Oblate missionary began teaching lessons in geography, math, English and religion, in the mission house during the summer months. Prior to the school coming under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic school board, lessons were taught in Innu-aimun (Ryan, 1988:12). Like the first Jesuit priest, Pere Le Jeune, who spent a winter with the Montagnais in the early 1600s (Leacock 1980:27-28), this missionary saw education as the primary means by which to assimilate and control the Indian population. Although supportive of the Innu maintaining their language and practice of caribou hunting, he upheld the need to educate Innu children, believing that this was the door to the future.

Plate 1

Reproduction of a photograph of Father J. Pirson instructing
a group of Innu students in the mission school circa 1956.
Source: Innu Resource Centre Collection

Education is primarily a form of cultural transmission.
Singleton (1974:27) points out that "culture itself is often
defined in essentially educational terms ...as the shared
products of human learning". For the Innu, the beginning of

formal institutionalized Western education is equated with their cultural decline. Western education has presented the Native child with a foreign language, culture and way of being; a system of thought and action which is in stark contrast to the child's cultural experience of the Native values of self-reliance, interpersonal relations, cooperation, expression and inhibition of aggression, and role expectations (Sindell 1974:74).

Innu parents were always strongly encouraged to send their children to school by the priest, but attendance was problematic from the beginning. The first priest in Sheshatshit wrote about his feelings of guilt regarding low attendance: only 21 out of 53 students were regular attendants. Frustrated by the Innu coming to the community to collect government relief cheques which were being used for making beer, he sought to have parents threatened with having their family allowance cheques withheld if their children did not come to school (Ryan 1988:134). An elder commented on this period:

> When the missionaries first arrived to convert the Innu way of life we were told by a government representative that there would be a family allowance for kids who go to school. Those who don't go wouldn't get the family allowance. The goal was to get money for the teachers. In the country we used to educate our children in the old way, that way was forgotten, that way they [the children] were receiving cultural education (Survey D:33).

There were also reports of physical threats and ear twisting employed by the priest to enforce attendance (Ryan 1988:133).

In 1954, the Newfoundland government formally recognized the mission school. In 1959 a small school house was constructed with government funds and the first teachers were hired. In 1960, the school came under the auspices of the Roman Catholic School Board and a standardized curriculum was introduced, English became the operating language, and the school began to follow the North American school year (Ryan 1988:12-13).

The present school was built in 1968 and initially covered grades kindergarten to eight. In 1970, grade nine was included. The handful of students who wanted to go beyond grade nine had to go elsewhere. Since 1980 students have been able to complete high school in the community if they choose to. The current school principal argues that reports (Cleary, Evening Telegram, October 19, 1991) of there being only fifteen graduates from the community since the school's inception is misleading as high school education in the community has only been available since 1980. Prior to this time the current school was not responsible for the low numbers of high school graduates because students would go elsewhere after grade 9 if they chose not to drop-out. A handful of students have gone to Goose Bay, Corner Brook, and St. John's to complete their high school education. Since the

introduction of grade 10, 11, and 12 there have been one or two graduates a year. This number is still relatively low given the enrolment.

The school has made adjustments to accommodate the problems of poor attendance and drop-outs. After finishing grade nine, students are able to complete individual courses without being associated with a particular grade or age group. They go at their own pace, and this helps students who are in their early 20s and\or have a child.

The view of the school's potential to provide jobs and a means of integration into the wider society is still held amongst some hopeful parents in Sheshatshit. However, in many cases, these hopes have been coloured with disillusionment from past experiences. As one parent commented:

> Lots of things I don't like about the school,
> the way white children go to school. I never
> went to school, I learnt everything from the
> country. Children at Peenamin Mackenzie School
> are having difficulties and problems about
> their own life. We didn't have those problems,
> but today kids are into vandalism etc. We were
> educated in the Innu way, we were able to
> support our families. The school promised our
> kids education and jobs, but these have not
> materialized (Survey, 1993:A4).

The elders see that the school has replaced the knowledge of the past with a new educational system which produces unemployed youth who lack traditional skills and the motivation or interest necessary to acquire them.

The problems surrounding the school represents a deeper conflict of world views which has largely been misunderstood and taken for granted by missionaries, provincial administrators and other interlocutors of the past.

5.2 A Contrast in World Views

The cognitive location of the school in Sheshatshit, not unlike its actual physical presence, resembles a monolithic structure, displaced in the Labrador wilderness, surrounded by nomadic tents which flap in the wind. Its physical presence serves as an analogy for the contrast between Aboriginal and Western ways of seeing the world. Western approaches to both the content and method of education have been based on the teacher passing on standardized and "packaged knowledge" about the world, in an institutional setting, to the student. Freire describes this often sterile process:

> The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration - contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance (1972:45).

This Western model aims to transfer its abstracted cultural knowledge and to assimilate children of all backgrounds into the order and progress of the dominant society. The model focuses on the idea that children are empty

vessels and can be filled with knowledge which can later be measured and evaluated in the form of exams which students may pass or fail.

It is no longer possible to characterize a monolithic Western or Aboriginal world view in a world where Westerners are integrating Aboriginal ideas and spiritual practices into their lives and Aboriginal groups, are incorporating Western ideas and values into their lives. However, we can explore in broad terms the overall contrast in learning approaches between Western and Aboriginal societies in order to illustrate the effect schooling has had on Innu society over the last thirty years.

In contrast to Western educational systems, life and learning was not compartmentalized for Aboriginal peoples. Their ways of being were permeated by and in accord with each other and the environment. The concept of _being_ in Aboriginal thought does not have a static definition, but rather is always "in the process of becoming" (Ross, 1991:163-164).

In his writings on the Cree and Ojibway, Ross points to the conviction "that life is a process of slow and careful self-fulfilment and self-realization". Everyone has a duty in this respect and must reinforce this process in their interactions with each other.

> The process of maturation continues until
> death, and no one ever becomes all that they
> _can_ become. The duty of all people, therefore,

is to assist others on their paths, and to be
patient when their acts or words demonstrate
that there are things still to be learned. The
corollary duty is to avoid discouraging people
by belittling them in any fashion and so
reducing their respect for and faith in
themselves (Ross, 1991:27).

Prior to formal schooling, daily life experience in the

country provided the means through which children acquired

skills. As in most pre-literate societies the family was the

dominant educational institution (Havighurst in French

1987:13). In a recent book on First Nation Schools, Kirkness

describes traditional education prior to contact as being "an

education in which the community and the natural environment

were the classroom and the land was seen as the mother of the

people" (1992:5).

Among the Innu there exists a strong ethic of non-

interference in child-rearing practices. One does not dominate

the other, nor the environment. Each person has the capacity

to be a leader. Children are brought up to respect and

practice non-interference and to view this approach to social

relations as "decent or normal and to react to even the

mildest coercion in these areas with bewilderment, disgust,

and fear" (Wax and Thomas, 1972:35). The individual freedoms

produced by non-intervention and the free choices of others

suggest a lack of rules and structures of constraint in Indian

society. However, Ross points out that a "highly structured

society was able to maintain that structure, yet deny, to

itself as well as others, that it possessed any rules for telling people what they could and could not do" (1991:134).

Knowledge and learning were primarily experiential. The specific approach to the presentation of knowledge and facts by the Innu is illustrative of this. When speaking about animals or hunting grounds, the elders will not claim authority on any information that is hearsay, only on what they know from experience to be true (Armitage, personal communication, see also Armitage, 1989, 1992). The transmission of religious knowledge to Innu youth occurred through engagement in the activities of hunting and paying respect to the animal masters with an elder and/or parent while in the country. Aspects of religious knowledge may also be transmitted through discussion with parents or elders while in the community, however this form of transmission is less likely to be effective given the experiential component necessary for true acquisition of knowledge (Armitage, 1992:65).

This experiential approach to knowledge acquisition is reflected in a response to a survey question inquiring as to how much parents knew about the school. One parent responded by saying: "I don't know much about the school, if I am there, I will know what is going on" (Survey, 1993:A8).

The nature of any mode of knowing the world and acquiring knowledge is a dynamic process. Settlement and school

attendance have permeated the Innu world-view with ways of seeing and being that are in direct conflict with those which were traditionally considered to be Innu. The lightly-guarded, less institutionalized Innu way of knowing has become marginalized by the school system. Though the ethic of non-intervention and the need to learn through culturally-based experiences remain strong, many changes are now occurring with the introduction of television, computers and literacy to the younger generations. World views do not remain static and the cognitive location of the school in the community may still be in the process of becoming.

5.3 Voicing the Problems

The formal education systems imposed on Native peoples by the Newfoundland and Canadian government have "theoretically been organized on principles of democracy and responsiveness to local community needs" (Darnell, 1972:i). However, schools were clearly established as institutions of external domination since the power to control or have input into the institution did not lie with the community.

The present school, established in 1967, has an enrolment of approximately 318 students. There is a staff of 27, seven of whom are qualified Innu teachers, and five are Innu assistants. Two of the qualified Innu teachers work in the curriculum development centre along with two non-Innu staff.

The principal is from Newfoundland, and the vice-principal is Innu. Grades kindergarten to three are taught solely in Innu-aimun by Innu teachers who are graduates of the Teacher Education Programme for Labrador (TEPL) administered through the Native and Northern Education division of the Faculty of Education at Memorial University in St. John's. (The Native and Northern Education division at Memorial also offers a program leading to a Bachelor of Education for Native teachers.)

Inside the school, most of the signs are in Innu-aimun as well as all the bulletins and many of the posters. The school appears to be relatively well kept and neat. But the school, like the community does not always function in a constructive way.

5.3.1 Parental Involvement

During the school year, the hallways and classrooms echo with the sound of lively children; very few adults or parents from the community pass through the doors other than local teachers and staff. At the open house for parent-teacher interviews in the fall of 1992, only a handful of parents came, and most of the teachers spent the evening talking among themselves. The reason given by an Innu informant for the lack of parental involvement is that Innu parents are intimidated by this foreign institution and the presence of White teachers.

Survey interviews conducted with parents consistently revealed how little parents knew about what went on in the school. This problem, like so many associated with the school illustrates the wall of difference and misunderstanding that separates the two cultures. The parents feel shy and intimidated and stay away from the school. This in turn causes a sense of discouragement amongst the teaching staff. The non-Innu teachers come to doubt that the parents care about the formal education of their children.

5.3.2 Intervention

Several Innu parents expressed a real concern that the teachers (Innu and non-Innu) are not adequately involved in educating their children and feel as though the teachers do not care about their children. One family had taken all its children out of school for over a year because they were being teased and beaten up by other kids. The father said he was surprised that no one from the school ever came to the door or called after the children. The Innu vice-principal is responsible for making contact with community members whose children are consistently not attending. However, the vice-principal is caught between two value systems in opposition; to intervene or not to intervene is a sensitive question. Based on the dim view of enforced attendance by the priest from earlier years, the vice-principal must have opted for non-intervention. However, the father in this case expected

some intervention from the school because intervention is consistent with the school as a Western institution. This is a dilemma that confronts Innu staff working in the school and often results in inaction or non-intervention which is then misinterpreted by Innu parents.

The survey results reflect some of the contradictions in the expectations that several parents had regarding the teachers' role in the teaching and discipline of their children. Two extremes were presented: on the one hand, a few parents felt teachers were strict and sometimes too hard on the children, on the other hand the same parents often expressed the need for the teachers to play a much more active role in the disciplining of their children. Some parents also felt that the Innu teachers practised favouritism towards the children who were related to them. These children would be protected from the threats of other children, while those without kinship connections to Innu teachers would be much more vulnerable to being beaten up.

Several parents wanted the teachers to intervene more when the students are fighting and to do something about the air of intimidation that exists within the student body. "Maybe there is not enough discipline. Kids get teased and teachers don't do enough about it" (Survey 1993:B62). "I would like to see a change in the Principal situation. He is not hard enough on the kids picking fights" (Survey, 1993:A10).

5.3.3 Teachers

Some parents felt supportive of Innu teachers and saw them as being more patient and committed than the white teachers. However, other respondents expressed concerns about the racism among the Innu teachers. "The Innu teachers are racist towards the White teachers and they teach this to the children and take advantage of the fact that no one understands Innu-aimun" (Survey 1993:B58). One respondent also expressed concern that some Innu teachers would appear drunk in public and she was worried about the effect they may have as role models for the students (Survey 1993:B6). "There are so many divisions between what the parents want and what the teachers do" (Survey, 1993:B23).

> Before kids used to listen - the former teachers were older and the kids listened. Now the teachers don't care too much. Innu teachers just let things go, they don't seem to be involved with the kids (Survey, 1993:B6).

> I don't feel kids are being treated like before when they were treated with more respect. Long ago in my days I can remember when the child was saying things to other people and treating them with respect. Now kids don't know how to respect their elders and treat them with respect (Survey, 1993:B5).

5.3.4 Standards

A few survey respondents felt that the academic standards were too low and that Innu and the non-Innu teachers lacked adequate involvement in the learning processes of the

students. Many respondents said that the standards of the school overall were far too low in comparison with other schools. "Teachers aren't teaching enough" (Survey, 1993:B24).

> Students don't learn to read, they are not on level with other students in the province. Teachers are only here for one year. They get all the inexperienced teachers who are not really into it. School is too lax, it doesn't matter if you sleep in. You could miss a whole year of school and they would put you ahead anyway... (Survey 1993:A21).

Twenty-five percent of respondents complained that the school standards were far too low. Some respondents wanted to see an improvement in the educational materials. It was also pointed out that the text-books used were consistently out of date and the teaching materials were of a lower standard than what is provided for students in the neighbouring schools. "The school doesn't educate the children enough. Education is a token thing for them. Standards here are far too low and don't measure up. There should be more education here" (Survey, 1993:A24). Students who leave Peenamin Mackenzie School to study in other schools find the false standards humiliating.

> My sister used to go to school and when she got high grades she was sent to St. John's to continue in the higher grades. They found out that the grades she had weren't the grades they were supposed to be, she found it really hard (Survey, 1993:A35).

5.3.5 Attendance

The teachers are challenged to include both regular and irregular attenders in the classroom, which slows down the learning process for everyone. One teacher felt that this approach often resulted in infrequent attenders falling far behind while those who attend regularly may experience boredom (personal communication).

A non-Innu teacher explained:

> I guess it would be fair to say that teachers attempt to teach to the "norm" or average group in the class most of the time, doing their best to accommodate more able and less able students as much as possible (personal communication).

Several teachers felt that a central obstacle to effective teaching at Peenamin Mackenzie was low attendance and the cycle of low standards produced by it. The problem with attendance forces teachers to lower their standards. Attendance for the students is entirely optional as their parents are generally non-interventionist in their child-rearing practices. Excuses like "It's too cold", or "I feel lazy" are acceptable ones for many parents. Walking through the community on a sunny winter's day, I would see as many as 50 children out skating on the lake. When visiting homes with school-age children, inevitably the children would be there, playing, watching television or "hanging out". One teacher explained that since the students are not pressured to attend,

teachers feel they need to make their lessons much more entertaining than educational in order to keep attendance up (personal communication).

Last January, the grade six class attendance was 46 percent on average. No one was in the country at this time, or was absent with the principal's permission (for a breakdown of attendance records over the course of a year, see Appendix A). This is not unusual. A non-Innu grade four teacher reported a 33 percent attendance rate over a three-month period last year (personal communication).

During the fall and early spring when approximately one-third of the households in the community go into the country, children who accompany their parents are not considered absent. The school offers remedial programs for children who have missed time from being in the country, but most "country" students are accommodated in a regular class. Several parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the extent to which children who go into the country fall behind. The remedial program is often ineffective because the demand is so great that one classroom teacher is unable meet the needs of a group of students with varying levels of ability and patterns of attendance.

5.3.6 Fighting

Though fighting is a major cause for non-attendance, teachers remained unaware of this problem because much of the

conflict is limited to verbal abuse and goes unreported. Much
of the verbal and physical abuse occurs on the school grounds
or the bus.

Fighting often escapes the attention of the non-Innu
teachers due to their inability to communicate in Innu-
aimun.[26] Fighting was identified by close to 25% of the
parents as the main problem in the school; it was also
identified again in approximately 20 percent of the responses
as being the main difficulty children confront at school. The
causes of the fighting were explained by a young parent (my
questions appear in italics):

> They [the kids] talk about the problems they
> have in regards to other kids beating them
> up. Again I think this is from the problem
> that these kids are associated with at home.
> If they grow up in a family that sees violence
> or in broken down homes .... they are very
> ummm .... cause I used to do that same thing
> to the younger kids — I used to beat them up
> cause I felt like...
>
> *Because of violence in your home?*
>
> I would imagine that would have been the
> problem ... Yes. Cause you are very jealous
> when you have a lot of problems at your
> house. You grow up wanting everyone to feel as
> miserable as you are. So when you see kids
> laughing, having a great time, you know they
> are not hungry, they have been fed in the
> morning, they have parents, you know they are
> going to go back and have sober parents, food

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[26] This is also due to the general lack of communication
between parents and teachers. Translators are made available
for parents who want to talk, but this resource is rarely
tapped.

on the table. Then you get jealous and you
beat up on the kids who are ... who are doing
better than you ... that's what happens.

*So even if you see a smile or something,
that's a symbol of somebody who is happy,
regardless of what the reality is?*

Not so much a smile, but you always know which
ones are doing well.

How do you know?

You just do because you know the kind of type
of family they have at home... everybody knows
whose parents drink and whose parents don't
drink, and who are doing well in their homes
and stuff like that, who spends time with
their kids and who don't.

So everybody knows, even small kids?

I think so ... I knew ... I knew who everybody
was... I knew if their parents drank and if
they didn't drink and the kids with parents
that didn't drink always seemed much happier,
much more content with life... I used to envy
them.

*How many kids on average had parents who
didn't drink? Half and Half?*

It's hard to say right now, maybe half, maybe
a little more than half, it is hard to say
right now but that's not the point, if you
have kids, four or five kids who are having
this, that's gonna affect everybody
else...(Survey I:31).

I remember for example if someone said to me,
you got a hole in your sock, I'd beat them up
or, you know, your jacket is from the sale
for example, you'd beat 'em up. If they said,
for example, they had this meal program in
school and the kids that they knew they were
going to go home and have a meal at home
didn't rush to have the meals for example,
whereas we didn't have the same opportunities
as they had, we knew that you know... I knew

that we'd go home and there would be nothing
to eat at home so for example if I rushed
over, people would say "Well you must be
hungry" and you would get very embarrassed and
very hurt, and if you didn't beat them up,
you held that against them and so you are
always conscious of these things, having a
hole in your sock, for example or hole in your
pants, you were very conscious about
everything about your self, and everything
that was wrong with you and that played like
all day with you. Try to teach math with that
sensitivity or that concern - you can't do it
(Survey J:31).

The home situation of this student did eventually change
and by later reconnecting with his cultural roots, he was able
to go on to be an accomplished student. However, concerns
expressed by parents regarding conflicts in the school suggest
that the above comments typify the experiences of many Innu
students today.

5.4 Conclusion

The "problem" with the school, as publicly articulated by
the Innu leaders, has been its imposition of an alien Western
content and, even more importantly, Western educational
methods on to the student body. Innu leaders tend to argue
that the language, culture and approach to learning of Western
cultural forms contrasts sharply with what Innu children need
- and what the wider Innu culture needs if it is to survive.
Yet the school "problem" is made more complex still by the
dislocation and anomie that followed settlement, factors which
have helped to undermine the effectiveness of the present

school system. Many families now find themselves entrenched in an abusive and alcoholic lifestyle, and are unable to provide the type of home life necessary for children to learn regardless of whether or not the education is culturally appropriate. The students from problem homes then create an atmosphere of intimidation for the children who have more comfortable home lives and are having their basic needs met.

The school itself has provided a marginal education for Innu students, fundamentally out of tune with their world view as well as the social problems confronting them at home. Formal education has also been inadequate in preparing Innu students for lives as blue or white collar workers.

Culturally appropriate education may not necessarily alter the attitude that parents and children have towards the school which is still seen by many as an essentially foreign institution. Despite the school's potential to serve as a means for the transmission of Innu culture, unless formal education and attendance become part of the Innu value system, the current difficulties will continue to undermine the school's effectiveness.

Chapter 6

School Control: A Means for Cultural Continuity?

> In school, I learnt nothing about my own
> culture, my own people. How can I benefit when
> I don't know who I am. I have lost my identity
> as an Innu (Survey, 1993:F12).

6.1 Cultural Change and the Institutionalization of Tradition

In October, 1993, the Innu Nation and the provincial
government worked out a compromise over the hydro boycott.
With this issue resolved the negotiations for school control
will commence again and the actual take-over of the school may
take effect in 1994. Once complete control of the school is
achieved, the Innu will have to grapple with the question of
what Innu culture is, and how it might be transmitted to
current and future generations through a locally-run school.

Community members express differing views on the role the
school should and can play in the expression of culture and
institutionalization of traditional Innu practices. This
chapter will discuss the perceived ability of the school to
serve as a vehicle for the transmission of Innu culture and
the tensions between the desire of the Innu to have the
benefits of a "White education" while also trying to hold on
to the language and traditions. These tensions parallel some
of the controversy between community members and leaders
regarding who should control the school and why.

The process of defining culture and incorporating it into an institutional curriculum will be challenging for the community given that settlement and modernization have given rise to so many differences in cultural expression. Divisions in ethnic groups frequently accompany assimilation into a modern lifestyle which emphasizes differences in generation, class and kinship groups (Enloe,1973:161). Enloe suggests that the problems members of an ethnic group face in forging unity will vary according to the divisions which fragment them the most (1973:161). She points out that one of the ironies of development is its "tendency to acerbate differences inside ethnic groups" (1973:162).

The decline in the practice of traditional folk culture has often paralleled the process of integration into modern industrial society (Sider, 1976:102). As the pre-industrial means of production and the accompanying social relations are uprooted, the basis for the reproduction of cultural practices is also lost. Despite the changes introduced in the reproduction of cultural practices, the collective articulation of cultural symbols in political struggles continues and serves to perpetuate romantic images of the traditional Innu. Keesing points out that these political symbols "radically condense and simplify 'reality' and are to some extent devoid of content: that is how they work" (1989:19). The attempt to transpose Innu values onto an

educational system involves interpreting both myth and reality from the past in the socio-political context of the present.

The desire to preserve indigenous knowledge tends to remain an ideal which seldom finds practical expression. The conflicting sentiments of both idealizing the past while getting on with a modern future were expressed by one man in his late 30s. He felt passionately about the "real" Innu culture and yet says he knows little about it. Having been educated through the formal school system, he learned English and "White ways" and now feels that his knowledge of Innu-aimun and Innu traditions is inadequate. His laments for the past do not interfere with his practical expression of future goals as he carves out a career for himself in a business enterprise. However, recently he began to practice Innu traditions. Last spring he spent several months in the country with his family, a practice he is now very committed to. While in the country he discovered an old Innu camp site. He remarked on how clean the old campsites of his ancestors had been left and said despairingly that in years to come the next generation of Innu would find disposable diapers and pepsi cans on the sites of his generation.

In Sheshatshit some traditions are being revived[27]. The

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[27] Henriksen (1993) refers to a process of "cultural revitalization" occurring among the Innu of Davis Inlet. He suggested that the people in Davis Inlet have not experienced the same degree of distance from country life and traditional

outpost program has played a major role in reviving people's relationship to the country. Prior to this, people in the community had more or less stopped going into the country for several years as they were not able to receive social assistance or child allowance cheques while in the country. The outpost program allows people to receive their cheques three months in advance, thus enabling them to stock up on provisions to take into their camps.

Other efforts to revive traditions include the language research which began in the summer of 1993. High school students were hired to interview elders and record the vocabulary associated with country life, which is no longer part of the Innu-aimun now spoken in the community and taught in the school. Recently, a local radio program explored how the Innu have been changed by the church. A presentation was made on the way Innu history and culture has been presented in church records. This was followed by an open discussion on the phone-in line which ran for 10 hours.

The Innu cultural festival, *Innu-etuin* is now an annual event which takes place in late August or early September. One of the performers I watched was an elder who played the traditional Innu drum, sang songs and told stories. There are

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culture as the people of Sheshatshit and that revival is perhaps a more appropriate term in this case (personal communication).

very few elders still living who know these songs and who can beat the traditional drum, a sacred practice reserved for the most skilled hunters. The majority of performers at the Innu-etiun in 1992 were Innu youth in rock bands playing popular Innu songs from Kashtin and other Quebec Innu rock groups. There were also several middle-aged men who played the guitar and sang Innu folk songs. Past the stage, on the edge of the festival grounds along the beach, each family group had one or two canvas tents set up around which all the extended family members gathered. On fires in front of the tents traditional foods like smoked caribou and smoked salmon were being prepared and sold. Inside, on tent stoves, bannock, caribou stew and Innu donuts were cooked and sold. This festival was primarily a public celebration of Innu culture. Though residents of surrounding communities came out to listen to the music and partake in the festivities, the Innu did not cater the program or production of food to the outside market.

In the fall of 1993, a model of a shaking tent was erected in the curriculum centre and its significance explained in Innu language culture classes. A steam tent was also set up in the village in 1992. Though steam tents were used by the Innu historically, the construction of this particular one was inspired by a Native conference on healing which took place in Alberta. Pan-Indian traditions from other Aboriginal groups, such as the sweet grass ceremony are being

brought to the community by people returning from conferences
and gatherings in other parts of Canada.

Hobsbawm (1983:4) describes tradition as "a process of
formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to
the past, if only by imposing repetition". Traditions are most
frequently "invented" when societies undergo rapid
transformations which undermine the basis of previous
traditional practices. When the old "institutional carriers"
of tradition can no longer adapt to the changes, new
traditions are invented along with appropriate "institutional
carriers" (1983:4-5).

> [W]here the old ways are alive, traditions
> need be neither revived or invented. Yet it
> may be suggested that where they are invented,
> it is often not because old ways are no longer
> available or viable, but because they are
> deliberately not used or adapted (1983:8).

Hobsbawm organizes traditions that have been invented since
the industrial revolution into three overlapping types:

> a) those establishing or symbolizing social
> cohesion or the membership of groups, in real
> or artificial communities, b) those
> establishing or legitimizing institutions,
> status or relations of authority, and c) those
> whose main purpose was socialization, the
> inculcation of beliefs, value systems and
> conventions of behaviour (1983:9).

An Innu-controlled school in the future will no doubt
serve as a means for reviving and transmitting the traditions
and value systems of the past. It will also be a means through

which modern traditions and conceptions of Innu-ness may be institutionally validated.

6.2 Putting Culture in the Curriculum

In the last few years the staff at the Innu curriculum centre have produced an array of educational materials using Innu content. The centre is directed by an Innu teacher. She and another Innu teacher and two non-Innu staff work on developing culturally relevant curriculum. Much of the material produced by the centre integrates Innu-aimun into traditional English style text books. A large library of Innu booklets have been produced for use in the primary grades, illustrated with images from Innu country life. The curriculum centre also maintains an extensive library of books and videos of Canadian and American Indian histories, myths, and legends. The library provides teachers with excellent resources on Aboriginal peoples and Innu history for use in supplementing their lesson plans with content which is more meaningful and relevant for the students.

For the most part, materials developed by the curriculum centre mirror the standardized materials employed in formal educational curriculum in Canadian schools elsewhere. The main difference is that Innu cultural and linguistic content is transposed onto these standardized materials. The educational advisor for the Innu Nation felt that far more innovation is needed in the development of curriculum materials. The Innu

staff, however, feel that their creativity is limited as long
as they remain under the auspices of the Roman Catholic School
Board.

In the primary grades students are taught by Innu
teachers and instruction is almost entirely in Innu-aimun,
(except for gym and music). In observing the daily activities
of students and teachers in these classes, I was struck by the
degree to which Innu teachers chose to use non-Innu curriculum
materials. In one class the teacher had children colour in
stencils of a scarecrow ir a pumpkin patch. This halloween
imagery would seem to be uncharacteristic of Innu culture, but
it is not: Sheshatshit is saturated with values and images
from the broader society of which the Innu are now a part.
Children in Sheshatshit enjoy trick or treating and halloween
parties. In another Innu class, the children were watching
"Charlotte's Web" on video.

Pride is a highly emphasized objective in Indian
education (see National Indian Brotherhood Association 1972,
Kirkness, 1992). But pride is transmitted through parents and
role models in the community as well as through formal
education. The school has come to be seen as the main
educational force in the lives of Innu children, and it is to
the curriculum that many parents now look for assurance of
cultural continuity and the transmission of Innu pride. But
cultural acquisition is obviously not limited to the

classroom. A father told me that he felt the school was inadequate in that they did not teach students basic skills such as how to chop firewood and he regretted that his children were not able to help bring in the winter wood supply. There is a general expectation that the school will provide children with everything they need to know, yet at the same time it is criticized for its inability to effectively teach children anything.

A parent recently sang out to me as he was getting into his truck: "Most of these kids spend eight hours a day in front of the television and about five hours in the school and I don't know how many [hours are spent] in the classroom learning anything". Children in Sheshatshit absorb a lot of information from television, video movies and popular video games like Nintendo. These products can be found in almost all homes in the community and in some tents in the country. In some cases traditional country skills are passed onto children by parents, grandparents or relatives. However, elders and parents sometimes complain of the lack of interest displayed by the village youth in acquiring this knowledge. Several middle-aged adults spoke about their sense of inadequacy in being unable to build a canoe or make snowshoes, sew moccasins, or tan a caribou skin. Despite the sense of loss they seem to show no real interest or motivation to learn

these skills. Now many people are looking to the school as a means to transmit this knowledge.

Children learn about Innu animals, beliefs and traditions through spending time in the country with parents or elders and this knowledge expands their vocabulary in Innu-aimun. Parents who are unable to teach their children Innu ways through spending time in the country hope that an Innu school will provide this type of cultural education. Many children have contact with the country through visits to people living in tents and their grandparents. Other children may learn about Innu culture in the school and come home everyday to lifestyle which has, for the most part, assimilated many Western values.

The children in the village are learning from a variety of sources which are constantly being assimilated into their behaviours and general knowledge of the world. Unfortunately, many children in Sheshatshit are exposed to far too much drinking, violence and neglect at home. The type of "cultural" education in the lives of Innu children today is a problem which pervades more than just the school as students do not necessarily learn what is held up as Innu "culture" in their homes.

While emphasis is often placed on the revival of culture and identity in an Innu school system, the value of formal

education as a means of survival in today's world is recognized by many parents. As one parent pointed out,

> I never really appreciated school for what it is. I feel my children need school. I find it hard living in this community, my skills are limited and I would find it hard to get employment now anywhere else. I went to school because I was told to go. [But now], I am beginning to see that everything is learning. The future depends on the people who participate in it. Your children are your heritage. I will always be interested in education because of my grandmother. For the sake of my children I am learning to be more appreciative of its works. It will do what it is suppose to do (Survey A:23).

The recognition of the importance of education and the necessity of a school is evident throughout the interview data. Some respondents were positive about the school and stated that they thought it was alright now. One elderly women said "My grandson seems to be happy about school. He goes everyday. He was able to open up to us and tell us how much he likes it" (Survey A:1).

Support for the current inclusion of Innu-aimun in kindergarten to grade three was generally high. Innu language and history is taught up until grade nine where it has been made a credit course. The use of Innu-aimun is still very much alive in most homes in the community, the exceptions are those families with one non-Innu parent. In school most of the

classes are held in Innu-aimun up until they enter grade 4[28].
Though the language is still strong, the elders have expressed
concerned about the inclusion of English words and the loss of
a whole branch of the Innu vocabulary associated with country
life and religious thought.

Two mothers who were interviewed expressed concern that
their children at the age of eight still did not know how to
read or write a word of English and thus did not have access
to many English books and educational resources. They felt
that the school should introduce English in the primary grades
as it is the language that their children will eventually need
in order to continue their education, get further training or
employment. A minority of respondents felt that the school
should operate totally in Innu-aimun. The majority of
respondents wanted a school which incorporated an even balance
of English and Innu-aimun throughout the curriculum.

The leaders see education both as a means through which
pride in Innu history, language and culture, temporarily
eroded, can be reinstated; as well as a means to facilitate
Innu participation in the wider social and economic spheres:

> Kids should go to school because education,
> university is an accepted means to learn, to

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[28] Research on language learning demonstrates that
children who learn a second language between the ages of 8-12
will learn faster and be more proficient than children
learning a second language between the ages of 4-7 (Olivares
1993:5).

know more, to always want more information
and to be proud of who you are and to teach
your history - teach something about
yourself, something relevant. At the same
time, it has to deal with the realities of the
situation. As I have said, we have to deal
with the emotional problems of the kids. So,
I think we have to start thinking that way so
our kids can grow up to be very proud of who
they are and not have the baggage of their
childhood lugged around with them throughout
their life-time, and they find themselves when
they are 30, married, three or four kids, no
job, no future and they have no pride in
themselves, and they realize they need help
because they have been drinking too much.
Essentially that is what it all leads to. So
we have to address that seriously I think
(Survey C:31).

6.3 The Politics of Control

The following excerpt from a brief submitted to the
Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, by the Innu Nation,
June 1992, illustrates the Innu Nation's presentation of the
necessity for local school control.

I believe this Royal Commission on Aboriginal
Peoples wants to hear of solutions relating to
self-government... We can only tell you this:
we believe strongly that we have the right to
determine our own futures and that right
includes the right to become educators of our
own children. We cannot relinquish that right
because if we do that, the futures of our
children would be in jeopardy.

It should be of no great surprise then to
learn that the Innu are in disagreement with
the educational philosophy that the Roman
Catholic School Board for Labrador tries to
impose on Innu children.... The Roman Catholic
School Board for Labrador has basically been
following a philosophy which borders on
assimilation of the Innu child into the
mainstream of North American society and thus

forcing and/or coercing the Innu child to
abandon and/or reject the notion to be a
distinct people. Our children are following a
school system which teaches them values and
aspirations which are foreign to us. The
school system, in effect, reflects nothing of
our culture but rather continues to confuse
and poison the brains of our children by the
steady flow of non-Innu values and aspirations
being fed into their heads (Innu Nation,
1992b:1-2).

Another leader commented on the political and practical

realities of school control:

So if people think magically that by taking
over the school, that their problems...are
gonna disappear, they got another thing coming
to them, cause it's not going to disappear.
But it is gonna disappear if we approach it
properly over the long-term. Everybody is
running away from the realities or from their
responsibilities because that is the way they
have been treated, that's what people have
been trained to do. Social services will deal
with this, the church will deal with that for
your sins, education will deal with this,
everything is compartmentalized, everybody has
a department, has a role. So if the people
are given an opportunity to play an equal role
in developing policy and a role in the
administration of policy, then I think things
will change.
What we've got to do is such a huge task
because what we have to do is that we have to
retrain ourselves, everybody, we have to stop
being subservient, we have to start teaching
ourselves to be proud, we have to recognize
that everybody around us speaks English and
that there is a different way of looking at
things and that there is a lot to learn. There
has to be different ways of looking at things.
We have to start realizing that as collective
people we do approach things differently even
though sometimes we don't realize it, but by
our actions you can tell that we people belong
to a certain group of people. You know some
people say, I don't want to be Innu, I just

want to be like them, you are envious,
understandably, but if you want to be like
them this is not the place to be (Survey,
1992:M31).

These quotes reflect a relatively high degree of realism
in the Innu Nation's understanding of what would be required
of an Innu school given the contemporary problems of community
life. The transition process from the current school system to
an Innu school is projected as being a gradual one[29]. The
leaders I spoke to felt that no modifications to the present
school should be entertained until total control and decision-
making power is handed over to the Innu Nation; everything
else is to be worked out afterwards.

The responses from survey respondents in the community on
the issue of whether or not the Innu Nation should take
control of the school were varied. In response to the
question: "Are you in support of the take-over of school
control by the Innu Nation?" several different positions were
expressed.

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[29] A fear among the Innu and non-Innu teachers is that
when the Innu Nation takes control they will get rid of many
current members of staff at the school and hire a completely
new group of teachers.

Table 1.

Percentage of Survey Respondents in Support of a Locally Controlled School

Group 1	YES	55%
Group 2	NO COMMENT	15%
Group 3	NO	25%
Group 4	YES AND NO	5%

The themes which emerged among respondents in group one who supported full control of the school by the Innu Nation, expressed the desire for the school to reinforce an ethnic identity which would be distinctly Innu. One respondent viewed local control as an important part of the nationalist agenda for Aboriginal peoples in Canada to run their own schools. Another respondent equated an Innu school with being Innu.

> I support it because Innu kids go there. There are no non-Innu there so it should be completely controlled by the Innu. The school was originally built for the Innu and they should be in control (Survey, 1993:L:1).

There are a handful of non-Innu students in the school and many students from mixed marriages. However, this person obviously perceives the school as predominantly Innu. I think there are dangers in the more extreme expressions of Innu

ethno-nationalism in that it may increase the degree to which non-Innu and children of mixed blood are harassed by racist comments. I spoke to two white children who had left the school after having been taunted by racist remarks. Several children of mixed blood also complained of being teased, harassed and called "half-breeds"[30].

For some respondents in Group 1 local school control was seem as being synonymous with the nature of community life and therefore very necessary. Others felt that local control would enable greater participation from community members in deciding what is taught. The respondents in Group 1 also felt that school control would be a decisive step away from the "White" ways which have long been imposed upon the community. Nationalist sentiments were expressed in many responses.

> We can't let the Government take control of our children because it's the way we will lose our way of life forever. If they educate us, we live like them. But if we teach our children our way of life too, it will be the best thing that Innu will ever do, we cannot let the school system destroy us, we have to

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[30] I once had a stick thrown at me by a little boy who was not more than 9 or 10 years old. As he threw the stick he yelled, "You White mother-fucking... [something or other]" Though these incidents are not commonplace, they do occur. It is common to see little boys hurling stones at other kids as they pass by on foot or bicycle. A group of young boys were responsible for stoning to death a new born puppy belonging to the family I lived with. This type of destructive behaviour has become quite upsetting for many adults who in response feel even more intent on the need for the Innu Nation to take control of the school and other institutions and bring order back into village life.

have our own Innu education run by the elders
(Survey, 1993:L:64).

Respondents in Group 3 expressed several concerns
regarding local control. A few people in this group had doubts
regarding the ability of the community and the Innu Nation to
administer a school which could adequately meet the changing
needs of Innu students.

> I don't know how the Innu would be able to run
> a school that would be able to teach English
> and White courses - the Innu just don't have
> the resources. In order to run the school we
> would need non-aboriginal people to be working
> there to help the Innu... We have seen a lot
> of things in Sheshatshit Innu tried to run -
> when the Innu took over - bankrupt - every
> thing bankrupt. Non-aboriginals helped to set
> up industries but when they went everything
> was fooled up (Survey, 1993:L7).

During my stay in Sheshatshit, the Band Council office
went bankrupt and was closed for almost a year: the Innu
Nation took over the administrative functions of the Band
Council and was able to get the finances back in order.
However, this event undermined the confidence of a few people
in the ability of some leaders to effectively institute
change. It also intensified criticisms of family patronage
among the leaders, which is sometimes blamed for the failure
of local institutions and economic endeavours (see also
Mailhot, 1993).

> Look what happened to our chief [of the Band
> Council] here, he lost everything. I don't
> support local control. I don't think we have
> the kind of manpower necessary to run the

> school. If there is Innu control it is going
> to work for a while then it's not going to
> work. Soon after Innu control everyone is
> going to be related. It should be equal but
> its not fair the way only [relatives] get the
> jobs. The Innu Nation is related to some of
> the teachers in the school - something is
> wrong somewhere (Survey, 1993:8).

A few respondents in Group 3 echoed similar concerns.

Others were eager to have their children receive an education

and learn to speak English so that the choice to pursue a

career in the labour force would be available to them. For

Group 3 Innu control was seen as a potential impediment to

their children's education as it might cause the school to be

closed for months on end and then take several years for the

school to be able to function effectively. A few parents

questioned the competence of Innu teachers, who they felt were

only token educators and lacked proper educational training.

Many Innu teachers at the school are related and this has

engendered some criticism towards them.

> I don't support Innu control of school. I
> feel if Innu take over, they will try and
> change the school scheduling and all it will
> do is fuck-up the schooling of kids and
> possibly make more changes gearing towards
> teaching of cultural stuff, which I feel is a
> step backwards. If Innu do control the school,
> they should focus more on the importance of
> English language, education and how important
> it is to finish school. Maybe turn the school
> into trade school so those less fortunate in
> school will at least have job experience to
> rely on. Also don't rely on those so-called
> Innu teachers. They're just a bunch of puppets
> who are well paid. To me those so-called
> teachers who have teaching certificates would

have a hard time getting jobs outside Peenamin Mackenzie School (Survey, 1993:L:34).

Respondents from Group 4 were unsure about local control. These respondents were torn between wanting local control for the same reasons the people who supported it did, but had similar doubts as those who were against it.

The above discussion of school control reveals the lack of consistency in community political opinion. Several dimensions of control are at stake, and the political discourse of the Innu leaders often fails to reflect the diversity of community opinion. For the leadership, political autonomy and local school control are strongly related. It is believed that such control would enhance pride in Innu culture, further the ethno-nationalist agenda for self-government, and provide the community with a challenge to come together in the creation of an educational system for the next generation.

However, it is not always in the community's interest to buy into the Innu Nation's political agendas[31]. It is true

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[31] This is slippery territory as views are variable, and subject to changing influences. For example, when the Innu Nation decided to set up its own clinic and health care services in Sheshatshit, the community was dubious as to whether or not this would work out. In the end they went ahead without total community support. However the clinic has been a great success and is now a source of pride for the community. But school control is a much bigger issue than control over the clinic; it represents more jobs for community members, and it raises myriad questions about Innu identity, modern values and future goals.

that, on an ideological level, strong nationalist sentiments are felt throughout the community. But when the rhetoric and promise of "self-government" is examined by people in the community, doubts and concerns come to the surface. The actual meaning of self-government is contested in a community where individuals are accustomed to, and have more confidence in, literally governing themselves. The Sheshatshit Innu are, in keeping with cultural practices of the past, much more interested in actually being "self" governing - that is, in being autonomous as individuals rather than having power and authority invested in a single locus, be this the Canadian state or the Innu Nation. Ironically, individual autonomy may be threatened by the power structure implicit in an Innu government rather than enhanced by it.

Chapter 7

The Country\Community Dialectic

7.1 Three Dimensions of Country

The distinctions experienced between the country and the community reflect differing generational perceptions of what it means to be Innu and the appropriate means by which this knowledge should be passed on to younger generations. Culture, for the two older generations of Innu, is predominantly equated with the country and notions of the past. Concepts of Innu-ness for the younger generation tend to be inclusive of traditional experiences of country life as well as values associated with more modern ways of living.

The following descriptions of country are an attempt to illustrate three forms in which concept of country manifests itself among three generations of Sheshatshit Innu. The categories of "real country" , "country as metaphor" and "country as past" are broadly generalized to illustrate the variations in how country is conceived and experienced and how these variations determine, to a degree, the perception of the school as cultural transmitter.

Real country is employed here to describe what the elders and those who continue to spend several months of the year in the country experience. The elders have maintained a relatively strong sense of their identity as Innu. For them

the essential meaning of life in the country has not changed
dramatically despite the accumulation of new technologies. In
the village, they do not seem to be as concerned with the
ambiguities of community life and modern values because the
country continues to define their core values and remains
integral to their existence and lifestyle.

Country life prior to settlement represents more of a
contrast than an opposition to community life for the elders.
The elders see the past as having been good because people ate
wild meat, were much healthier and could walk long distances.
They now see that people are lazy and want to fly, take
skidoos or motor boats wherever they go. In the community the
elders feel sad to see the loss of sacred practices, and
social organization. In former times, these cultural practices
would have assured that they would be provided for in their
old age. They would have been viewed as educators of the
younger generations and accorded respect from everyone.

The elders remember the past as a time when they were
proud and independent, and able to survive without government
assistance. They resent the dependency that characterizes Innu
society today, a dependency in which they find themselves
entrenched. On the whole, the elders have a more balanced and
somewhat less romanticized view of the past than Innu of the
following generation, most of whom never lived year-round in
the country.   The elders will talk about the hardship,

diseases, starvation and abuse that existed in the past. They remember times when people did not share. Many of the elders feel isolated from their own people in Sheshatshit as they experience the changing values and the accompanying disregard shown towards them by the young people.

For the elders I spoke to, school control was not perceived as a priority. They were not against school control but nor was the school regarded as an effective means for the transmission of a culture that is lived and experienced. The elders felt that as long as people are still able to teach Innu culture by taking their children and/or grandchildren into the country, this is where Innu culture should be taught. They advocated that more stress be put on bringing children into the country as an integral part of any education. The elders also criticized the school for its role in holding students and families back from the country.

From the interviews conducted with elders, it is evident that their concerns about the school were limited. This generation of elders (aged 45 – and up, most people over 60 do not know their exact age) received no formal education and regret their inability to speak English and therefore to communicate with the wider society.

As the younger generation become less fluent in Innu-aimun and the old ways, they communicate less with their elders. The elders feel isolated from the "community"

generation as their traditional role as educators is
diminishing. One elder was hired for five days to teach
snowshoe-making at the community college in Northwest River.
He was indignant at the way Innu culture was viewed both by
his white employers as well as the Innu students attending the
course.

> Why do White people think that this can be
> done in 5 days? In White culture it takes 5-6
> years to be a lawyer. To be able to teach kids
> about the culture and country - to be able to
> know everything about the country it will take
> 5-10 years. I was hired by the community
> college for 5 days to teach [Innu] kids how to
> make snowshoe frames. It is crazy to expect
> this. There were so many things missing that I
> didn't have a chance to explain that they were
> all interrelated (Survey P:4).

The elders see the limitations in the ability of formal
education to adequately transfer Innu skills and knowledge. At
the same time many recognized the need for Innu youth to be
integrated into both cultures.

Country as Metaphor The country represents an idealized
state of being, in varying degrees, to the majority of people
around the ages of 20-45, the first generation to grow up in
the settlement. In addition to an idealization of country
experience among this middle-generations there is also an
articulated experience of country life which reveals some
degree of continuity between the ideal and the actual.
Village life lies in opposition to the country; here the
ideals of the country are not realized. The country

represents a clarity of purpose and existence, a place in which one can experience and express his or her ideal self. For this group country has come to represent a world in which an idealized identity exists. In the country there is sharing, hard work, cooperation within the family, and a sense of the sacredness of life is revived by just being in nature and eating wild meat.

Presently, when funding is available approximately one third of the families in Sheshatshit go into the country for several months in the late fall and early spring of each year. The experience of country life has little connection with the way people of this middle-generation live their lives in the community. The grounding in Innu country life does not transfer into the community. Here, their identity is predominantly linked to community life and its corresponding values. Village life is not able to replace what is lost from a grounding in country life. The country has come to represent the utopian ideal which, when realized, provides a cohesive sense of identity. Yet the motivation to go into the country is often thwarted by the pressures of community life, such as school and work: in some cases people are held back by their bingo or alcohol addictions. In other cases people just get out of the habit and stop going.

Country excursions are heavily subsidized by the Band Council. Old ways of hunting and paying respect to animals and

the animal masters are seldom practised by people of this generation. Their dependence on a cash economy has further eroded old values of caring and sharing. Yet the country continues to be revered as a symbol of their Innu-ness. It is this idealized Innu image of themselves which they portray to the media and use to represent themselves in their political and environmental campaigns. Though this ideal reflects some of the actual practices and beliefs of the Innu, current processes of change are transforming these images into symbols which now have little to do with the everyday reality of village life. For this generation, the first to grow up in the community, the elders continue to be held in reverence in word, but in practice, life in the community does not always involve the elders in a meaningful way.

The middle-generation tends to be more supportive of local school control. School control is seen as a legitimate way to preserve traditions by institutionalizing them. Ironically, this generation was the first to go through the education system and it is they who seem to have the most confidence in the school's ability to instill cultural knowledge and identity. Culture as it is being defined in this new framework is now held up as a panacea for the social problems and the violence in the community. "If the Innu way of life was taught in the school more, I don't think they would have any problems" (Survey B:11). Having a strong sense

of identity and self-esteem seems to take precedence over being qualified for employment.

> I don't know if I benefited very much. I do have a job now. I don't have a degree yet. I am able to read and write. I am able to do a lot of things for myself, but the sad part is that I have lost a large part of my culture going through a program that didn't take into consideration me as an Innu person, it didn't teach me that. That's the saddest part about me (Survey, 1993:F79).

The elders, parents of people from the middle-generation did not receive formal education, yet they embodied a rich sense of identity and history. The history, language and cultural identity of the elders was denied validity in the school system the middle-generation were brought in. Thus, the current emphasis on Innu education will be significant if it is able to provide credibility to a contemporary Innu identity.

There is a strong desire among this middle-generation for a locally run school to provide Innu students with a history which empowers youth and instills a healthy sense of pride in an Innu identity. What is sought by this group is the integration of languages and skills that would enable students to bridge the dichotomy between country and community and to transcend the experience the middle-generations has had of being marginal in both worlds.

Country as Past represents the views of the younger generation, who are under 20 and make up just under 50% of the

population. This group identifies the country and its symbols as being important and having meaning, but these particular expressions of Innu-ness do not play a central role in the defining their identity. The Innu language remains important, as do the stories of the elders and occasional trips to the country. However, this generation of youth have other aspirations. Several of the teenagers I spoke to want to be doctors, teachers, secretaries, study business administration or go on to trade school. There also exists a small group of young people who prefer to live in the country and aspire to be hunters when they grow up.

There seems to be less idealization of the past amongst the youth. While sitting in on a grade eight Innu history class taught in Innu-aimun, I noticed that the students were quite distracted, one boy was playing with a deck of cards. The others were listening in the bored, distracted way that young teenagers everywhere listen to old people talk about how they used to live. The teacher was telling stories of her life in the country as a small girl in Innu-aimun, (she later translated it for me). But her students did not express much interest. The youth do not appear to share the excitement or romanticized views of an Innu past. A past which holds marginal relevance in their lives today.

The high school students I talked to supported local control but had little vested interest either way. Through the

local Innu rock bands and more popular bands like Kashtin, and an increasingly more positive depiction of Native people in the media, these youth appear to project a stronger self-image than their parent's generation.

These data reflect the degree of consideration given to issues of the past, identity and change amongst the two older generations who are attempting to maintain the continuity of their culture both through practice and an institutionalized cultural education. There are clear expectations that Innu culture in its changing forms must be an integral component in the school's curriculum. The degree of uncertainty regarding the expression of Innu cultural forms reflects a community struggling to adapt to the changing demands of the present while also trying to articulate how the symbols and practices of the past and of country life can be effectively preserved and transposed onto an important social and political institution.

7.2 Being Innu in the Modern World

The idealization of the past prior to settlement has been an important strategy in asserting a common identity and in the advancement of a political agenda (Keesing 1989:19). But political leaders are not always able to establish unity within the community. A common Innu identity may exist in relation to the "other" but this identity is not maintained in relation to each other.

The Innu have drawn from the representations of country life to define their identity in the context of a modern political and social reality which emphasises the oppositions between modernism and traditionalism. These form what Friedman refers to as a "hypothetical field of available identifications specific to Western modernity" (1992:847). Integral to becoming part of the modern world is to identify with values in opposition to those which are dominant within modern society (Friedman, 1992:847).

The country and community present the Innu with oppositions, in response to which different senses of "self" and what it means to be Innu emerge. The different "selves" which exist within this heterogenous community find a sense of identity in relation to the country and in opposition to the dominant values of modern society. The meanings associated with country provide important resources which are employed in affirming a contemporary Innu. The representative role these constructions play in enabling the community to resolve its dilemmas and continue to make beneficial choices in the future may in the end be what determines their validity.

In the expression of Innu-ness today, the past serves as a resource, but not necessarily as a role model. Innu-ness is predominantly expressed through many Western values which are now incorporated into life in Sheshatshit. The middle-generation of Innu, whose identity has been closely tied to

their conception of the country, are in the process of examining what it actually means to be Innu in the modern world. Some are asking whether they have a right to call themselves Innu now that their lives have lost the spiritual values and practices embodied in Innu country life of the past. This line of questioning is internal to the community, but it reflects the tensions involved in grappling with concepts of identity that are tied to the past and symbols which remain somewhat dissonant with their lived experience.

The younger generation, as outlined above, do not seem to feel the split between the past and the present in their identity as Innu. While speaking with fifteen year-old one evening, I asked how she would describe Innu culture, her response was "Everything in Sheshatshit is Innu culture!".

The incorporation of Innu culture into a locally run school may not present the up and coming generation of Innu leaders with the same dilemmas that today's leaders face while their sense of identity still lies somewhere between the country and the community.

7.3 School Control: The Challenge

The progress towards school control achieved thus far; the overall success of Innu politicians in their negotiations with government; and the precedent set by Aboriginal communities elsewhere in Canada who are running their own school, suggests that Innu school control is inevitable. But

the implementation of school control will initially raise more problems than it will immediately resolve. This is because the Innu Nation will be pressed to coordinate the participation of a community which is, in many respects, divided. It is also because school control raises in embryo many wider issues to do with the tension between political authority and the tendency for many Innu to see Innu-ness as the capacity to act autonomously. Whether school control is a desirable objective, and if it is, what form it should take, is contested. In part this is because school control means different things to different strands of opinion. For the Innu Nation, control is envisaged as part of a political strategy: self-government. The issue of control is related to a nationalist project and, at the same time, has become one of the stakes in it. For others, the issue of control has a different significance. Many parents are more concerned with the need to equip their children with skills that will provide them with an opportunity to participate in the social and economic structure of modern society. However, the record of the school thus far in this regard is poor, and critics of local control have no clear sense of how to improve the school. Improvement is likely to require leadership - and this is what the Innu Nation is seeking, in difficult circumstances, to provide. In this way, and in some tension with its traditional ideology and claims, the Innu Nation is a 'modernizing' force which at

the same time seeks to preserve vital aspects of Innu
tradition.

The take-over process is occurring at a decisive period
in Innu history. Innu traditions are now noticeably
disappearing with the death of the Innu elders who embodied
them. The school represents an opportunity to preserve the
knowledge of the elders, Innu history and language. The "past"
may be institutionalised, though inevitably re-shaped, through
courses in Innu history and culture integrated into a modern
educational curriculum.

Gaining control of the local school will challenge Innu
leaders to involve teachers and parents in finding solutions
to the internal political diversity, and to the complex
questions of ethnicity and identity which trouble the
community. Questions such as "Who am I?" and "What is Innu
culture?" will still need to be addressed and school control
will not automatically answer them. Innu leaders and adults,
of the middle-generation, are caught between two worlds. On
the one hand, they are compelled to respond to the dissonant
voices and images of modernity which provide a new set of
narratives on what it means to be Innu. On the other hand,
they are also drawn to listen to the voices of the past, and
experience the pull of country life which continues to
provide, in diluted form, a contrasting narrative. The
establishment of a curriculum that will enable students to

understand their past, and acknowledge the cultural diversity and the future dreams of the Sheshatshit Innu, remains a difficult challenge. Perhaps the process will encourage people to let go of the limited concept of what it means to be Innu, a concept partially imposed upon them through a Western educational system which taught today's leaders that the nobility in being Aboriginal lies in being traditional.

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Appendix A

Attendance Records for Peenamin Mackenzie School
1990-91

KINDERGARTEN

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country*
September	81%	19%	10%
October	65%	35%	35%
November	63%	37%	53%
December	72%	28%	23%
January	70%	30%	8%
February	69%	31%	0
March	60%	40%	0
April	43%	57%	24%
May	28%	72%	53%
June	27%	73%	48%

GRADE ONE

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	62%	38%	23%
October	52%	48%	42%
November	52%	48%	38%
December	59%	41%	20%
January	50%	50%	15%
February	49%	51%	16%
March	52%	48%	8%
April	33%	67%	19%
May	20%	80%	42%
June	14%	86%	32%

* In Country refers to the percentage of children who have gone into the country with parents or relatives. Principal's approval was granted for the absent students in this category. This is calculated as a separate category and thus the percentages do not add up to a total of 100%.

GRADE TWO

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	79%	21%	68%
October	65%	35%	80%
November	75%	25%	49%
December	80%	20%	49%
January	73%	27%	13%
February	73%	23%	13%
March	68%	32%	10%
April	48%	52%	33%
May	28%	72%	46%
June	35%	65%	34%

GRADE THREE

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	73%	27%	24%
October	49%	51%	55%
November	53%	47%	71%
December	64%	36%	21%
January	57%	43%	9%
February	55%	45%	2%
March	38%	62%	5%
April	20%	80%	65%
May	13%	87%	94%
June	17%	83%	36%

GRADE FOUR

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	72%	28%	48%
October	53%	47%	38%
November	57%	43%	49%
December	67%	33%	34%
January	62%	38%	30%
February	52%	48%	21%
March	48%	52%	11%
April	25%	75%	70%
May	14%	86%	72%
June	33%	67%	33%

GRADE FIVE

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	63%	37%	6%
October	59%	41%	46%
November	59%	41%	50%
December	67%	33%	21%
January	59%	41%	20%
February	55%	45%	19%
March	50%	50%	13%
April	36%	64%	67%
May	29%	71%	58%
June	31%	69%	34%

GRADE SIX

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	42%	58%	5%
October	30%	70%	0%
November	33%	67%	32%
December	40%	60%	5%
January	46%	54%	0%
February	33%	67%	3%
March	24%	76%	11%
April	23%	77%	46%
May	11%	89%	0%
June	6%	94%	57%

GRADE SEVEN

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	59%	41%	18%
October	45%	55%	35%
November	41%	59%	50%
December	38%	62%	4%
January	51%	49%	0%
February	48%	52%	1%
March	41%	59%	5%
April	30%	70%	22%
May	28%	72%	36%
June	29%	71%	6%

GRADE EIGHT

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	36%	64%	8%
October	49%	51%	0%
November	46%	54%	0%
December	45%	55%	0%
January	42%	58%	1%
February	47%	53%	3%
March	40%	60%	5%
April	24%	76%	24%
May	21%	79%	44%
June	21%	79%	24%

GRADE NINE

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	32%	68%	0%
October	28%	72%	12%
November	33%	67%	8%
December	40%	60%	9%
January	40%	60%	0%
February	45%	55%	0%
March	42%	58%	3%
April	39%	61%	38%
May	34%	66%	39%
June	50%	50%	10%

LEVEL ONE

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	81%	19%	0%
October	84%	16%	73%
November	59%	41%	57%
December	51%	49%	21%
January	74%	26%	1%
February	61%	39%	7%
March	54%	46%	0%
April			
May	44%	56%	50%
June	41%	59%	62%

LEVEL TWO

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	78%	22%	0%
October	45%	55%	46%
November			
December	49%	51%	6%
January	89%	11%	0%
February	70%	30%	13%
March	56%	44%	0%
April			
May	82%	18%	0%
June	63%	37%	39%

LEVEL THREE

Month	Attendance	Absent	In Country
September	95%	5%	0%
October	93%	7%	0%
November	84%	16%	0%
December	81%	19%	0%
January	86%	14%	0%
February	74%	26%	0%
March	83%	17%	0%
April			
May	70%	30%	0%
June	100%	0%	0%

Appendix B

Community Survey on Education

Survey Objective: To find out what community members want for their children's education.

Part 1   Background information on the interviewee

a) Parent with children in school:

b) Parent with pre-school children:

c) Grandparent:

d) Teenager in school:
   i) with children
   ii) without children

e) Ages of children: Corresponding grades:

f) Age of interviewee: Male: Female:

Part 2 Questions on Peenamin Mackenzie School

1. What do you know about the school?

2. What would you identify as the main problems in the school now?

3. What changes would you like to see in the school?

4. What do you think the goal of education should be?

5. What should education prepare children for?

6. What options should be available for kids when they finish school?

7. Do you think it is important for children to finish school?

8. What did you learn from your education at Peenamin Mackenzie School?

9. How have you benefited from your education?

10. What do your children like most about school?
11. What difficulties do they experience?

12. Should the teachers encourage kids to talk about their feelings at school?

13. Do you encourage your child to go to school? Why? Why not?

14. What parts of Innu culture/values should be included in the school?

15. Should the school make use of volunteers?

16. In what areas?

17. Would you be willing to volunteer in a community run school?

18. If yes, in what area?

19. What schedule should the school follow in the year?

20. Do you support full control of the school by the community? Why or why not?

Other comments or suggestions?