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Production and Exchange among Wemindji Cree: Egalitarian Ideology and Economic Base

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Article abstract

Despite a series of changes in productive forces and in relations with capitalist society, the Cree of northern Quebec have maintained a domestic mode of production. Until quite recently, reciprocity was seriously entertained as the idiom of relations even with the white man. This paper examines, for Wemindji Cree hunters, the effect of increased consumer affluence on subsistence production, sharing, and potential stratification between subsistence-oriented and wage-earning sectors of the local economy. The case of Wemindji Cree suggests that “antisurplus” forces in a domestic mode of production are reduced when domestic producers enter into reciprocal exchange with wage-earners, who have superior access to consumer goods. Surplus bush product is generated by domestic producers in exchange for help from wage-earning relatives in purchasing labor-saving technology and other consumer items. Hence, inequalities of access to both bush products and consumer goods are reduced or eliminated. However, for ecological and technological reasons, possible increases in domestic productivity are often more restricted than potential increases in wage income. Egalitarian exchange is threatened if wage-earners' margin of superior access to consumer goods becomes disproportionate to domestic producers' ability to produce a parallel surplus of bush products. In that case, the ideology of reciprocity would require that the value of domestic products become too marked, wage-earners might not exchange enough of their goods for equality to obtain, and permanent stratification might develop. A second scenario consists in the establishment of independent access to more consumer goods for domestic producers (in addition to legal guarantees of a subsistence base). In the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1975), this condition was established in the form of a guaranteed annual income for hunters.

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Despite a series of changes in productive forces and in relations with capitalist society, the Cree of northern Quebec have maintained a domestic mode of production. Until quite recently, reciprocity was seriously entertained as the idiom of relations even with the white man.

This paper examines, for Wemindji Cree hunters, the effect of increased consumer affluence on subsistence production, sharing, and potential stratification between subsistence-oriented and wage-earning sectors of the local economy.

The case of Wemindji Cree suggests that "anti-surplus" forces in a domestic mode of production are reduced when domestic producers enter into reciprocal exchange with wage-earners, who have superior access to consumer goods. Surplus bush product is generated by domestic producers in exchange for help from wage-earning relatives in purchasing labor-saving technology and other consumer items. Hence, inequalities of access to both bush products and consumer goods are reduced or eliminated.

However, for ecological and technological reasons, possible increases in domestic productivity are often more restricted than potential increases in wage income. Egalitarian exchange is threatened if wage-earners' margin of superior access to consumer goods becomes disproportionate to domestic producers' ability to produce a parallel surplus of bush products. In that case, the ideology of reciprocity would require that the value of domestic products become too marked, wage-earners

might not exchange enough of their goods for equality to obtain, and permanent stratification might develop.

A second scenario consists in the establishment of independent access to more consumer goods for domestic producers (in addition to legal guarantees of a subsistence base). In the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (1975), this condition was established in the form of a guaranteed annual income for hunters.

En dépit de modifications des forces de production et des relations avec la société capitaliste, les Cris du Nord québécois ont conservé le mode de production domestique qui leur est propre. Jusqu'à une date récente, le principe d'échange et de réciprocité s'appliquait aussi bien aux sociétés amérindiennes qu'à celle des Blancs.

Dans ce texte, nous analysons, à partir de l'exemple des Cris de Wemindji, les conséquences de l'augmentation des biens de consommation sur la production locale, le partage des biens et l'émergence possible d'une stratification entre deux catégories, celle des producteurs domestiques et celle des travailleurs salariés. Le cas des Cris de Wemindji laisse supposer qu'à partir du moment où les producteurs domestiques entretiennent des rapports d'échange réciproques avec les salariés (lesquels ont un accès privilégié aux biens de consommation), une réaction se manifeste et va à contre-courant du contrôle des surplus de produits domestiques. On assiste alors à une production excédentaire de biens domestiques destinés aux travailleurs salariés en échange de biens manufacturés et de consommation courante. De cette façon, le droit à l'accès

de produits domestiques et manufacturés est rendu possible pour les deux catégories.

Cependant, pour des raisons technologiques et écologiques, l'augmentation des produits domestiques ne peut suivre en toute logique celle des produits manufacturés. Ainsi le principe de l'échange réciproque se trouve-t-il menacé si les salariés sont en position d'accéder plus facilement aux biens de consommation que les producteurs domestiques, ceux-ci étant dans l'impossibilité de créer un réseau parallèle de biens de production. Dans ce cas, le principe de réciprocité exigerait une augmentation régulière des produits domestiques allant de pair avec celle des produits de consommation. Ce principe étant irréalisable dans les faits, on assisterait alors à l'émergence d'une stratification entre le groupe des salariés et celui des producteurs domestiques.

Une proposition alternative consisterait à promouvoir la création de réseaux d'accès indépendants de biens de consommation pour les producteurs domestiques. Ces réseaux viendraient s'ajouter à ceux que la loi garantit à titre de subsistance de base : en effet, lors de la signature de la Convention de la Baie James et du Nord québécois en 1975, on a inscrit le droit à un revenu annuel pour les chasseurs.

In this paper I focus on the elaboration of domestic production and exchange in a contemporary Cree community, and I would like to give it a historical preface which approaches economic base from the unlikely angle of myth¹. Today's developments are set within an egalitarian ideology which has travelled the rough road of three centuries' interaction with a system which did not share its premises — our own. Today we are left, at best, with a few of the texts which have emerged from and influenced that interaction, and I will hardly do full justice even to those in the present context. But I want to draw out an egalitarian theme which yet defines a certain problematic of economy, for Cree and for anthropologists.

In anthropological writing, there is a growing consensus that the production of furs in the James Bay region was largely supplementary to domestic production right into the 1960's and 1970's (Feit, 1978 ; Tanner, 1979 ; Scott, 1979). The fur trade allowed Euro-North American companies to amass unequal value by paying trappers only a portion of their labor's worth, but fur production was not generally suited to coercive forms of labor intensification. Beyond trading for the limited range of equipment and supplies on which they depended, hunters could pursue their own production objectives. Trade was probably advantageous in the hunter's view, because the effort expended in

providing furs, food and transport for the companies was more than offset by increased domestic efficiency using European tools (Salisbury, 1976).

Possibly for these reasons, economic ideology viably entertained the theme of reciprocity for exchanges not just between Cree, but with Whites. If the true imbalance of exchange was expressed, it was represented as a function of unstinting Cree generosity rather than white man greed. An elderly Wemindji hunter told me a story about an exchange between white men and *Chakaapaash*, the Cree-Montagnais hero-transformer :

Out walking along the coast, *Chakaapaash* came upon a ship. He went over, got aboard, and was served white man's food. It was something new, and he took some home for his sister. In return, the people on the ship had asked him to bring some food for them. When *Chakaapaash* gave the white man's food to his sister, she proclaimed her gratitude so loudly that she was heard all the way to the ship. *Chakaapaash* informed his sister that the white people wanted some food and that he would take it back with him. He carried one whole leg of squirrel (*Chakaapaash* is a renowned hunter of squirrels, his favorite game). He walked onto the ship and put down the leg of squirrel. So great was its weight that it caused the vessel to list.

A second, historical narrative tells of a husband and wife who went aboard the first ship sighted along James Bay coast, a French vessel. The story focuses on the exchange of the couple's fur clothing for European clothes, and the gift of a gun to the husband. But after the French had established a post, a French trader took furs from a group of Indians and gave them nothing in return. An old Englishman, the first along the coast, stood up for the Indians. Soon after, the English went to war with the French, the English triumphed, and the Hudson's Bay Company, referred to as the *Kaampaanii*, were regarded as the benefactors of the Indians for a long time to come.

But the theme of reciprocity with the white man was probably often in question, and it was severely strained in the 1930's, the years of scarce game. The Company reduced credit to families who came to the post for supplies, many of whom later starved in the bush. The Company had neglected its responsibility to those who had always stood by it. The Government, too, who had the power to order assistance, was blamed for ignoring the plight of the people. An elderly man recalls :

Two pilots who were living in Eastmain at that time asked my father, "How can people survive when they have nothing (no supplies) to take with them?" They were so surprised to see what was happening to the people, even though the people were expected to stand in for the store (Hudson's Bay Company). My father talked

to them, telling them how the people were treated. The pilots told my father that they would mention everything he had told them when they got home...

Most of the time, all the people had that they could depend on was fish. I didn't like what I saw out in the bush. All of my deceased brothers died from starvation. Two of them were older than I was... I often think about what happened. Many times I saw people being unable to provide for their children. The Indian people were so mistreated in the past that even the Government, who had the right to give orders, said that nothing should be given to the Indian people...

An increase of survival rations was finally implemented. And the eventual introduction of welfare was welcomed as a gesture which reaffirmed the attitude of reciprocity. Another elder says :

The government got a lot of money from the Indian's garden. How much did the government get from all the beaver", because it seemed as though the government treated it like their wallet. The government showed that it had compassion for its children by passing a law as a result of this. The money (from fur) was accumulated for them (as welfare).

With the assistance of Company personnel and the co-operation of the hunters, the Government also intervened to establish beaver preserves and restrict trapping, so the beaver population would increase. But a hunter for 60 years, and band councillor during the difficulties over the hydro-electric project in the 1970's, pointed out the contradiction between this earlier positive government involvement, and the later hydro development :

When we were first told that we weren't allowed to kill the beaver, we were told it was an order from the government, so we called the beaver "the government beaver", because it seemed as though the government owned them. We tried to respect this order, and the beaver. When we were allowed to kill it again, we only killed as many as we were supposed to, not more. We always looked at it this way. But today you can see what has happened inland ; the land is flooded, where the beaver used to be plentiful. The beaver is being drowned ; this is not the doing of the Indian people ; they tried to respect the wishes of the government. The time has come when the beaver is being killed in another way, not the Indian people's way ; where it doesn't help them in the way of food or money. It is the doing of the government. When the people weren't allowed to kill the beaver so that it could increase, they tried to respect this because they knew that this would help them in the future, their children and their children's children. This is the reason the Indian people were against the James Bay Project.

The notion of government as an exchange partner in good faith was ruptured by the hydro project. The conservative elder who had commended the Gov-

ernment for its compassion in implementing welfare also had these words :

Now the white man is moving the Indian aside and he doesn't even listen to him ; he is doing what he has decided. He wants to own the land, this land where we are... he is forcing it, the flooding of our lands. It was not like that before ; it was not about flooding the Indian's garden.

The court actions and negotiations of the 1970's featured an openly adversary relation of Cree to government, in the arena of liberal state institutions. Economic guarantees and benefits were extracted with difficulty, a general disgrace from the standpoint of egalitarian ideology. If egalitarianism was still to characterize the Cree ideal for relations locally, it took a beating as the ideology of exchange with the white man. In the upshot, egalitarian reciprocity became a preeminent feature of Cree cultural difference, of a society aware more than ever of its status as an enclave.

The James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, and Income Security for Hunters

The domestic economy remained a priority for Cree throughout negotiations with the Government, and Cree felt there were reasonable longterm prospects for subsistence production if the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA, 1975 ; Convention de la Baie James et du Nord Québécois) were honored (Feit, 1979). This defense of domestic economy transformed not just its relation to capital and to the state, but its relation to a sector of Cree society who were not primarily hunters. Many young, educated Cree became well-paid local and regional spokesman and administrators. Together with social service workers and skilled laborers, they make up a permanently employed population of around one-quarter of households at Wemindji. Cash settlement portions of the JBNQA contributed substantially to the incomes and the permanency of this sector.

The incomes of hunting households were also enhanced and stabilized under the Agreement. The JBNQA established the legally-defined right of prior, and in some cases exclusive, use by Cree of traditional resources unharmed by hydro-electric or other development. A James Bay and Northern Quebec Native Harvesting Research Committee (1976-82) was formed to determine actual subsistence harvest levels current in the 1970's, both prior to and following the implementation of the Agreement. Current harvesting levels as deter-

mined by this research are to be the central definer of guaranteed future subsistence harvests for Cree hunters. Should any present or future development cause a decline in subsistence harvests below the guaranteed levels, or a reduction in the efficiency with which game can be harvested, governments are legally required to take such measures as reducing the portion of the resource allocated to sport hunting and fishing, in favor of native subsistence users. In addition, the JBNQA established an environmental protection regime, intended to control the effects of development projects (See Feit, 1979, for a detailed discussion of these and related measures).

The JBNQA also compensated the Cree for losses of traditional resources, or impeded access to them. A major form of compensation is the Income Security Program (ISP) for Cree hunters, trappers and fishermen (JBNQA, 1975 : Section 30), which makes direct payments to all "intensive hunters". In addition, there are state-funded programs for improving transportation and communications in the form of snowmobile trails and two-way bush radio service, now available to all hunting camps. A Cree Trappers' Association, partially funded by government, is seeking more advantageous fur marketing arrangements, and ways to economize on imported equipment and services.

Rising costs of hunting had led to the subsistence sector underproducing by the early 1970's, with simultaneous underemployment in the wages sector. The cash costs of going hunting were increasing steadily, while income from fur, welfare, and seasonal employment were not keeping up. A major cost was air charter transport to winter camps, which hunters began to use in the 1950's. Rather than revert to long trips by canoe and a more limited range of winter supplies, hunting families opted to use more distant territories less often, and to take wage employment if it was available. Although traditional family hunting groups remained the norm, all-male winter hunting groups were formed on a minority of territories in some years. A combination of inflationary costs for purchased supplies and services, and limited beaver populations on these particular territories, seems to have been responsible for this development. Where beaver populations were low, less efficient small game hunting would be required to feed families, and more purchased supplies would be required as a security against poor fortunes in hunting. In addition, less fur income from beaver pelts would be available to offset the costs of flying families and additional supplies to the bush. The strategy which emerged in response to these conditions was that

groups of hunters flew inland for up to two or three months, during which time they would trap intensively before returning to the settlement. Meat would be flown back to the settlement when the men returned, but the advantages of the more efficient division of labor in family hunting groups, companionship, and a more extended season in the bush, were lost.

The Income Security Program was intended to increase hunters' access to industrially-derived technology, to improve security in the bush, and to control the rise in costs through annual indexing of benefits. ISP represents a modified economic and political linkage to the state and the capitalist economy². It provides a significantly higher level of state transfers to subsistence producers than previous social aid programs of general application. Unlike previous transfer payments, it is a legislated and legal right in perpetuity for "intensive hunters". And unlike other transfer payments, it encourages subsistence production by increasing benefits in proportion to the days spent annually in subsistence activities by a household. A minimum of 90 days in the bush is required to qualify as an "intensive hunter". Over the whole Cree region, intensive hunters, male and female, now average about 180 days per year in the bush (Scott and Feit, in press). Since the household's ISP benefit is based on the combined number of days spent in the bush by husbands and wives, hunting in traditional family units is encouraged. About 900 households participate in the Cree region, comprising slightly more than half of the total population of about 6500. In 1978-79 the average household benefit was \$5810, with ISP distributing total benefits of about \$5 1/4 million.

At Wemindji, where a community case study of ISP's effects was undertaken (Scott, 1979), the annual hunter-days spent in the bush have increased by about 50 % with the implementation of ISP, and the number of households in intensive hunting has stabilized at about 33 % higher than in recent pre-ISP years. Upon implementation of the JBNQA, the value of both wages *and* subsistence production rose by about 40 % (see Table I), as more people were employed at the settlement and more families went to the bush for more extended periods of time than had been the case in recent years.

Wage-earners were still better-off than hunters in cash terms, but the gap was reduced somewhat by the Income Security Program, while hunters' domestic product was of course much larger than wage-earners'. The specialization of households into either hunting or wage employment became more marked, although hunters are seasonally-

TABLE I.
Value of Domestic Production and Cash Income
at Wemindji, 1975-76 and 1976-77.

| | 1975-6 | 1976-7 |
|---|-----------|-------------|
| Domestic production | | |
| 1) Subsistence foods | \$372,000 | \$436,000 |
| 2) Housing, fuel, etc. | 28,000 | 60,000 |
| 3) Clothing, equipment | 65,000 | 122,000 |
| 4) Vegetal foods, medicines | 22,000 | 40,000 |
| 5) Furs sold | 44,000 | 74,000 |
| Total | \$531,000 | \$732,000 |
| Cash incomes | | |
| 6) Wages | \$341,000 | \$480,000 |
| 7) Welfare | 184,000 | 152,000 |
| 8) Other transfer payments (pension, family allowance, unemployment) estimate | 100,000 | 80,000 |
| 9) Income Security Program | 0 | 472,000 |
| Total | \$625,000 | \$1,184,000 |

Figures derived from the following sources :

- 1) Community total weight of game harvested (James Bay and Northern Quebec Native Harvesting Research Committee, 1978, 1979) at \$5.50 per kilo. A replacement mix of chicken and red meats at the local Hudson's Bay Company store would have cost a minimum of \$5.50 per kilo, based on prices in 1977.
- 2) Camp-based household-weeks (Scott, 1979) ÷ 52 weeks per year X \$2,120 in annual fuel, service, maintenance costs per household at the settlement (Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, 1977) = indicated replacement value.
- 3) No. of respondents X mean annual days spent in summer fishing, fall goose hunting, winter trapping and spring goose hunting (James Bay and Northern Quebec Native Harvesting Research Committee, 1978, 1979) ÷ 180 days annually per intensive hunter (Scott & Feit, in press) X \$905 annually per intensive hunter (Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, 1977) = indicated replacement value.
- 4) No. of respondents X mean annual days spent in summer fishing, fall goose hunting, winter trapping and spring goose hunting (James Bay and Northern Quebec Native Harvesting Research Committee, 1978, 1979) ÷ 180 days annually per intensive hunter (Scott & Feit, in press) X \$300 annually per intensive hunter (Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, 1977) = indicated replacement value.
- 5) Income Security Program records.
- 6) Wemindji Band and local business records.
- 7) LaRusic (1978) from Social Aid and Band Welfare statistics.
- 8) Estimate based on numbers eligible X prevailing rates.
- 9) Income Security Board.

employed, and wage-earners hunt after-hours and on holidays. The political and bureaucratic power of educated wage-earners, as mediators of external relations, has increased; but traditional hunting group leaders retain their authority in the local management of subsistence activities and resources.

The issue I address here is whether egalitarian institutions have been equal to evening out differences in wealth between wage-earning and hunting

sectors, or are they incipient classes from an economic standpoint. Do wage-earners consume or accumulate at superior levels? Do hunters use their enhanced productive potential to provide meat for wage-earners, who are poor in traditional food? A response to these questions requires a close examination of the internal relations of domestic production.



Wemindji houses. A traditional tipi (*müchiwaahp*) is often built nearby for cooking with the open hearth. During the past decade, construction of settlement housing has provided a substantial portion of seasonal employment taken by men who hunt most of the year.

Relations in the 'Domestic Mode of Production' at Wemindji

Some earlier studies (Leacock, 1954 ; Murphy and Steward, 1956) predicted that individually-owned territories and competitive trapping for exchange-value were necessary outcomes of relations with a capitalist market. They overestimated the importance of market goods in relation to subsistence products. Sub-arctic hunters became critically dependent on imported goods, but this dependence did not eclipse their reliance on subsistence products. Evidence from the 1950's onward (reviewed in Scott, 1979 : 31-33), indicates that subsistence hunting made contributions to household economy which far exceeded the exchange-value obtained from fur. The organization of production, dominated by egalitarian relations, remained oriented to subsistence objectives, as well as to obtaining trade items. By and large, production of furs for exchange was compatible with and ancillary to subsistence objectives (Knight, 1965), and when it was not compatible, fur production could be suspended at strategic points, so long as purchased essentials could be maintained.

Expanded cash income from transfer payments and seasonal employment in the era of government services resulted in the inclusion of new industrially-derived technology in hunting — the most costly of which were air charter service, motorized watercraft, and snowmobiles. For its reproduction in the contemporary context, domestic production depends on income from seasonal wages, fur income, and transfer payments — including, most recently, the

Income Security Program. As in the earlier fur trade period, new technology has been adapted to the objectives of domestic production, which continues to make extremely important contributions to overall community income at Wemindji (Table I). The Income Security Program is itself one element in the attempt to control the effects of dependence by elaborating specialized institutional articulations to the wider economy and state (Feit, 1979 ; Feit, in press ; LaRusic *et al.*, 1979).

Dependence on imported goods, I will argue, is related to a partial weakening of the "anti-surplus" forces associated by Sahlins (1972) with domestic economies. Relations of domestic production have structured the local consequences of dependency, however. The relaxation of antisurplus forces has occurred in the context of persistent egalitarian relations, which extend beyond hunters to wage-earners.

Relations of domestic production at Wemindji involve varying degrees of co-residency and co-operation in hunting, depending on the production processes undertaken. A typical winter hunting-trapping group is composed of about a dozen individuals in three co-residential households. One, and sometimes two hunting groups exploit each of twenty territories in the Wemindji hunting area. Hunters work individually or in pairs to trap beaver and hunt small game. Larger teams often co-operate to kill moose and caribou. The key winter species, beaver, moose, black bear and caribou, make the largest contribution to the overall subsistence effort of intensive hunters. Goose harvests, however, rival the contribution of winter species (Table II), and in most years, Canada geese are the single species making the largest contribution to community subsistence product. Spring and fall goose hunting along the James Bay coast involves larger co-residential groups, which include an average of two dozen individuals in six households. In spring, there may be a dozen or more such hunting groups distributed on the seven Wemindji hunting territories bordering the coast. A high degree of co-ordination and co-operation is required of goose hunters in each group to achieve successful hunts, and co-operation between adjacent groups is also important.

In summer, most hunting households stay in the settlement to hold down seasonal employment, but others fish at camps along the James Bay coast, or form camps at inland sturgeon waters. Fishing camps are normally comprised of only one or two households. Except during the summer and early fall, when many seasonally-employed men hunt and fish on short excursions from the settlement, the

great majority of domestic product is generated by co-residential households widely dispersed on the land.

Fall and spring goose hunting and winter hunting-trapping on each territory are co-ordinated by a senior hunting group leader (*paaschichaa uuchimaa* or 'shooting boss' in the case of goose hunting ; *amiskw uuchimaa* or 'beaver boss' in the case of winter hunting). The specialized knowledge and skills of these leaders are important to the productive success of their groups. Hunting group leaders are particularly instrumental in the maintenance of ecological conditions which ensure good seasonal and perennial hunts. They are the custodians of key game species on their respective territories, and are sometimes referred to as the "owners" of their territories. This authority, however, depends on actively using their territories to the benefit of the households which normally depend on them.

All households have right of access to the resources required for domestic production. However, in the cases of beaver trapping and goose hunting (and, in effect, any concurrent subsistence activities), this access is mediated by an invitation from the leader of the territory on which one wishes to hunt. A variety of kin and friendship links can be exercised in extending or securing an invitation. Individuals are usually closely associated with at least one territory on which a close patrilineal kinsman is the leader. Some hunters spend several seasons on the territories of their fathers-in-law following marriage, and other affinal links can also

be employed in securing invitations. A stable core of close patrilineal kin is evident in the hunting groups associated with particular territories or their sub-divisions over the years. However, considerable movement by individual households between territories, sharing of hunting privileges, and merger of groups, occurs from season to season and from year to year.

Although the role of the hunting group leader/territory custodian imposes some limits on household autonomy, the household remains in many important respects the lowest common denominator of productive self-sufficiency. Each household normally possesses the basic tools and skills necessary for obtaining a living in the bush, is the principal consumer of its own product, and is the unit which distributes through a more extended network of kin, friends, and community members. The primary division of labor is contained within the household, structured along lines of age and sex. The principal sphere of men, often aided by unmarried sons, is hunting and trapping. Women, aided by unmarried daughters or other female relatives, process the animals brought by hunters, care for children, and are primarily responsible for the up-keep of the camp. The sexual division of labor with respect to these and other tasks is not rigid. Women vary in the attention they devote to small game hunting. However, they kill larger animals only in exceptional circumstances. Men sometimes cook, and participate in a variety of camp chores.

TABLE II.
Total Harvest of Wemindji Intensive Hunters,
1975-76 to 1977-78, before and after Implementation
of the Income Security Program.

| | Kilograms of meat caught | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------|
| | pre-ISP 1975-6 | post-ISP 1976-7 | 1977-8 |
| Fur mammals, beaver | 13,900 | 18,850 | 21,070 |
| Big game | 2,720 | 7,160 | 5,150 |
| Small game, hare | 2,430 | 6,610 | 10,090 |
| Waterfowl, geese | 18,700 | 22,850 | 16,850 |
| Fish | 7,590 | 7,740 | 9,760 |
| Seal, Polar bear | 950 | 1,590 | 1,510 |
| Total, all species | 49,290 | 64,800 | 64,430 |

Source : JBNQ Native Harvesting Research Committee (1978-1980) Reports for numbers of animals caught ; average foodweights used are those in Scott (1979 : 188, 201), where JBNQ Native Harvesting Research Committee average goose and sturgeon foodweights have been modified to accord with existing data. Overall harvest figures for the community have been multiplied by the percentage attributed to "intensive" hunters in the Reports, to provide the figures cited.

A Wemindji woman, Mary Minequaken, attaching weights and floats to a fish net.



A Wemindji hunter, Mathiew Hughboy, retrieving a Canada goose.



Each household in a co-residential hunting group has a separate working and living space, including hearth area, within the larger common tipi or winter lodge. Except for certain ritual periods and events, each household normally prepares its food from its own product. Individuals hunters are typically the owners of what they shoot or trap, but care is taken to see that opportunities for making kills are distributed evenly. In addition, a number of ritual and informal sharing practices guarantee that unequal hunting success will not result in inequalities at the level of consumption, between co-residential households or neighbouring groups.

Sharing and "Anti-Surplus" Forces in the Relation between Hunters and Wage Earners

Marshall Sahlins (1972) has indicated a tension between the household's production of use-value for its own consumption, and for exchange with other households, in domestic economies. This tension is an "anti-surplus" force. Because needs are finite and households have relative productive autonomy, there is a limit to the amount they will produce for sharing with other households. The result is time spent in leisure, and under-production by the labor potential.

Subarctic hunters have enjoyed less leisure than some other hunting societies. Feit's (1978) analysis of Waswanipi Cree hunting indicates that in terms of caloric expenditure, winter hunter-trappers working with a basic technology of snowshoes, guns, traps and hand implements work more heavily than workers in the most strenuous categories of industrial employment. Production processes at other times of the year, such as spring and fall goose hunting, are less demanding of men, since waterfowl hunting involves sitting in blinds for extended periods. But the greater "leisure" inherent in waterfowl hunting still occurs within the context of high inputs of labor time, from sunrise to sunset most days, since hunters must be present at hunting locations during highs and lows in waterfowl activity. Women's work in processing game, maintaining the camp, and supplementary hunting was perhaps marginally less demanding than men's winter work during the traditional fur trade period. Although quantitative measures are unavailable, stories of famine from Wemindji indicate that men, with long distances to walk in search of food, were typically the first victims of starvation when the hunting group was unsuccessful. Women's work during the major waterfowl hunts is, and no doubt was, more demanding than that of men, since they have to process more food-weight per hunter-week than at any other time of year (compare, for example, the foodweight harvest-

ed per hunter-week in winter hunting-trapping and fall goose-hunting camps (Table III). During the summer months, when relatively low yields are obtainable per subsistence work input in fishing (Feit, 1973 : 121), families would make the long trip to the post, in the pre-welfare period. From the 1950's onwards, when welfare and seasonal employment made possible the use of charter aircraft to and from inland bush camps, even intensive hunters and their wives would look for seasonal wage employment during the summer months, a pattern which persists to the present.

Given the unusually high work inputs required of Cree domestic producers, there was a particular incentive to turn to labor-saving technology such as snowmobiles, outboard motors, and charter air transport. Although rising prices for these items had a role in increasing hunters' involvement in the wage and welfare economy, their need for exchange-value was still finite, and limited to maintaining their inventory of equipment.

The prospect of producing a domestic surplus that has to be shared seems not to deter Wemindji hunters from making high inputs of labor time and other resources. Wemindji hunting households routinely generate subsistence surpluses during fall and spring goose hunts and the winter hunting-trapping season (see Table III). A major proportion of this surplus is circulated informally through a network of kin and community. There are numerous ritual occasions to distribute meat, including community-wide feasting for Christian and traditional

holidays and ceremonies. In winter hunting camps, kills of big game are shared with co-residential households, and with neighbouring camps when there is the opportunity for a visit. Moose and caribou brought to the settlement are often distributed community-wide. Black bear kills are the occasion of elders' feasts. On children's birthdays, mothers send plates of food to a wide network of relatives and friends, who make small gifts of cash to the children who bring the food.

During the extremely productive and significant spring goose hunt, the structural balance between production for household use and for sharing with others is neatly expressed in the ritual segmentation of the hunt. Practically all productive households, including wage-earners who take their holidays especially for the event, are in hunting camps along the James Bay coast for the month of May. The first geese killed are distributed by elders to all households in camp, regardless of who brings them in. This goes on for a few days, until geese begin to arrive in greater numbers. Then each household begins to save its geese until there are enough to give every man, woman and child at least one, and more often two or three geese each. Again the distribution is made by an elder. Only then are households free to accumulate geese for their own use, for the duration of the hunt.

Anti-surplus forces, it appears, were weakened when a sector of wage-earning households became marginally involved in actual production, but continued to value and expect gifts of bush food from

TABLE III.
Meat Harvests and Consumption,
Wemindji Hunting Camp, 1977-78.
Kilograms per week

| | Winter (1 camp) | Fall | |
|------------------------|--------------------|--------|--------|
| | | Camp A | Camp B |
| 1. Harvest per person | 13.1 | 14.5 | 12.8 |
| Consumption per person | 8.8 | 8.6 | 8.6 |
| | 4.3 | 5.9 | 4.2 |
| 2. Harvest per hunter | 28.9 | 56.4 | 44.5 |
| Total consumed | 19.4 | 33.6 | 30.0 |
| Surplus per hunter | 9.5 | 22.8 | 14.5 |

Each "person" in a hunting camp is a standardised "consumption unit", in which an adult male is counted as 1, an adult female as 1, and children as 1/3 (0-6 yrs.) or 2/3 (7-17 yrs.). The winter 1977 camp was an inland hunting-trapping camp. The camps observed in fall 1977 were goose camps on the coast. The number of dependents per hunter varied between 2 and 4, with 3 to 4 hunters per camp.

relatives. There would be a curtailment of sharing if the recipients were freeloading. But this is not the case. Today, routine production of a surplus does not imply unreciprocated sharing with less productive households; but rather, sharing with households who have superior cash income, and who are in a position to reciprocate with gifts of purchased use-values, or standard gifts of cash. Although wage-earners can afford to buy imported foods, *waamstukushiyuu miichim* (white man's food) is thought to be a poor substitute for *nuuchimii miichim* (bush food), and the latter is always in demand.

New levels of cash income have had two opposing effects at the level of material constraints. On the one hand, households are theoretically less dependent on reciprocity as a form of subsistence insurance. On the other hand, opportunities for sharing domestic produce have actually expanded with the new communications and transportation technologies of hunters. The importance and scope of ideology and ritual for reproducing egalitarian relations have increased.

Some payments of cash for bush food in exchanges between Wemindji people began during the last two decades, when people started to get more employment. Nominal cash exchanges for whitefish (20¢ or 25¢ per fish in 1977) were a way for wage-earners to obtain bush food, and for people who had no employment to obtain pocket money. In recent years, it has become commonplace for hunt-

ing households to accept token donations (\$10 or \$20) which help with the cost of transporting a kill of moose or caribou back to the settlement, in exchange for portions of meat distributed. These payments should not be expected, however. A comment by one young man reflects a dominant position both among elders and a generation of modern hunters:

People don't sell meat. I don't think to myself when I'm giving meat that maybe I'll get something back for it. Maybe some people think that way. When people get money, it's to help the hunter who gives it to pay for the air charter. When I get a big animal, I'm glad to give it away to people. That way I'll be able to kill some more of the same. It comes easier that way.

Although the distribution of a big game animal is often settlement-wide, cash donations made in return often fall well short of meeting the air charter costs of the hunter. People sometimes request meat from households which are outside their more intimate sharing networks, and here, it is my impression, cash donations enter more routinely into the exchanges. Still, any such payments are well below the cost of meat and chicken at the Hudson's Bay Co. store. To my knowledge, it is extremely uncommon to make a profit by selling meat. Money is regarded simply as one in a range of possible elements that can be used to reciprocate.

In the case of closely-related households and good friends, those rich in bush foods regularly distribute meat to those with less. Here it is more

TABLE IV.
Intensity of Hunting at Wemindji
before and after the Income Security Program,
1973-78, Inland Traplins.

| | Kilograms of meat caught per hunter-week | | | | |
|----------|--|-------------------|--------|--------------------|--------|
| | 1973-4 | pre-ISP 1974-5 | 1975-6 | post-ISP 1976-7 | 1977-8 |
| Big game | 2.2 | 3.1 | 2.0 | 3.8 | 3.0 |
| Beaver | 13.1 | 18.5 | 14.9 | 12.6 | 14.4 |
| Hare | n.a. | 0.4 | 0.7 | 2.9 | 6.0 |
| Fish | n.a. | 2.8 | 7.6 | 4.6 | 3.9 |
| Total | n.a. | 24.8 | 25.2 | 23.9 | 27.3 |

Big game includes moose, caribou and black bear.

Source of data : hunter-weeks field interviews. Big game and beaver catches field interviews. Hare and fish catches from JBNQ Native Harvesting Research Committee Reports ; their category "Wemindji away" corresponds roughly to "inland traplins" group.

common for the cash-rich to help hunting relatives purchase 'skidoos', outboard motors, canoes, air charter transport, and so on. One wage-earning couple told us in 1977 that they spent over \$2,000 on Christmas gifts alone. Another household has paid 80 % of the costs of a 1/2 ton truck, though its use is shared equally with several sibling households who hunt intensively and who contributed to the remaining costs.

But wage-earners' ability to reciprocate, and hunters' increased productive capacity when ISP made available more efficient technology in 1976, have not caused hunters to increase production to the maximum possible. Hunters' weekly rate of production held roughly constant (Table IV). However, the total domestic product is larger, because ISP brought more hunters to the bush and each spent more weeks annually in hunting (Table II). Part of the increased product was consumed by the larger bush population, and there was also more to go around the reduced settlement population. But each donating family continued to contribute a roughly constant amount per unit of time in hunting, and did not increase its gifts as it could have done, given the improved productive efficiency.

What appears to have happened instead is that hunters took advantage of their new ability to fly equipment to the bush, to achieve a greater degree of leisure and family co-habitation. Hunters travelling on foot had previously to leave camps at or

before dawn, and return only after dark. With the aid of snowmobiles they can leave an hour later in the morning, and usually get home before dark. Previously, several nights had to be spent by hunters away from families at secondary camps on the trapline, and main camps had to be moved midway through the winter. With snowmobiles it is possible to return home each evening and still cover the winter range.

Women, who had previously assumed the greater burden of cutting and hauling wood, were relieved in part by men who could afford the occasional afternoon away from the hunt to cut and haul a few days supply of wood with chainsaws and snowmobiles. Several women operate chainsaws and snowmobiles of their own, and a few have taken washing machines and portable generators to the camps.

A second reason for not expanding production, and not accumulating a larger surplus for later distribution in the settlement, should be interjected — game conservation. Feit (1973, 1978) has argued that the efficiently-harvestable beaver and moose could easily be depleted if the Cree were not practising voluntary conservation of these animals.

Hunters did not reduce their work efforts still further when ISP was introduced, even though they could have done so while maintaining their own consumption rate and the customary level of sharing. Wemindji hunters are evidently striking a balance

TABLE V.
Incomes of Wage-earning, and Intensive
Hunting Households at Wemindji,
1976-77 and in the Cree Region, 1978-79.

| | Wemindji | Cree Region |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1) Full-time wage-earners | (32) | |
| a) employment | \$ 8,300 | \$10,500 |
| b) subsistence goods | 1,050 | n.a. |
| Total | 9,350 | n.a. |
| 2) Intensive hunters | (101) | \$ |
| a) furs sold | \$ 700 | 600 |
| b) ISP benefits | 3,710 | 5,810 |
| c) seasonal employment | 1,300 | 2,000 |
| Sub-total, cash | 5,780 | 8,410 |
| d) subsistence goods | 5,730 | 7,400 |
| Total | \$11,510 | \$15,810 |

Sources : 1) Field survey data, 2) Field survey for employment earnings ; Tables 1 and 4 for other incomes, except ISP where \$960 of retroactive benefits included in Table I are omitted here.

Cree 1978-9 figures are approximations : 1) is from the GCCQ 1978-9 Report on ISP, 2) from Cree official reports for 1976-7, corrected for inflation at 10 % per annum.

between a level of work and comfort in the bush commensurate with that of wage-earners, and their continuing wish to be generous and to engage in reciprocal exchange on an equal basis with the wage-earners.

The introduction of the Income Security Program made that balance easier to strike. As the expansion of government services employed more Cree, the wage-earners, before 1976, were receiving cash incomes far exceeding those of hunting households. Inequalities in consumer purchasing power were widening. In typical fashion, Cree certainly attempted to reduce or eliminate unequal access to both imported goods and domestic product through egalitarian exchange. But any marked increase in gifts of purchased goods by a wage-earning sector would require an inflated valuation of the reciprocal domestic product, whose supply was limited. And with the pre-ISP technology, hunters were already producing close to the limits of their labor potential. Unless there were some corresponding increase in their access to imported goods, independent of local reciprocity, the value attributed to subsistence products would have become excessively inflated in relation to consumer items. This could have led to a "poor relative" status for hunters. And it could have led to wage-earning kin limiting their sharing of consumer goods, to unequal consumption or possibly accumulation, and to permanent economic stratification.

Average ISP benefits of \$3710 per annum had increased the overall cash incomes of Wemindji intensive hunters in 1976-7 to \$5780 (Table V). If hunting families had retained the full replacement-value of their subsistence production for themselves, they would have been markedly better off, with an average income equivalent of \$11,507, than wage-earners. But as I have shown, a major portion of the surplus of subsistence goods is given to wage-earners, who reciprocate with a portion of their cash. The incomes of both groups are roughly equalized, with customary exchange appearing equal to the task of maintaining egalitarianism.

Conclusions

Is the domestic mode of production a form that can endure? The question needs to be addressed from the perspective both of its external articulations and conflicts, and its relations internal to Cree society.

Capitalism is often regarded as inherently opposed to domestic production, since it "must expand to create new sources of wealth, and since

native people embody two such sources (labour and consumption) and extensively utilize a third (natural resources)" (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1976: 13). Given high technological unemployment in North America, it seems that capitalism can afford to be selectively unconcerned about the labor power of isolated native communities for some time to come. Meanwhile, in northern Quebec, the Crees' contribution as consumers to capitalist accumulation has been enhanced through the Income Security Program, and through wages from employment in local and regional Cree administrations or senior government services.

The immediately threatening element in the "inherent opposition" between capitalism and the domestic mode of production is conflicting demands on resources. Hydro-electric projects now underway and planned for the future will interfere heavily with the subsistence resource base, but there will remain large areas open to continued subsistence production. Economically viable large-scale forestry appears to be limited to the southern margins of Cree territory, and is not necessarily incompatible with subsistence production on the same lands. Mining, the third form of industry-based exploitation, is localized in its effects on subsistence resources.

A major issue in the near future will be direct competition for the subsistence resource itself. The network of roads servicing the hydro project and other development opens wide areas to sport hunters and fishermen, who form a strong political lobby. The principle of native priority in the use of subsistence resources, established by the JBNQA, will encounter increasing opposition. The intentions of state government, and the legitimacy of the courts in enforcing the terms of the JBNQA, will come to the test on this and other issues.

Internal to Cree society, will a viable subsistence base remain a political priority? Whatever else transpires, population growth relative to finite subsistence resources will see a growing sector seeking wage employment. A changing political balance between domestic producers and wage-earners is likely. One fears it will be an increasing temptation to trade-off subsistence-related environmental considerations for other economic benefits, which turn out to be transitory. A balance between economic priorities is presently controlled by a prevalent attitude of economic and political reciprocity, depending in part on primary kinship links. These links connect virtually all wage-earning households to hunting households. It is a question whether, one or two generations into the future, close kinship ties will have been maintained be-

tween the two sectors. If so, the domestic mode of production may avoid increasing encapsulation within Cree society itself.

The economic and social health of northern native communities depends on developing wage-employment alternatives that do not undercut the conditions for an active domestic economy. Subsistence activities and products enjoy high cultural status, and will continue to do so for some time to come, among hunters and wage-earners alike. In land claims and other political actions, measures designed to support domestic production will be of critical importance.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Canadian Ethnology Society Annual Meeting, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, May 7-11, 1982. Portions of this paper are developed in greater detail in Scott (1979, in press) and in Scott and Feit (in press). Funding for the research included a grant from the Quebec Ministry of Social Affairs (Québec Ministère des Affaires sociales, Comité de la Recherche socio-économique); summer field fellowships from the McGill University Centre for Northern Research and the McGill Programme in the Anthropology of Development; a J.W. McConnell Memorial Fellowship (McGill University); a doctoral fellowship from the Quebec Ministry of Education (Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, Direction générale de l'Enseignement supérieur); and a doctoral fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2. LaRusic (1978, 1982) compares the ISP benefits structure to that of various guaranteed income and income-support experiments elsewhere in North America, as well as assessing other technical and administrative aspects of the program.

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