

## Culture



**Adrian TANNER, *Bringing Home Animals. Religious Ideology and Mode of Production of the Mistassini Cree Hunters*, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Social and Economic Studies No. 23, 1979. 233 pp., \$10.00 (cloth)**

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By Toby Morantz  
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This monograph, based on the author's field-work conducted over eighteen months (1969-71) in Quebec amongst a northern hunting group of the Mistassini Cree band, successfully demonstrates the relationship between religious ideology and economic production. This in itself is a notable contribution to the literature but along the way far more is revealed than this relationship.

Tanner provides for his reader an understanding of the distinctiveness of (winter) bush life for the Nichicun group vs. (summer) life in the settlement at Mistassini. He enables us to understand how one can move from the one social and economic situation to the other, i.e., primarily to bush life. This transformation in lifestyle is guided by the traditional Cree religious beliefs and practices which control the hunting as well as the social relations within the hunting group. It is this ideology which accounts for the high degree of cultural autonomy and integration despite the Cree's long association with the fur trade. Although not the focus of the book, the historical dimension, so often missing in ethnographies, is outlined from the perspective of understanding the Cree role in the fur trade and their marginal involvement with the larger Canadian society. Of particular importance to the orientation of this work is the chapter on the ecology of hunting which clearly and systematically sets out the ecological conditions under which the hunters work. Although it should need no emphasis, Tanner rightly draws the reader's attention in several places to the fact that the hunting is not left to chance but is the result of calculation based on knowledge. Other details which make Tanner's study an important ethnographic work are the descriptions of the seasonal round of activities, the social organization including domestic arrangements, economic cooperation, leadership, use of land resources and inheritance practices.

A great deal is to be learned about the religious beliefs and practices. Tanner isolates three phases of the hunting and trapping activity, i.e., information gathering, killing and distribution, each of which is correlated with the parallel religious

practices of divination, killing rites and treatment of the slain animals. Not an easy subject matter on which to interview any individual, Tanner is to be commended for tackling this study in the first place. The Mistassini religion, as he says, is a "natural philosophy", not a system of "elaborate and explicit verbal explanations" (p. 213). It is not a theological treatise which he has produced but one which identifies the numerous practices and beliefs as they relate to the production of food and furs. It goes far beyond Speck's 1935 classic study of the Northern Algonkian religion in this central region of Quebec as it demonstrates the integration between this religious thought and the material conditions within the hunting context. He gives a significance and practicality to the Cree religious system which until now has been missing in the literature. At the same time he extends the dimension into which one fits the hunting/trapping mode of production by showing its articulation with a religious system. Even though Tanner wonders, at times, if the modern Cree hunter believes some of the explanations, he notes that the ritual is still observed, a fact which reinforces for the reader the notion that neither the religious ideology nor the hunting complex are easily or quickly altered in form. In his summation of Mistassini traditional religion Tanner concludes that "the ritual action parallels symbolically, rather than reaches beyond, actions performed at the physical level" (p. 212). This parallelism rather than dominance of one over the other is an interesting, surprising finding and worthy of further debate on the nature of the interrelationship of the supernatural with the secular.

Besides providing a wealth of ethnographic details centering about the mode of production, Tanner also confronts certain contentious issues found in the literature on Northern Algonkians. For example, he convincingly shows the Mistassini as exhibiting a considerable degree of cultural autonomy and continuity rather than cultural disintegration and/or acculturation. Nor does he find evidence in the economic system of a growing individualization or in the traditional religious system of an acceptance of a non-Indian world view. Although earlier writers claimed the Mistassini and other Northern Algonkians harboured inner conflicts between subsistence hunting (production for use) and trapping for trade (production for exchange), Tanner could find no evidence of this either by questioning the hunters or observing their practices. He demonstrates in his chapter on the process of production that for the Cree these are complementary activities. He also questions interpretations made by others regarding scapulimancy

and access to resources. He suggests these interpretations were based on incomplete data and in both cases offers his own cogent interpretations. In a final chapter he examines the system of land tenure. Since the concept of ownership of land is non-existent this discussion could easily have been fitted in elsewhere (and is to some extent) but Tanner rightly isolates it because of the prominence accorded in the literature to the issues of the development of individual hunting territories. In the process of showing that the question of land tenure is basically one of a hunter's relations with the resources, governed by the ideological system, he has also provided much useful detail on the contemporary situation as well as challenged the thinking of others.

Tanner's study is eclectic in that he utilizes a variety of analytic tools. It is unusual to find in an Algonkian work both Marxist analyses of the mode of production and structural analyses of myths. This however has produced an unevenness. Whereas Tanner sets forth several models with which to view the Nichicun hunter's relationship to the capitalist/industrial system, his structural analyses, by contrast, are based on his own interpretation of parallels and symbolism, leaving this reviewer wondering just how to go about evaluating his conclusions about their significance.

This is a scholarly work, well-illustrated with maps and figures, which should appeal to a wide variety of interests. It is of considerable value to the student of Northern Algonkians and hunters and gatherers in general, to the cognitive and economic anthropologist, the structuralist, the fur trade historian, the archaeologist and so forth. Furthermore, with its detailed description of this intricate religious system honed to a hunting life, Tanner's work should be required reading for all those historians who accept as even plausible Calvin Martin's thesis in *Keepers of the Game*.

Besides the valuable insights Tanner has provided, one should also be grateful to him for the high standards he has set for ethnographic fieldwork and interpretation.

Sally M. WEAVER, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda 1968-1970*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1981. 236 pp., \$10.00 (paper).

By Richard K. Pope  
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Sally Weaver's study of the so-called "White Paper" or statement on Indian policy of the Canadian Government in 1969 is a landmark of research in applied anthropology. Much of what she tells us in this interesting blend of investigative journalism and anthropological research is not new: those who are concerned with this topic have known for years what the abortive White Paper was and much of why it was; Indians understood it best of all when they called their own collectively produced response to it a "Red Paper" and by so doing highlighted their own perception of it as being a policy produced by and for White men. One would in fact, be hard put to find a more ringing endorsement of Anglo-American civil libertarian concerns of the 1960's (or of the preceding century) than is to be found in the White Paper. What Sally Weaver has done is to use her very considerable investigative skill to create a fascinating account of *how* the policy was produced.

Her study is mostly concerned with events occurring within the Canadian Federal Government during the formative first year of the Trudeau regime, that is, from the summer of 1968 through to the summer of 1969, along with some description of the "wrap around" years before and after this period of actual intensive policy making relating to the "Indian Problem". And what was the "Indian Problem" of the 1960's? Surely all of us can remember that Canadians were no further away from the "Indian Problem" than they were from their television set because that is where it was — in compounded images of the civil rights struggles against segregation in Mississippi, of the threat of ethnic confrontation and violence in Québec and of the mournfully chronicled media accounts of Indians living substandard lives in Reserve ghettos. What Blacks were to America, Natives (or were they called that then,) were to Canada. Having lived through the period myself, especially in its New Left atmosphere, I have a nostalgia for some of the details of this period which Weaver leaves out, but she certainly does an adequate enough job to make her point. The point is simply that the newly elected Government of Pierre Trudeau, which had promised a "Just Society", felt compelled to deal in a decisive way with the "Indian Problem" if it was to have