MAKING A LIVING IN THE BUSH:

LAND TENURE AT WASKAGANISH

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Pour gagner sa vie dans la brousse il faut connaître le pays et les techniques nécessaires. Cet essai illustrera les stratégies dont se servent les Cris de Rupert House pour utiliser leurs territoires de trappe. Des facteurs idéologiques et physiques seront analysés pour montrer comment ces territoires sont exploités, au moyen d'une variété de stratégies qui tiennent compte de l'étendue et du caractère du territoire aussi bien que des besoins individuels des trappeurs. L'histoire de l'exploitation des ressources dans la région sera invoquée afin d'en isoler les facteurs décisifs qui ont été impliqués dans le changement des approches des Cris à l'utilisation de la terre.

To make a living in the bush, one must have both a knowledge of the land and the necessary skills. This essay illustrates game plans with which the Rupert House Cree make use of their trapping territories. Ideological and physical factors are reviewed to demonstrate how trapping territories are exploited through a variety of strategies that take into account the size and nature of the territory and the needs of individual trappers. The history of resource exploitation in the area is used to isolate factors crucial to changing Cree approaches to land use.

This essay looks at how discrete hunting-trapping territories form part of the land use pattern of the Waskaganish Cree. (Waskaganish, also known as Rupert House, is located on the southeastern coast of James Bay, in Québec.) The debate on hunting territories found in the anthropological literature has tended to center on the hunting territory, never adequately defined, rather than on the activities undertaken by a specific group in hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering—in other words, in making a living off the land.

The focus on "territory" incorporates a whole complex of traits (including known boundaries, marked boundaries, defense, and inheritance of territory) that assumes a degree of rigidity or formalization out of keeping with the way of life of the people. My concern stems in part from this apparent lack of fit between the levels of territorial and societal organization.

Is too much being read into the statements of informants? Is too much organization imputed by the anthropologist? Does the anthropological focus on "territory" introduce too much into the analysis that is unintended and is more the anthropologist's artifact and less the way of life he or she is studying? Is there a level of organization hitherto undiscovered? Are such institutions as initial matrilocal residence and cross-cousin marriage only incipient and underdeveloped forms of social organization?

When viewed in historical perspective, these questions become exceedingly complex. Are the hunting territories, for example, remnants of previously more clearly defined complexes? Alternatively, are they a product of more recent circumstances? If so, what factors are relevant to conducting such an analysis?

The intention of this essay is to demonstrate that the study of hunting territories requires more detailed ethnographic information than that which has been brought to bear in the classical studies of Speck and Leacock on hunting and trapping territories. This applies whether or not all the historical questions are indeed answerable. The relevant issues must derive from a detailed consideration of land use. To explain why this is so requires a brief review of some of the literature.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of the writing on Algonquian hunting and trapping territories has been generated by the desire to explain the apparent anomaly of hunting peoples having specialized or formalized organization. The widespread presence of this phenomenon among different Algonquian groups was noted (Davidson 1928; Speck 1942), but for some years it was studied as though the differences were of little consequence to the analysis. It was presumed that some historical key might be found if only the complex could be mapped. In his zeal for filling in the map, Speck often seems to have tired of reporting the detail needed to document all aspects of the hunting territories. In reference to the Kipawa Band he noted: "Socially and economically we find the same characteristics prevailing here as in the Temiskaming and Timagami bands which are respectively treated in the first and third chapters of this [study]. It is hardly necessary, therefore, to repeat the facts concerning paternal inheritance, trespass regulations, and the conservation of game in each of the family groups" (Speck 1915:9-10).

However, these details are needed to assess the complex as a whole. Under what circumstances were groups able to conserve game, to whom did trespass rules apply, and what happened when the rules broke down? Speck's study, rather than being systemic, tended to respond to the methodological concerns of the day, namely, the delineation of culture areas. For example, while

viewing trespass regulation as part of the hunting territory complex among the Lake St. John bands, he casually noted: "Resentment against trespass is not especially strong" (1927: 389). In Speck's work, it is unclear how the different elements fit together in any one community and set of ecological circumstances. Differentiating crucial and peripheral factors did not seem to concern him.

Leacock (1954) introduced another category of considerations. She focused on and refuted Speck's claim that such territories are aboriginal in nature. Using historical and contemporary evidence, she suggested that the territories are a relatively new phenomenon arising from a shift from subsistence strategies to ones based on production for exchange. She saw the Montagnais of the lower north shore of the St. Lawrence River as becoming more reliant on store-bought goods and food and less on integrative, community-wide support. Cash or credit from the sale of furs was breaking down the community circle of cooperation and changing the man/land relation to one of individual ownership over discrete trapping and hunting areas.

Leacock emphasized the economic causes of change—a shift in social relations. This is, however, doubtful: historic data from the lower north shore suggest that inter-ethnic conflict caused change. I. H. Lavallée, M.D., of Sept Iles, Québec, in a letter of July 1935 to Indian Affairs, states: "The Indians do not exaggerate, their game lands are massacred by the whiteman who have no scruple in violating the game laws. Further, they appropriate the Indian game lands and the latter have to drift further away" (Indian Affairs, RG 10, Volume 6750, File 420-10A). The situation seems to have worsened, as is reported in *Action catholique* (1939) on December 9: "Tense situation developing between White People and Indians of the North Shore; the Indians claim that white people do not have the right to hunt certain parts of the area. An open dispute is taking place. It is said that some camps have already been pillaged." (Indian Affairs, RG 10, Volume 6750, File 420-10A).

A model that incorporated these historic data might have better accounted for the facts put forth by Leacock. Leacock's and Knight's models are based on propositions and facts that generally remain at the level of assertions or are peripheral to the main argument. These claims must be examined to develop well-founded models.

The factors isolated by Leacock are worthy of further investigation. For example, she distinguishes between pre- and post-trapline. People of the north shore were more dependent on migrating caribou in the earlier period than they were later. Moreover, the trappers formerly used their knowledge of hunting techniques to derive a living wherever they wandered. Older hunters spoke of their earlier travels and of the fewer restric-

tions on exploiting certain areas. One must, however, evaluate such testimony within the context of broader changes in land use. If the area was "one hunt," what did this mean during different seasons, when different resources were exploited? Did people wander randomly over the entire area? If not, what were the strategic (ecological and social) considerations of the hunters which allowed them to best exploit their own circumstances?

Answers to such questions would allow one to address the coordination of activities between hunting groups. Perhaps non-territorial rules governed exploitation. There may have been need not so much for territorial defense but rather for intergroup cooperation, depending on the resources exploited. Defense of boundaries may not have effectively controlled access. An alternative method may have been coordination of effort. The implications of such a strategy depend on the case. An "open hunt" could in fact have ranged from unrestricted to limited opportunities.

In his study of Rupert House (Waskaganish) hunting territories, Knight (1959) did not accept Leacock's arguments. Rather, he saw territories as imposed by the Hudson's Bay Company and little affecting activities of Rupert House hunters. He recorded men who said that they could hunt anywhere—according to Knight, without regard to territories. He also reported that people sometimes set off for the winter hunt without a clear idea as to where they would spend the season. The argument that store food would tide a trapper over and thereby lessen his dependence on the community was not acceptable to Knight; he noted many non-economic reasons for relying on other people. For Knight, the growth in the moose population increased individualization among hunters in recent times. This, and moose frequenting the same habitats as fine fur animals, allowed for an increased food return to the hunter, who could focus on fur trapping. Trapping groups could gain minimal independence from each other.

Other authors have introduced further considerations. Bishop (1974) queried the relation between the location of trading posts and the distribution of territories in northern Ontario. Rogers (1963) noted the association between a particular territory and a grouping larger than the nuclear family, called the family hunting group or the extended family. Tanner (1973) stressed the importance of Cree concepts of land, animals, and ownership for territoriality. Both Tanner (1973) and Feit (1973) saw territories as management units. Feit has examined inheritance, hunting and trapping techniques, and territories.

Clearly, hunting territories must be viewed within the context of detailed analysis of many different types of information. Moreover, our terms should stem from, or make sense of, the ethnographic context, not simply be applied without question.

WASKAGANISH TRAPLINES TODAY

I will now describe the current situation in Waskaganish and comment on previous analysis of territoriality there. Also, I will depict territoriality as it relates to hunting and trapping strategies.

There are now thirty-two traplines in the area of Waskaganish, covering ninety-five percent of the exploited land. Nineteenth-century areas and numbers are uncertain, but population figures of 205 and 250 for 1838 and 1858, respectively (Francis and Morantz 1983:173), suggest about fifty hunters in that period. Waskaganish today exceeds 900 people, an increase of 330 percent. However, many adult males hunt only part-time; they do not trap in winter but join the spring and fall goose hunts. There are about 100 full-time trappers and about 108 casual hunters. Thus the number of full-time hunters/trappers has only doubled since the mid-nineteenth century.

The full-time trappers manage their winter hunting and trapping by forecasting the numbers of animals they expect to harvest. Furs comprise part of their income; wage labor and special income supplement payments for hunting add to their earnings. Generally speaking, a hunter assesses a particular area, either a whole trapline or part of it; the quality of information varies, depending on experience. Due to increases in schooling and alternative job opportunities, experience is not a simple function of age. A person may begin hunting and trapping for a living after he is fully grown and perhaps has a family. Older people often provide helpful information.

Some hunters are better than others at applying what they have heard or learned from experience. Certain people observe details and integrate these into a more general understanding of the land. For example, one of the Waskaganish hunters observed burned trees at various times and places and was told of earlier burns. He linked these data to obtain a detailed account of the extent and timing of burns and of the present vegetation pattern.

How the territory is used depends on its likely products, potential employment, and possible opportunities, such as invitations to hunt on others' lands. There is, thus, an assessment of options and needs. Cost of travel and equipment and cash and food needs of the family are all taken into account. Since the 1940s travel may have involved the use of airplanes, outboard motors, and snowmobiles as well as in-town residence. Assessment of costs and needs also affects land use strategy.

There emerge two patterns of land use. First, an area can be trapped out and left "fallow" for one to five years to allow the beaver population to increase. Second, restricted trapping can be conducted every year, leaving breeding stock for the next and

allowing for continual, low-level exploitation of small traplines, with only one annual trapping management unit. That is, most of the hunters tend to conceive of their trapping territories as containing one or more units which are exploitable from certain camps, using certain means of travel. These areas contain a minimal set of requirements (camps, roads, types of resources) to sustain a season's hunting and trapping activities. Territories with two units are sometimes managed on a "skip cycle": the trapper leaves his line every third year to trap elsewhere. Sometimes an adjacent untrapped area of the next trapline will act as a feeder zone and allow for continuous trapping of a two-unit line. Similarly, some hunters with three units will leave one upstream unit untrapped to act as a feeder zone for the rest of the area, again allowing for continuous trapping on two units. Three units tend to be the minimum for continuous trapping. There are some exceptions to this pattern. For example, one man took five families to his trapline which is large enough to accommodate two internal units, and trapped it out. He had not trapped the line for four years and did not intend to return to it for a couple of years. The strategy is altered to fit opportunities for wage labor in the community. Overall, however, the territorial strategy is basic and reflects a desire to maximize chances for a successful hunt.

The size of traplines is quite varied, but the biggest variation can be explained historically and ecologically. For example, the largest traplines are all south of Waskaganish. Trappers there explain that the large area of unproductive muskeg is responsible for the large size. More land must be covered to make a living. Further, Abitibi band trappers used to work part of the area until the late 1930s, when the Hudson's Bay Company and the federal government set up a beaver preserve, forcing their withdrawal. Also, trappers from Moose Factory had hunted over part of this area at various times. Construction of the transcontinental railway line (south of Waskaganish) in 1911, and of the extension of the railway line to Moosonee, adjacent to Moose Factory between 1922 and 1932, also drew these other Indian groups southward. Consequently, the area was left to Waskaganish trappers. Earlier, supply routes for Abitibi and Waswanipi-Gull Lake posts and fur trade competition probably affected the distribution of trappers in the area. All the smaller traplines appear to have been created since the beaver conservation projects of the period from the 1930s to 1960s and have been owned by descendants of former Hudson's Bay Company employees since the 1930s.

The surface areas of the thirty-two Waskaganish traplines are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE ONE: WASKAGANISH TRAPLINES TODAY

	Number of Traplines	Surface Area (km^2)
Group 1	5	100-300
Group 2	9	300-500
	10	500-700
Group 3	4	700-900
	1	900-1,000
	1	1,100-1,300
	2	3,000+

In group 1, four of the five traplines are close to the post (within thirty kilometers) and are fairly recent. In group 3, seven out of eight traplines are located south of town, as far as 210 kilometers away; the one exception, 702 square kilometers, is northeast of town. Most traplines are from 300 to 700 square kilometers in size and contain two or three internal management units.

The one hundred full-time trappers associated with Waskaganish spread their winter trapping activities over a maximum of thirty-two traplines. Within these areas, they must decide which management units will be hunted. About eighty-three management units are distributed among the thirty-two traplines.

The consensus among the Waskaganish trappers is that there is not much room for increasing the number of trappers on the land. The resources are being exploited to the maximum. The system of territories and internal management units is generally for the trapping of beaver and fine furs. There are exceptions, however, since fine fur animals are thought of as moving across the land during cycles of abundance. Trappers will take any opportunity to kill high-return furs, especially lynx, but trapping other fine furs tends to be confined to travel routes to beaver traps or other resources. Also, one trapper may sometimes allow another to hunt in a portion of his trapline, but killing only fine furs and small game, not beaver. This type of arrangement is sometimes made when a family wants to be on a trapline near its village or when an elderly man wants to trap a few animals close to the village. Examples include a man unable to undertake strenuous activities who wished to live near the village on his brother's line. Another man did not want to hunt on his recently deceased brother's line and so asked if he could spend the winter on a corner of another trapper's line. Avoidance of a deceased man's territory is usual: there is a Waskaganish belief that when a man dies, the animals leave the territory in search of him.

Spatial organization is a necessary part of the exploitation of animal resources by present-day Waskaganish hunters. Whether

this type of organization was always necessary and occurred under different conditions is not easy to determine. Evidently, however, a strategy of land use challenges Knight's view that hunters often set out without a clear idea of where they would spend the winter. Moreover, on many of these traplines, moose and caribou are seldom present. Thus Knight's suggestion that the presence of moose enhances the chances of confining hunting and trapping to a territory also does not seem to be supported. The Waskaganish area has woodland caribou in small numbers. Local accounts often described the hunt as performed by one to four hunters. In the Waskaganish, groups of three or four caribou are found in the fall; only about once in ten years, in the spring, is found a herd of twenty or more (up to fifty) caribou.

At Waskaganish there appears to be an adaptation to a fairly evenly distributed, though sparse, population of small game and fur-bearing animals. Whether territories with well-defined boundaries were present in the past or not, they exist today. The situation some years ago allowed for a dispersal of population across the land. Rather than requiring boundaries and sanctions against trespass, the sparseness of the population necessitated contact with neighboring groups.

In the past, conjuring was used to establish contact with other groups. Important themes in conjuring included the use of the *wapimocakoman*, a bark container of water that provided a means of seeing over distances. Dreams and unusual occurrences are other examples of conjuring practices. There seems to have been considerable anxiety over the health of others and at times over the health of one's own group. Concerns were related to the need to establish contact between groups. When a person came upon another's trail he felt obliged to follow it to the other's home. This is still the case today, although to a lesser extent. As a result, the whereabouts of each hunting group becomes known to the others. Inevitably some activities of both groups end up being coordinated by the eldest male, who knows the area best. Today, such a person is referred to as the "tallyman" or "trapline head," while the traditional boss (*ocimaw*) of a camp is distinguished by the local trappers if there is a difference between the two. As one trapper said of his father, "He gave me the trapline, so I am the tallyman, but he is still the boss (*ocimaw*)."

SUMMARY

Both Leacock (1954) and Knight (1959) played down the importance of knowledge of a particular territory in favor of knowledge of the techniques of travel and resource exploitation, which allow for mobility throughout a given trapping and hunting territory. Knight based his conclusion partly on one informant, who indicated that he felt free to hunt anywhere.

Knowledge of a specific territory is vital to making a living from that territory, and we must therefore re-examine Knight's interpretation. First, Knight's study was based on data from three individuals; two were not the oldest in their families and had not inherited their fathers' hunting territories. For some years, both men had hunted in Ontario and also on other men's territories, along with the owners. The third man had acquired territory through reallocation of land by the Hudson's Bay Company during the beaver conservation program. In other words, Knight's sample contained no traditional trapline heads.

Nevertheless, we must consider this one informant of Knight's claim that he could hunt anywhere. The statement seems better understood as sociologically based rather than as reflecting a statement of hunting strategy. It would be uncommon for a trapper to admit to a newcomer that he is unable to hunt in a particular area or with the owner of the area, or unable to obtain the owner's permission to hunt there. Conversely, but unlikely, the speaker could have been referring to moose hunting or hare snaring, and may have felt that he could kill these animals anywhere. In my experience, even these activities are undertaken with the permission of the owner. Moreover, this is a small society. While a trapper would likely grant another's request, this would affect the network of reciprocity that binds the community: at some point there would be a return in kind. The exercise of rights is bracketed by the larger hunting group and community context. A couple of examples will illustrate this.

Three families were together on one trapline. A large beaver lodge visible from the camp had remained untouched by any trapper for the first month of the season. Seeing that nobody claimed it, one hunter set traps at the lodge. This caused a minor controversy. The first to see a lodge has the right to trap it. Another man claimed the lodge, since he had seen it from a plane. By accepting all three hunters on the hunt, the head of that territory had set aside his prior claims in favor of first sighting. In this case, the one who had set his traps left them there but the kill from that lodge was only one two-year-old beaver. If the kill had been larger, it might have developed into a greater controversy.

In another example, a man heard of a moose that had been seen at a certain place. He went there and killed it. This caused comment around town: the one who had seen and reported the moose had thereby established his right to kill the animal. In a similar way, a hunter in the bush might know where a moose is browsing and decide not to disturb it. He might walk around the area on the snow, so as to be sure of its location, and indicate to others his prior right.

Today, hunting territories have more or less clear boundaries. These boundaries are often disputed, and there are tres-

pass sanctions. For example, a man came across a trap set at beaver lodges on a stream that he thought belonged to him. He therefore tore up the traps and put them on the bank. He was criticized for this in town. It was thought that he should have left the traps set and informed the owners that they were trapping on his land. Once the question of stream ownership had been resolved, it then would have been incumbent upon those trappers at least to turn the pelts over to the owner of the stream. The general rule is respect for another's "road," even if at times the other's road seems to violate your rights.

Last, the issue of a trapper's ability to travel anywhere, without detailed knowledge of the terrain, needs to be addressed. Three facts are relevant to this point: First, the Eastern Crees have a word *nihaciiw* meaning "he hunts on land he has not seen before." This is probably cognate with *nihasim* (son-in-law) and so suggests that patrilineal descent operated in the Waskaganish for some time, or at least that sons-in-law are unlikely to know one's territory. Initial matrilocal residence may also be reflected here. Second, in certain places, particularly in regard to fishing techniques, prior knowledge is necessary. For example, lakes where fish can be driven into a net periodically saved people from starvation. Third, whether hunting moose or beaver, hunters always consult one another about the land. This knowledge is at a premium. A person going to hunt in a new area will go with someone who knows the terrain.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In summary, the traplines near Waskaganish are becoming increasingly more defined, as are the rights to these territories. There are, however, still few immediate sanctions on trespass. Rather, the system is maintained by social pressure, which regulates adherence to implicit but widely known rules of access.

A similar system of social pressures operates during the spring goose hunt. For that hunt, there is a considerable investment in time in a particular place. The location of all the hunters' blinds is worked out by indirect negotiation: each man indicates his intended location through others, often his wife. However, certain older hunters always go to the same places and so increase the stability of the arrangements. When the jockeying for position is finished, the hunters set off to build their blinds and camps.

For the fall goose hunt, the system has broken down in recent years. The hunt used to be well organized, as families would live in camps on the coast. Hunters did not travel all around the coast but rather waited for the right weather conditions. However, families now seldom establish camps on the coast

but stay in town. Moreover, bigger canoes and motors have allowed travel in weather conditions that were formerly prohibiting. The hunters therefore travel to where they think the wind is blowing toward shore. Their movements, however, are uncoordinated and unrestricted, and so groups often spoil one another's chances of killing geese. People now comment that the frequent movement of hunters around the coast has made the geese skittish, so that they avoid regular flight routes near the blinds.

This example serves to demonstrate that the close coordination of effort is one ingredient in the long-term success of the hunt. The challenge for the Cree trappers and hunters will be to continue to promote this coordination in the face of increasing pressure on resources and changes in access.

The foregoing has demonstrated that a Cree hunter must process and evaluate a wide range of sociocultural and environmental information, which suggests that the hunting complex is not just a simple reflex of European contact. Many anthropologists have focused on external variables as underlying explanations or causal factors for the development and/or persistence of family hunting territories, but clearly one must first understand the total hunting complex.

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