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The Chipewyan-Cree-Métis Interaction Sphere and the Fur Trade Political Economy: Archaeological, Ethnohistorical and Ethnographic Approaches

Introduction

The goal of this paper is to understand the development of economic and social interactions between several different societies, or cultural-ethnic groups, occupying the same regional environment and involved in a common political economy. Toward this end, Chipewyan, Cree, Métis and Euro-Canadian relationships and conflicts in central subarctic Canada will illustrate the complexities and subtleties of intergroup dynamics emerging over a two-century span from the late 18th to the mid-20th centuries. Particular emphasis in this paper will be given to the period between the 1890s and 1950s.

We began grappling with these issues over 30 years ago, for which we developed a particular style or genre of ethnoarchaeology which involves a synergistic blend of historical archaeology, archival ethnohistory, and ethnography. First, we will provide a brief overview of some of the key findings and interpretations of our research[1]. Second, the occasion of the Tromsø conference offers an opportunity to rethink Chipewyan-Cree-Métis relations and, perhaps, to reassess their theoretical relevance for discussions of "interaction spheres," networks, and identity in archaeology and anthropology generally.

Historical-Cultural Context

The region under consideration is part of the Upper Churchill River drainage in northwestern Saskatchewan, Canada. Beginning in the 1770s, early trading posts of independent pedlars, and those of the major fur companies were situated near the divide separating the Athabasca-Mackenzie watershed from those

1. For more detailed presentations of data summarized in broad outline here, readers may refer to citations of the authors' work in the bibliography.

Networks, Interaction and Emerging Identities in Fennoscandia and Beyond. Tromsø, Norway, October 13-16 2009.
Suomalais-Ugrilaisen Seuran Toimituksia = Mémoires de la Société Finno-Ougrienne 265.
Helsinki 2012. 67–92.

waters draining east into Hudson Bay. As such, the area became part of the western contact zone between the Dene or Athapaskan-speaking Chipewyan and the Algonquian-speaking Cree.[2] A late 18th century rivalry between Montreal-based companies, particularly the North West Company, and the English-owned Hudson's Bay Company, was responsible for drawing some Chipewyan groups southward from their forest-tundra environment into the full boreal forest. Some of these southern Chipewyan became known as *Kesyehot'ine*, or "poplar house people," in reference to their major trading fort at Île à la Crosse, and they entered into increasingly intensive interactions with both Europeans and with Western Woods Cree groups, locally known as *Nihiyawuk* (Figure 1).

The expansion of the fur trade was rapidly rearranging indigenous societies spatially and economically. Moreover, the southward movement of Chipewyan into the Upper Churchill region was not an easy transition. From the outset, the Cree, who were already resident along and immediately south of the Churchill River, were able to assume a position of socioeconomic dominance over the Chipewyan. This system of stratification expressed itself primarily in the manner by which the two groups articulated with the mercantile economy. Initial competition for furs actually saw Chipewyan encroachment upon beaver hunting locales habitually used by Cree, often at the behest of the fur traders (Gillespie 1975: 383). However, the Cree were able to force reparations of rum and other items from encroaching Chipewyan trappers when hostilities could be avoided (Mackenzie 1802: LXXVIII). There is no evidence of reciprocal payments when Cree made forays north of the Churchill River. Rather, the Chipewyan made every effort to avoid bush contacts with northward-traveling Cree, and they practiced elaborate forms of surveillance into the early years of the 20th century.

Occasionally in the early 19th century, the Chipewyan fear of *ena* (Chipewyan term for Cree or "enemy") disrupted normal trading operations at Île à la Crosse (PAC HBC B.89/a/19). Patterned avoidance behavior was an expression of Chipewyan deference toward the economically dominant Cree, and it characterized the semipermeable boundary between them. Chipewyan movement into predominantly Cree areas demanded considerable caution and expense, but Cree penetrations into Chipewyan locales received little resistance.

Through the 19th century both the Chipewyan and Cree intensified their economic ties with a growing class of Euro-Canadian fur trade personnel at the Hudson's Bay Company's (hereafter HBC) Île à la Crosse fort and its second-

2. The territorial distribution of Chipewyan and Cree groups prior to a European presence in this part of Canada is a complex issue. It was once assumed that the Cree migrated westward into Saskatchewan in the late 18th and early 19th centuries after depleting game and fur resources during earlier phases of the fur trade east of Lake Winnipeg. However, Smith (1976, 1981) provides evidence that Western Woods Cree groups had long occupied the western regions, including the Upper Churchill area, and that it was only the name "Cree" that was expanding westward with the developing fur trade and which replaced previous traders' generic terms such as "Southern Indian," "Upland Indian" or "Knisteneaux." Smith (1975, 1976) includes the Cree of the Upper Churchill region, along with groups eastward to the Nelson River headwaters, as part of a "Rocky Cree" division of the Western Woods Cree based upon putative historical, social and linguistic affiliations. It is likely, however, that the Cree of the Upper Churchill region are descendents of several major regional groups, including bands of the Rocky Cree as well as the Thickwoods or Strongwoods Cree who occupied the Athabasca drainage to the west (Smith 1976: 416; Curtis 1928: 55–58; PAC HBC B.89/a/2, B.89/a/4, B.89/e/4).

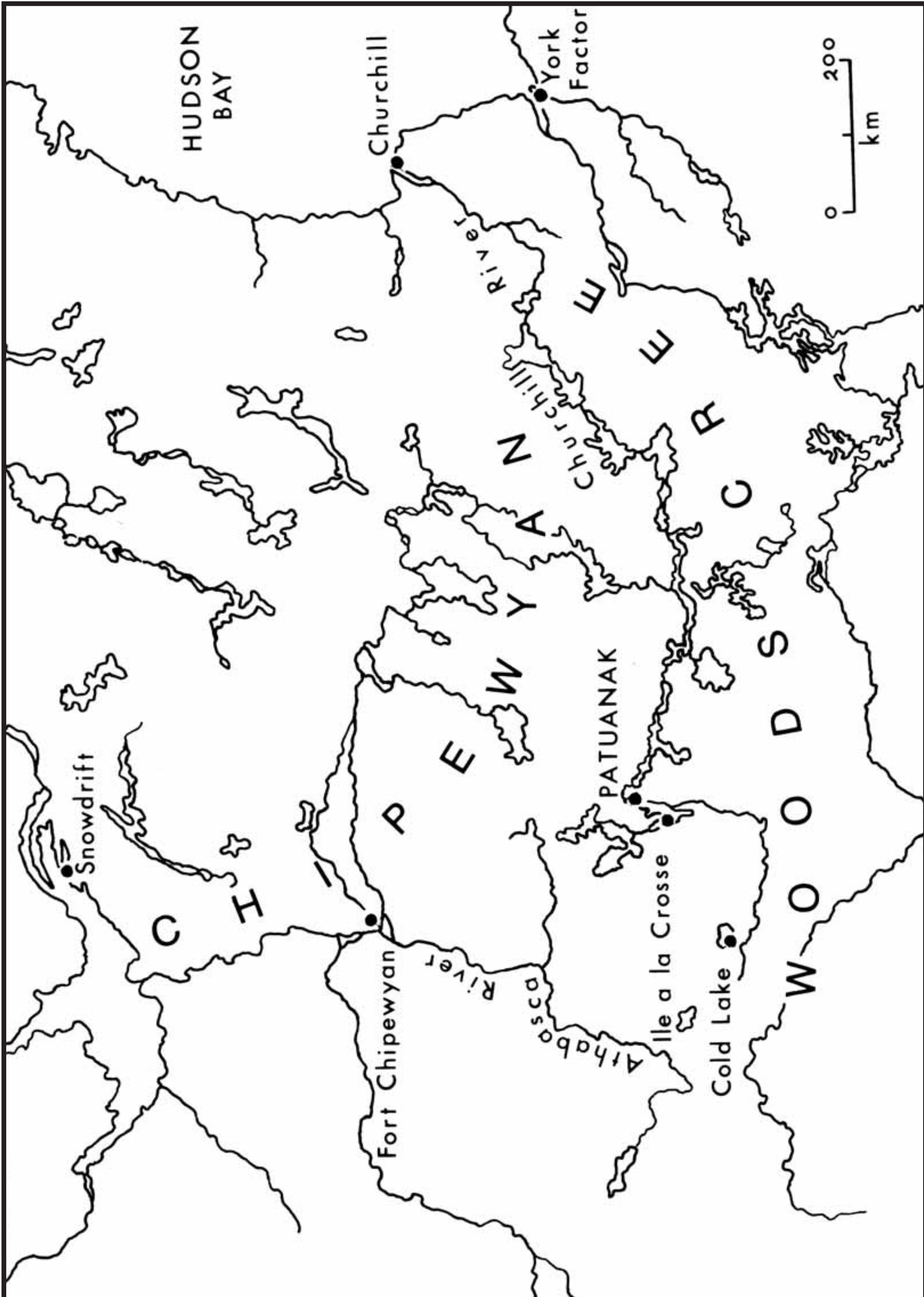

Figure 1. Territorial distribution of Chipewyan and Western Woods Cree groups in north-central Canada.

ary outposts.[3] While the bush-oriented hunting bands of Chipewyan and Cree served as the fur hunters or "primary producers" in the expanding mercantile system, an increasingly visible "mixed-blood" or Métis population was occupying a niche as fur company servants and laborers. The Métis in this region were largely descendants of unions between French-Canadian voyageurs and local Cree women. Their cultural identity is expressed as "Métis and Cree" or simply as "Métis Cree." Historically they have favored the Cree language while also speaking French and often having surnames reflecting their French-Canadian ancestors in the fur trade (e.g. Aubichon, Bouvier, Daignault, Dejarlais, Laliberte, Lariviere, Malboeuf, Maurice, Roy, among others).[4]

The complexity of social life increased in the last half of the 19th century with the arrival of French-speaking Oblate priests who established a Roman Catholic mission at Île à la Crosse in 1846 (Morice 1915,I: 301–302). The impact of the church on the Indians was initially negligible. By the 1890s, however, the Chipewyan regularly appeared in Île à la Crosse for the Catholic mission's Christmas and Easter services, as well as summer religious instructional gatherings. The fact that their important trading-provisioning periods at the HBC post were in June and September, therefore, meant that the Chipewyan had to stage at least four major annual gatherings in Île à la Crosse. This was possible only by withdrawing southward from the winter range of the migratory barren-ground caribou, a major traditional food resource, and by shortening their annual travel circuits (Brumbach 1985; Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1989: 61–67). Nonetheless, they continued to occupy extensive areas along and *north* of the Churchill River.

While the Cree also experienced reductions in wintering range and mobility in the 19th century, their nomadic circuits were less extensive than those of the Chipewyan and were confined largely to areas *south* of the Churchill River where moose and woodland caribou were key subsistence animals. While they were well integrated into the fur trade, the Cree exhibited greater resistance to missionization than the Chipewyan (Morice 1915, I: 391). Métis Cree families were associated with the network of fur posts, mostly along the Churchill River corridor itself. They were strongly Catholic, sharing a common cultural heritage and socio-ceremonial life with the French-speaking Oblate clergy who had all emigrated from France and Quebec.

However, the managerial ranks of the HBC were held by men of Scottish and English background who were either Presbyterian or members of the Church of England. This was a fundamental aspect of social life that separated the factors and clerks from the Métis laborers within their own company, and certainly from their Chipewyan and Cree clients.

After selling its remaining rights in Rupert's Land to Canada in 1869, the HBC's decades-long monopoly deteriorated (Innis 1937: 337–344). Numerous independent or "free traders" entered the region providing new competition for

3. These posts were part of an HBC administrative district known at various times as the Île à la Crosse District or English River District.

4. Macdougall's (2010) recent study of *wahkootowin,* kinship or family ties intimately linked with lifestyle and cultural identity, deftly examines relationships across four generations of Métis families in the Île à la Crosse area from ca. 1800 to the 1910s.

Indian clients and their furs, capturing as much as two-thirds of the fur harvest in some seasons. By the last decade of the 19th century the HBC was enmeshed in a tangle of economic adversities that complicated its relationship with the Chipewyan, Cree, the Métis, and the Catholic church. The HBC believed that the Catholic mission was operating a sub rosa or inappropriate fur trade, while Oblate priests felt that the physical and spiritual health of the Indians were being undermined by HBC policies and practices (Jarvenpa 1987). Traders in the Île à la Crosse district began strongly advocating treaty negotiations between local natives and the federal government. Although Treaty No. 10 was not implemented until 1906, the HBC was hopeful that the potential cash flow from treaty payments to Indians and scrip payments to Métis would revitalize its sagging trade and reduce indebtedness among its clientele.

While Cree customers had predominated at the outset of the trade in the 1770s and 1780s, Chipewyan exceeded the Cree in numbers in the Île à la Crosse District (or English River District) throughout the 19th century. Between the early 1820s and early 1880s, the Chipewyan population grew from 467 to 531, a modest 14 percent increase over 60 years. During the same period the Cree population grew from 231 to 463, a full 100 percent increase (PAC HBC B.89/e/1, PACM C-13, 285). It is not clear what roles natural increase versus in-migration from other areas played in the rapidly expanding Cree population. However, the rate of increase becomes more impressive when considering that Cree also provided the main native ancestry for the local Métis population which was growing at a similar rate.[5]

Île à la Crosse's importance declined in the early 1900s as both the HBC and the Catholic mission began decentralizing their operations. In the period approaching World War One, the combined factors of field-oriented missionization, seasonal trading outposts, dispensation of treaty rights, and an embryonic commercial fishing industry, spurred aggregations of Chipewyan and Cree families into tent and log cabin communities of gradually increasing size and permanence. Before being bought out by the HBC in 1936, the Revillon Frères company was an intense competitor with the HBC in both larger settlements and remote seasonal outposts. The Great Depression of the 1930s also brought a temporary influx of white trappers, mostly single males from southern Canada, into the Upper Churchill region as direct competitors with the natives for furs. After World War Two, federal programs for housing, education, health and social welfare began transforming some native settlements into larger service centers while smaller seasonal communities withered. Nonetheless, the historical pattern of a hunting livelihood based on seasonal *family nomadism*, integrated with a fur trade-mission political economy, remained viable for many Chipewyan and Cree into the late 1950s.[6]

5. Métis and EuroCanadian populations *collectively* at HBC posts in the English River District numbered 133 in 1822–23 and 251 in 1881 (PAC HBC B.89/e/1, PACM C-13, 285). This is an 89 percent increase. While we cannot segregate by ethnicity, it is likely that the majority of these people were Métis Cree laborers.

6. A subsistence and commercial bush economy persists among many native families today, but the organization of labor has shifted so that all-male teams of hunters and fishermen are mobile upon the landscape procuring food animals and furs which are funneled to women and other family members for further processing in centralized settlements.

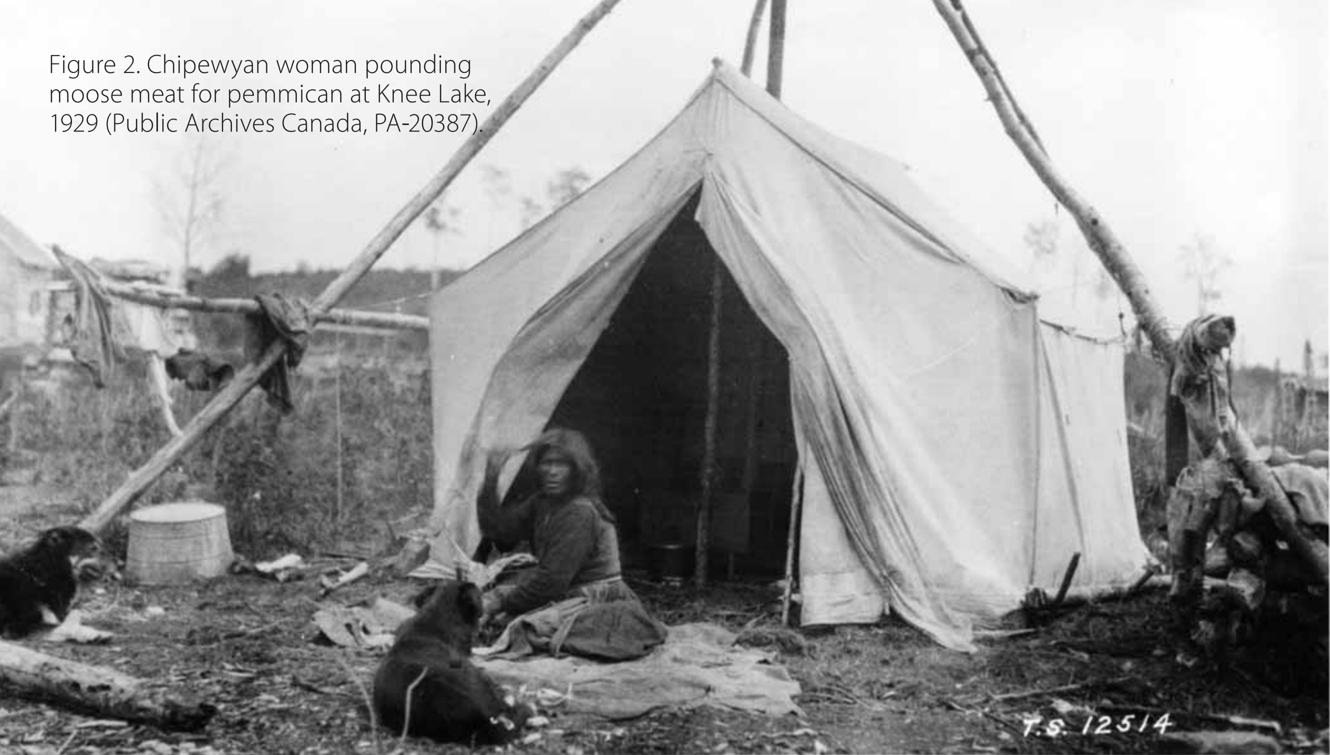

Figure 2. Chipewyan woman pounding moose meat for pemmican at Knee Lake, 1929 (Public Archives Canada, PA-20387).

Dramatis Personae

To summarize, the key players in the Upper Churchill interaction sphere include:

1. Chipewyan: the southern band group known as *Kesyehot'ine* ("poplar house people"), occupying Churchill River localities such as Patuanak, Dipper Lake, Primeau Lake, and Knee Lake, but also including some closely related *Hoteladi* ("northerners" or "northern people") in the Cree Lake vicinity and northward (Figure 2).

2. Western Woods Cree: groups known as *Nihiyawuk* ("Cree speakers") or *Sakawiyiniwak* ("bush people") occupying areas south of the Churchill River, including localities such as Canoe Lake, Waterhen Lake, Green Lake, and Pinehouse Lake[7] (Figure 3).

3. Métis Cree: rudimentary working class associated mainly with fur trade centers and seasonal outpost communities along the Churchill River and its major tributaries, including Île à la Crosse, Sandy Lake, and Souris River, among others (Figure 4).

4. Euro-Canadian: an assortment of English, Scottish, and French-Canadian fur trade managerial staff; French and French-Canadian Catholic missionaries; Depression era white trappers of Scandinavian, Slavic, German-Austrian background.

7. More specific appellations are used to identify members of particular Western Woods Cree communities or localities: *Saskitawauiyiniwuk* (Île à la Crosse), *Spahiniyawuk* (Pinehouse Lake), and *Paciniyawuk* (Canoe Lake) (Curtis 1928: 158; Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1989: 34; Smith 1981: 267–270).

Figure 3. Cree couple, Baptiste Nawtamaugan and wife, from Île à la Crosse district, 1920 (Public Archives Canada, PA-18349).

The oral lore of people in this region provides compelling symbolic clues regarding their histories and relationships. The Chipewyan tales “Magic Glass” and “Dog’s Hind Leg,” for example, feature Chipewyan, Cree and European actors involved in fur trade scenarios. Moreover, the lore emphasizes pronounced hostility between Chipewyan and Cree, perhaps exacerbated by their competition for furs and access to European traders. Not surprisingly, the Chipewyan lore portrays themselves as ultimate victors over their Cree enemies. Yet, it also recognizes the magico-medicinal power of the Cree (Jarvenpa 1982a). Indeed, this prowess, often acknowledged as Cree superiority by Chipewyan today, creates feelings of vulnerability and ambivalence. We will return to this issue later.

The oral lore-histories, early traders’ accounts, and recent interethnic tensions suggest a long history in which Cree enjoyed initial economic advantages in the fur market economy as *middlemen* and fort hunters, in being able to force reparations from Chipewyan when the latter visited traders at Île à la Crosse, in penetrating traditional Chipewyan territory north of the Churchill River, in the predominance of the Cree language in mixed ethnic settings, and in the expansion of the Métis Cree working class.

Interpretive Framework and Methodology

What developed between the late 18th and early 20th century, then, was a tripartite social-occupational system in which a community of Métis-Cree servant-laborers acted as economic and cultural mediators between Chipewyan and Cree hunting bands, on the one hand, and the Euro-Canadian mangerial class, on the other. To help interpret this complex history of interactions, we developed a set of linked hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Through history Chipewyan and Cree hunter-gatherer groups adapted to each other and to the European community by widening and expanding their biogeographical niches (this implies utilization of more microenvironments and/or more species through time).

Hypothesis 2: Differences in frequencies of “country food” and imported food among Chipewyan, Cree, and Métis Cree at different time periods become indices of these groups’ economic specialization, their access to the Euro-Canadian community, and their degree of integration into the fur trade political economy.

Hypothesis 3: A general directional trend in interethnic relations from highly competitive and hostile (or negative) to more neutral and cooperative (or positive) forms is a social concomitant of increasing niche width and generalization (as noted in Hypothesis 1 above).

Hypothesis 4: Socio-political stratification among ethnic groups, including the tripartite social-occupational system, owes its development to an interplay of demographic, historical, social and cultural processes.

Figure 4. Abraham Lariviere (on right), Métis Cree employee for Hudson's Bay Company at Île à la Crosse. 100 years old, ca. early 1900s (Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1014).

It is worth noting that all of the hypotheses relate in some way to the process by which principles of western market exchange and native concepts of reciprocity and redistribution conflict, combine, or are reconciled. Such phenomena may be fruitful for understanding cultural group differentiation and boundaries as well as intergroup or interethnic interactions and identities, theoretical terrain explored by scholars such as Abruzzi (1982), Barth (1969), Keyes (1981), and LeVine and Campbell (1972). A major goal of our research is to relate such interactions to ecological and economic dynamics in the broadest sense. In this regard, Bennett's (1976, 1982, 1996) insights on decision-making and his theoretical framework linking short-term "adaptive strategies" with longer-run "adaptive processes" are especially germane to our research. This perspective offers a means of interpreting Chipewyan, Cree, Métis and Euro-Canadian decisions, behaviors, beliefs and interactions as creative adaptations to local ecosystems, to other human communities and, at a larger scale, to an evolving fur trade political economy.

Our approach shares much in common with "political ecology" and its focus on the interplay of local ecological dynamics and macro-institutional markets and polities (Bates 2005; Jarvenpa 1998, 2008). Our work also has some affinities with "culture contact" or "archaeology of colonialism" studies (Gosden 2004; Lightfoot, Martinez and Schiff 1998; Orser 1996). The North American fur trade may be viewed as a type of capitalist world system (Kardulias 1990), but it also provided a "middle ground" of opportunities for new kinds of exchanges, mutual dependencies, and cultural forms that involved neither acculturation nor cultural destruction of indigenous participants, at least during its early development (Ray 1974; White 1991). Yet, a dilemma for much of the archaeology of colonialism is its capitalism-centered worldview. It shares a weakness that Ortner (1984: 149) diagnosed for political economy approaches generally whereby: "History is often treated as something that arrives, like a ship, from outside the society in question. Thus we do not get the history of *that* society, but the impact of (our) history *on* that society."

It is telling that recent reviews of historical archaeology and archaeology of colonialism research call for a greater emphasis upon indigenous peoples rather than colonial agents (Rubertone 2000: 440; Silliman 2005: 69). Our departure from most historical archaeological studies of the fur trade involves the incorporation of local indigenous people as active collaborators in the research process. Building upon our prior ethnographic studies in Upper Churchill communities, our ethnoarchaeological project was explicitly designed to capture local native actions, perspectives and voices as central in the evolving fur trade frontier of central Canada, not to privilege the accounts of fur trade elites, administrators or their core-state sponsors. In Ortner's terms, our perspective is anchored more on the "shore" than the "ship."

To address these concerns, we developed a three-pronged ethnoarchaeological methodology[8], including the following data-gathering components:

8. See Adams (1977) ethnoarchaeological study of Silcott, Washington for a similar tri-partite methodology.

1. Historical archaeology: In the late 1970s and early 1980s we mapped and inventoried a network of 44 historic sites in the Upper Churchill region. These represent small winter hunting encampments, multi-family settlements, and trading outposts once occupied by various combinations of all the cultural-ethnic groups. Archaeological documentation and interpretation was augmented by on-site native interpreters, some of whom had lived at the sites and had created some of the material residues, or who had direct connections to and knowledge of sites through parents, grandparents or other relatives who had lived there. This fieldwork strategy yielded many unanticipated insights into the meanings and uses of artifacts, the widespread recycling and adaptive re-use of items from middens and "abandoned" sites, and the complex events and social lives that unfolded in specific households and communities (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1990). Most of the archaeological materials derive from late historical sites representing the "twilight" of the fur trade era between the 1890s and 1950s (Figure 5).

2. Archival ethnohistory: We had access to abundant fur trade documents, particularly those held in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg. Post journals, correspondence between post managers and upper echelon managers, and annual reports for the HBC's English River District (later known as the Île à la Crosse District) provided a European perspective on their native clientele and the overall fur trade economy of the Upper Churchill region for the period spanning 1805–1939. However, special attention was given to the relatively under-studied business account books or ledgers.[9] Recognizing the potential of the quantitative data in the account books for understanding the microbehavior, strategies and motivations of exchange, we assembled annual commercial profiles for a sample of native customers. Currently, this data base includes transactions for 26 Chipewyan, Cree, and Métis Cree individuals trading out of the central HBC post at Île à la Crosse and two key winter outposts, Sandy lake and Souris River, for selected periods between 1889 and 1909 (Jarvenpa and Brumbach 1984, 1985). The account book material was the richest and most complete for these years. Efforts were made to find individuals who had ties to our archaeological sites and/or our ethnographic consultants.

3. Ethnography: In the late 1970s and early 1980s we began systematic interviewing of nearly 50 elderly Chipewyan, Cree, Métis Cree and Euro-Canadian consultants who discussed their life experiences at many of the 44 historical archaeological sites in the early 20th century. In turn, accounts and memories passed along from their immediate ancestors permitted backstreaming into the late 19th century. Another source of information derived from ethnographic research on contemporary social life and behavior we had been conducting in the region since 1971 (Jarvenpa 1977a, 1977b 1980, 1982a, 1982b; Jarvenpa and Brumbach 1983). These included studies of hunting ecology and socio-spatial organization as well as Chipewyan-Cree intercommunity relations. The con-

9. We were inspired by Ray and Freeman's (1978) innovative quantitative analysis of Hudson's Bay Company business account book data for the early 18th century.

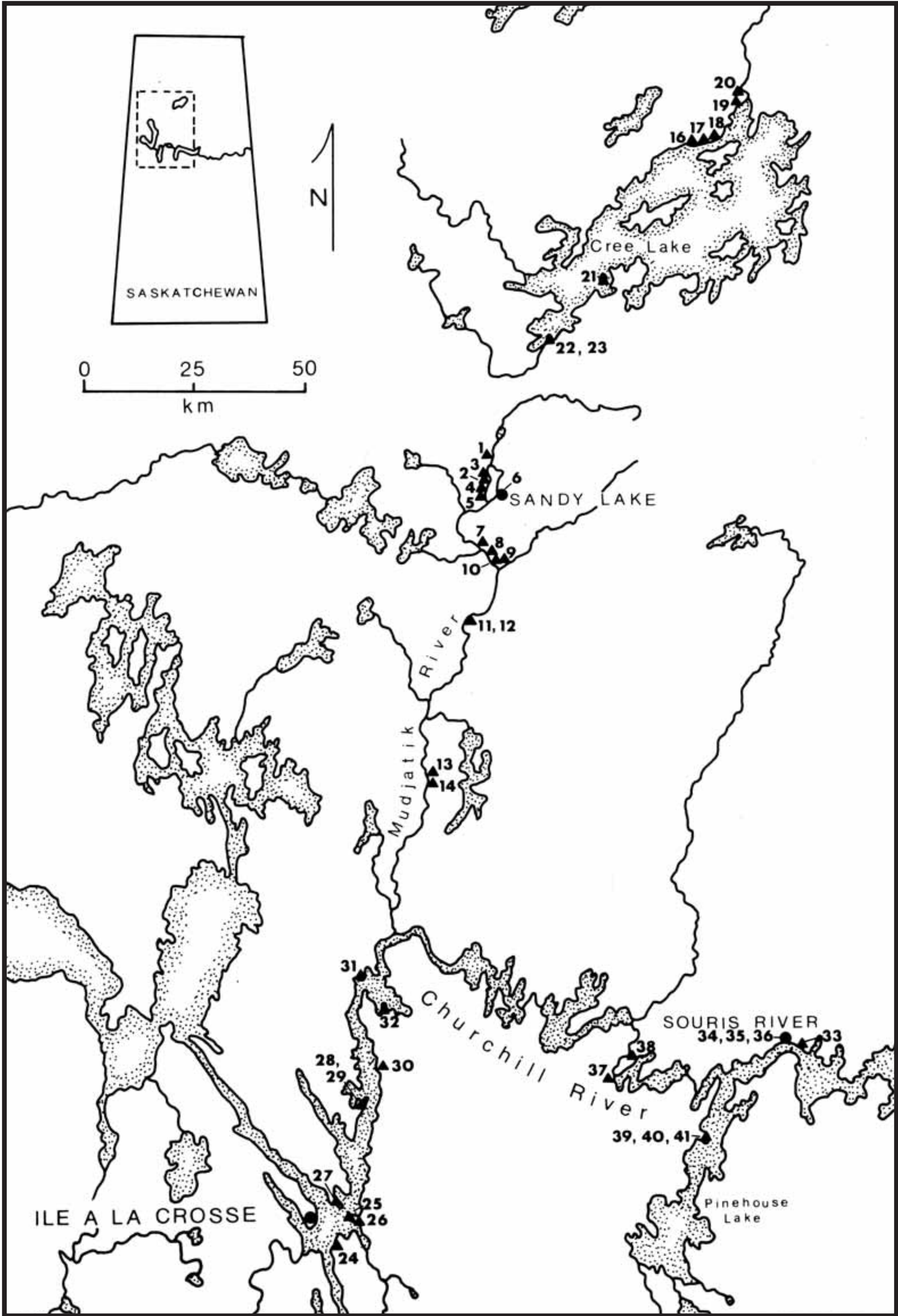

Figure 5. Network of historical archaeological sites in the upper Churchill River region of northwestern Saskatchewan.

temporary ethnography served as a source of direct historical analogies and penetrating native interpretations of the past and also provided ethnoarchaeological models for the kinds of processes creating material remains at the network of historical sites.

The synergy between the three data sets is most powerful, perhaps, for the period between 1889–1909 because: 1) individual business account records, and supporting documents such as stock inventories, fur returns and tariffs are most complete for this time, 2) these years correspond well with the occupation of many of the archaeological sites, and 3) ca. 1900 represents the historical limit of direct experience and memory for our oldest informants.

Material Expressions of Ethnic Group Differentiation

The historical archaeological material reflects cultural-ethnic boundaries in several ways. First, store-purchased food became a significant source of imported energy and, as such, facilitated changes in Chipewyan and Cree territorial and economic behavior from a pre-fur trade dependence on subsistence hunting and fishing to a later emphasis on trapping small fur bearing mammals for a commercial market. While an array of imported foods were available by the late 19th century, those packaged in distinctive tin containers, such as lard and evaporated (or condensed) milk, were most readily identifiable in the archaeological record. Commercially rendered pork fat, or lard, became a supplement to, or if necessary, a substitute for highly-valued animal fat ordinarily obtained from moose, caribou, bear, beaver, and other locally hunted animals.

Indeed, food tins accounted for a large share (23–82%) of all artifacts inventoried at the historical sites. However, an interesting distinction can be drawn as the percentage of food tins in the overall artifact inventory increases. Sites in the higher range of 75–82% tended to be occupied by either white trappers or Métis Cree. Sites in the lower range of 23–69% were generally occupied by large multi-family Chipewyan groups. This pattern reveals a fundamental distinction in adaptation to the fur trade economy. The highly mobile Chipewyan, while adept as commercial fur hunters, depended for most of their food supplies on locally procured fish and game. The Métis Cree, and the white trappers of the 1930s, had both become integrated into the fur trade in specialized ways that increased their dependency upon imported food (Brumbach 1985: 27–30; Brumbach, Jarvenpa & Buell 1982: 31–36).

Rather than interpreting frequencies of trade goods as straightforward indices of acculturation or assimilation into Euro-Canadian society, the residues in middens, house floors and other deposits require judicious examination for patterns suggesting different adaptations and economic niches within the evolving fur trade system. Different suites of trade goods were utilized by the various cultural-ethnic groups and, indeed, there also were significant *individual* differ-

ences in amounts and kinds of trade goods utilized. Some of this variation can be related to the distinction between hunting furs for market exchange (common for most Chipewyan and Cree) versus selling labor and services for goods and capital (common for most Métis Cree). Our food tin frequency data underscore the notion that there is no simple linear relationship between European artifacts at sites and acculturation of native peoples. Also, see Brown (1979), Lightfoot (1995: 206–207), and Orser (1996: 60–65) for discussions of this issue.

A second pattern of ethnic-cultural variation emerges in dwelling size as indicated by mean figures culled from house remains across all the sites (Brumbach 1985: 33–34)[10]:

Chipewyan	27.8 m^2
Cree/Métis Cree	19.6 m^2
Euro-Canadian trappers	14.9 m^2

These were rectangular log dwellings, or in some cases structures with a log base and a canvas tent roof, which after World War One began replacing Chipewyan and Cree traditional conical lodges or tipis covered with caribou hides, moose hides or spruce boughs.

The disparity in size between the Chipewyan and Cree/Métis Cree dwellings might suggest different family sizes. Census data for the Chipewyan in the early 20th century indicate that adult females of child-bearing age had on average 3.1 children (with a range of 1–8) to care for at any one time, so that *nuclear families* averaged ca. 5–6 people (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1997: 25–29). Yet, Cree/Métis Cree family size at that time may have been roughly the same or only marginally larger (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1989: 260–262; Spaulding 1970: 59–61).

The larger dwelling size for the Chipewyan reflects a common pattern of adding a second room to accommodate a recently married daughter and her new husband. Despite their bilateral social organization, the Chipewyan favored short-term matrilocal post-marital residence whereby the in-marrying son-in-law performed a kind of bride service for his wife's family while establishing new hunting partnerships and other ties with his father-in-law and brothers-in-law. The Cree and Métis Cree were also bilateral, but they had multi-generational households built from patrilocal residence arrangements and a focus on a founding pair of paternal grandparents. Yet, why were their dwellings appreciably smaller than those of the Chipewyan? One possible explanation is that the Cree/Métis Cree constructed more and/or larger storage facilities, thereby reducing their need for space within habitations. Also, their greater proximity to trading posts and the European community may have reduced their needs for storage

10. The majority of the sites were small multi-family winter hunting encampments where former residents had fairly uniform cultural-ethnic identities, that is, either Chipewyan, Métis Cree or EuroCanadian. A few of the larger sites, generally seasonal winter outpost communities, accommodated families and individuals of varied cultural backgrounds. A more fine-grained discussion of these patterns appears in Brumbach (1985) and Brumbach and Jarvenpa (1989).

while providing more opportunities for boarding some of their children with the Catholic mission school in Île à la Crosse.

The very modest size of the Euro-Canadian trappers' dwellings is less vexing. These men often were bachelors who operated alone, or in two-man partnerships, in the absence of conventional family structures or larger social support networks. Moreover, their commitment to commercial fur hunting and residence in the Upper Churchill region was emphatically short-term, a matter of a few years to a few decades.

Finally, locational characteristics of sites are informative of cultural-ethnic boundaries and relationships. Of particular interest are situations allowing access to more than one region, microenvironment, or watershed. Such locations typically include the narrows between two large bodies of water, the confluences of big rivers, and the trail-heads and trail-ends of major portages. By positioning settlements in these locales, people increased their resource options and potential for interaction and exchange with other social groups (Brumbach 1985: 30–33).

Nearly 60 percent of the sites are located in the contexts noted above. However, the trend is not uniform across ethnic groups as noted below:

Cree/Métis Cree	76.9%
Chipewyan	50%
Euro-Canadian trappers	30%

The distinction between the Native populations and the Euro-Canadians is related to their recent history in the area. There is archaeological evidence that ancestral proto-historic Cree populations occupied the Churchill River corridor itself since A.D. 1400–1750 (Meyer, Wilson and Klimko 1981: 49–105), underscoring the Cree's long term adaptation to this river system and their emphasis on water travel. Their Métis Cree relatives, acting as middlemen and laborers in the fur trade economy, also occupied sites that facilitated long distance water travel with access to a variety of far flung trade centers, outposts and reliable fishing stations. As the primary fur producers, the Chipewyan expanded into the Upper Churchill corridor when the Métis Cree were emerging in the late 18th century. However, the Chipewyan also continued earlier patterns of overland travel by foot and occupation of less aquatically-oriented sites that offered access to traditional food resources such as migratory barren-ground caribou herds in the vast region north of the Churchill River. Finally, arriving in the early 20th century, the ephemeral Euro-Canadian trappers situated themselves in the interstices between the established native settlements, often in the upper reaches of small tributary streams and other remote locations.

Socioeconomic Niches and Postures

The HBC business account book data reinforce the general impression of the Chipewyan as the hunters *par excellence* of the fur industry. Virtually the sole source of their credit in trade transactions derived from fur returns. Chipewyan customers had a rather uniform commercial adaptation of trading beaver, marten and mink pelts for key food staples like flour (HBC PAM B.89/d/338; HBC B.89/d/403; HBC PAM B.342/10; HBC PAM B.349/d/10; HBC PAM B.349/d/24; HBC PAM B.349/d/28). Variation in economic strategy was limited, but some individuals took advantage of periods of relative price stability in goods combined with heightened fur value to acquire stocks of goods in excess of basic needs. Stockpiling of clothing and textiles in particular may have represented an embryonic acquisition of capital for enhanced prestige and status (Jarvenpa & Brumbach 1984).

The account book analyses also support conventional interpretations of the subarctic Métis as a rudimentary working class and as cultural-economic mediators (Brown 1976; Slobodin 1981). The Métis Cree filled an intermediary position as field traders, transport specialists, interpreters and servants. Compared to the Chipewyan, however, individuals and families varied considerably in the way they procured food energy, articulated with the HBC, and interacted with other cultural-ethnic groups. These individual strategies form a continuum from relatively sedentary, non-salaried occasional laborer-craftsmen to mobile, full-time contracted servants with wages, rations, and managerial responsibilities. Although their total expenditures for trade goods were similar to those of the Chipewyan, the Métis Cree purchased less productive technology, such as firearms, gun powder, shot, snare wire, and steel traps (HBC PAM B.89/d/338; HBC PAM B.267/d/2; HBC PAM B.89/d/409). Moreover, store food and rations assumed greater importance for Métis (Jarvenpa & Brumbach 1985).

The limited account book data available for Cree (as opposed to Métis Cree) customers suggest a fur trapping-subsistence hunting adaptation closely resembling the commercial profiles of Chipewyan (HBC PAM B.89/d/403; HBC PAM B.89349/d/24).

Levels of Identification and Affectation

Although the Chipewyan, Cree and Métis Cree had different socioterritorial organizations, it remains the case that these groups participated in the same fur trade market system and political economy. It can be argued that this larger system of relations had its own pan-ethnic or supra-cultural form of sociospatial organization. This organization was the product of 150 years or more of reconciling Native and European patterns of settlement and social life. Viewed in this way, the settlement-community hierarchy embracing all Upper Churchill peoples combined elements of Native band organization (hunting camps and multi-

family domestic settlements) with an essentially Western framework of market distribution (central posts and subordinate outposts). The hybridity is apparent when these familiar forms are viewed as a system: 1) hunting or bush camps, 2) domestic settlements, 3) outpost communities, and 4) parent post (e.g. Île à la Crosse) (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1989: 267–289, Jarvenpa and Brumbach 1988: 612–613).

Ethnographic interviews and informant narratives were particularly productive in demonstrating that all the cultural-ethnic groups had some experience and familiarity with the full spectrum of community forms. For example, the Chipewyan lived for brief periods at the trading outposts and coordinated their summer rendezvous at Île à la Crosse, despite devoting much time to a "bush" livelihood. By contrast, Métis normally associated with trading post communities occasionally "tripped" or field traded at winter domestic settlements and remote bush camps of both Chipewyan and Cree. Nonetheless, the fundamental socioeconomic stratification of the fur trade kept these groups relatively segregated near opposite poles of the settlement-community continuum.

The Chipewyan identified most intensely with the mobile lifestyle of the small winter encampment. They highly valued the manifold material and social rewards of hunting which imbued bush camp life. For them, the domain of the outpost and central post was cosmopolitan and exciting but also fraught with ambivalence and discomfort. Traders were perceived as potentially deceitful, and Chipewyan were uncomfortable with the pervasiveness and immediacy of European authority and control over their lives.

Because the Métis Cree had become part of the lower echelon of management, under whose authority the Chipewyan chafed, their emotional commitment and sense of identity were anchored in the orbit of the trading posts. Mercantile operations, fur company traditions, and family involvement in the trade became sources of Métis pride and empathic bonding to places like Île à la Crosse.

By the mid to late 20th century, the interaction sphere between Chipewyan and Cree, or Chipewyan and Métis Cree, had developed in some interesting new directions. On the *cooperative* side, there are intercommunity flows of labor, particularly in the commercial fishing industry. "Fishing bosses," who recruit "hired hand" laborers to fish for them on a fixed wage basis, represent an emerging enterpreneurial class. Fishing bosses often recruit outside their home communities to prevent established kin and social ties from interfering with business. Thus, a Chipewyan fishing boss from Patuanak might search for Cree or Métis Cree hands from Île à la Crosse, Buffalo Narrows or Pinehouse Lake. Yet, the most successful bosses tend to be Métis Cree men with large fleets of workers of Chipewyan, Cree and Métis background (Jarvenpa 1982b: 290–291).

Also, a variety of festivals and pilgrimages have emerged in the Upper Churchill communities in recent years which serve to periodically integrate people from a vast region. They are complex ceremonial occasions and a form of mass social contact between Chipewyan, Cree and Métis Cree. For example, the

Patauank pilgrimage, held every July, ostensibly commemorates the death of an Oblate missionary, but the event has a variety of informal, sub rosa or latent functions. The pilgrimage is one context within which Cree curers or "medicine men/women" (*manitukasiu* in Cree) offer their services. Chipewyan readily avail themselves of these curing services and also seek the expertise of Cree soothsayers, seers and medicinal plant specialists in other contexts. Such patron-client relationships are based upon the Chipewyan acknowledgement of Cree superiority in magical and medicinal knowledge (Jarvenpa 1982b: 291–293, Jarvenpa 1990).[11] Arguably, in the context of magico-medicinal relations the Chipewyan and Cree have developed a system of interdependencies that relies upon complementary cultural differences in the sense meant by Barth (1969: 15–19).

On the "negative" or competitive side, there are intercommunity rivalries and antipathies which sometimes can be interpreted by locals as a product of Chipewyan-Cree animosity. Such judgements are common when young male visitors from other communities become boastful or offensive at drinking parties. More seriously, perhaps, is a widely-held fear by Chipewyan in the negative applications of Cree "medicine" in sorcery. A powerful Cree can initiate or facilitate misfortune illness or death by "working medicine against" someone. Lacking their own magico-medicinal practitioners, the Chipewyan are in the uncomfortable position of seeking protection from the same class of Cree specialists that has the power to create misfortune (Jarvenpa 1982b: -296).

Discussion and Conclusion

With respect to the hypotheses guiding this project, only partial or mixed support resulted from the research:

1. Niche width: For much of the late 18th and 19th centuries the Chipewyan expanded their geographical range and utilized new microenvironments as their involvement with European traders intensified, only to retract somewhat in the late 19th century. Despite some aggressive forays north of the Churchill River in the late 18th century, despite demographic increases which might have favored

11. Also of a "cooperative" nature, there has been a limited degree of Chipewyan-Cree intermarriage or, more precisely, Chipewyan-Métis Cree intermarriage. In the early 1900s, the HBC and Revillon Frères occasionally sent Métis Cree men from Île à la Crosse to manage some of their seasonal winter outposts in Chipewyan country. In some cases, these Métis Cree traders and clerks married local Chipewyan women and, therefore, either by accident or intent, developed reciprocal kinship rights and obligations within the local Chipewyan groups among whom they wintered. In addition to their native Cree speech, these men usually spoke French or a patois of French and Cree as well as Chipewyan, and sometimes English. These multilingual abilities were often passed along to their children, several of whom were prominent founding members of a satellite community of Patuanak in the 1960s (Jarvenpa 2004: 166–167). An interesting dynamic from an identity perspective is that the children, and especially the grandchildren and subsequent generations, stemming from these early interethnic marriages were raised in communities that were predominantly Chipewyan, so that their speech and cultural identity have been primarily *Dene* or Chipewyan. However, Cree contributions to people's ancestry can be invoked by the community as an explanation of disorder. A family experiencing several generations of drowning deaths, for example, may be viewed by others as "cursed." That is, the misfortune is interpreted as a punishment for being "part Cree" (Jarvenpa 1982b: 296).

geographic expansion, and despite the wide-ranging and diverse activities of their Métis relatives, the Cree remained in a rather restricted range on the southern periphery of the Upper Churchill region throughout history.

2. Food and specialization: A strong contrast emerged between "fur hunter" and "fur trade laborer" orientations for the Chipewyan and Métis Cree respectively. These roles were associated with different frequencies in use of locally procured and imported food, different patterns of mobility, and variable forms of access and attachment to European trading personnel. Paradoxically, the Chipewyan, with the greatest subsistence self-sufficiency and geographic mobility, were no less integrated into the fur trade economy than Métis Cree servants and laborers. Indeed, as the primary producers in the system, the Chipewyan may have endured greater initial hardship as the fur trade waned in the early 20th century. As noted previously, these realities deny any simple relationship between amount of European goods and degree of acculturation.

3. Interethnic relations: Chipewyan-Cree interactions exhibit some aspects of a long-term historical trend from competition toward cooperation, but this cannot be easily linked with shifts in niche width or biogeographical range. Competition in the early stages of the fur trade was expressed by territorial exclusivity and abrasiveness, and it is likely that sharpening of occupational roles later in history helped transform or rechannel such competitive relations. Nonetheless, even with the advent of cooperative labor and intercommunity festival life in recent times, the area of magico-medicinal power and expertise has become a significant arena for defining Chipewyan and Cree cultural separateness and for symbolically underlining their historical relationship as adversaries.

4. Socioeconomic dominance: More information is needed to clarify how various demographic, economic and cultural factors interacted through time in creating a system of socioeconomic stratification, but Cree and Métis Cree generally assumed dominant positions over Chipewyan. For the most part these status differences operated in the absence of *overt* political control. However, the defacto colonial authority wielded by the HBC extended to its Métis Cree outpost managers. A more thorough examination of the social life of the outpost communities would help address this issue.

The implications of this research for prehistoric or pre-contact archaeology are well worth exploring. Joseph Caldwell (1964) pioneered the idea of "interaction sphere" to explain how numerous prehistoric societies in the American Midwest came to share the same exotic high status grave goods of the Hopewell burial cult (ca. AD 0–450). Elaborating on this theme, Braun (1986) interpreted Hopewell as a peer-polity interaction characterized by competitive emulation and symbolic entrainment.

By contrast, the Upper Churchill interaction sphere was not constructed of peer-polity relationships but rather asymmetric power connected to market exchange. In other research contexts, including the many centuries of Hopewellian interaction and influence, "contact" was likely a long term and far more gradual series of events, changes, and accommodations, while many of the events analyzed in the Chipewyan-Cree-Métis sphere are well defined in terms of temporality. Our ability to examine change and interaction within a compressed time span allows us to interpret interethnic relations undergoing rapid transformation, in this case, the era in which indigenous Native American societies were drawn into the "world system" of the European fur trade economy. While we do not recommend applying the Chipewyan-Cree-Métis case as a static analogy for the cultural specifics of other times and places, we do suggest that reframing some of our findings as broad hypotheses or processes may aid in the interpretation of other archaeological interaction spheres. Toward this effort, several issues deserve consideration:

First, conventional scholarship may reduce contact and interaction to two parties, such as a "colonial power" and the "natives." Yet, real-life situations reveal complex social landscapes with numerous indigenous societies, such as the Chipewyan and Cree, and emergent groups like the Métis whose ethnogenesis was a product of frontier interaction. These local societies were in ever shifting relationships with each other and with multiple European agents and organizations, including representatives of numerous fur trading companies, free traders, independent hunters, and missionaries, among others. Arguably, the intersecting motivations and strategies among the full corpus of actors characterize their "interaction sphere." Accordingly, archaeological sites which initially appear to reflect a combination of "native" and "colonial" derived material culture actually may have complicated histories of occupation and re-occupation by more than two parties, perhaps several cultural-ethnic groups, as well as emergent societies, involved in complex arenas of exchange, competition, avoidance, negotiation, power relations, and identity dynamics.

Second, the nature of change in interaction spheres is unlikely to be one of simple cultural loss and replacement, even when the power differential between some groups is pronounced. Mutual accommodation, niche specialization, resistance, hybrid groups, hybridized institutions, networking through intermarriage, and individual coping strategies and innovations, among other factors, may contribute to a multi-layered and multi-stranded process of change.

Finally, interactions between multiple societies have not only economic and political contexts, but also they can have significant ceremonial and religious manifestations. In archaeology, long-term cultural histories are often punctuated by the appearance of ritual paraphernalia, burial cults, and related trappings of magico-religious behavior. In our Upper Churchill study, the death of a Catholic missionary was the origin of an annual Chipewyan pilgrimage which socially integrates numerous Chipewyan, Cree and Métis peoples from across

the region, hybridizes indigenous and European concepts of sacred power, and acknowledges Cree superiority in magical and medicinal knowledge. In a purely archaeological context, the details of emergence of ceremonial-religious traditions may not be retrievable, but the role played by interaction and integration of several or more societies should be considered. Sacred rituals may have the coercive power to bring diverse peoples together, to either arbitrate or temporarily suspend their different interests and conflicts, and perhaps to symbolically aid in the historical transformation from one state of society to another (for example, from subarctic hunting band to frontier working class). As part of this transformation, Cree superiority over the Chipewyan in matters of magic and medicine may have derived, in part, from initial Cree/Métis Cree dominance in the fur trade economy. The co-evolution of the material and the sacred is a promising area for future study of archaeological interaction spheres.

Acknowledgments

An early version of this paper was presented at the conference "Networks, Interaction and Emerging Identities in Fennoscandia and Beyond," at the University of Tromsø, October 13–16, 2009. We are grateful to Dr. Charlotte Damm for organizing the conference and also for co-editing the present volume with Dr. Janne Saarikivi. The anonymous reviewers also have our thanks for providing useful and constructive criticism. Our ethnoarchaeological field research was generously supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Museums of Canada (now the Canadian Museum of Civilization), and the University Awards Committee of the State University of New York. Our largest debt is to the Chipewyan, Cree and Métis people of northern Saskatchewan, particularly from the communities of Patuanak, Cree Lake, Pinehouse Lake, and Île à la Crosse. Their years of collaboration and friendship are a continuing source of inspiration.

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