

SOMETHING MORE THAN MERE ORNAMENT
Cloth and Indian-European Relationships
in the Eighteenth Century

by

Erica Smith

a thesis presented to
the University of Winnipeg/University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History

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ERICA SMITH

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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MASTER OF ARTS

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Preface and Acknowledgments

This thesis took root when my advisor Jennifer Brown handed me a recent publication entitled Cloth and Human Experience, a collection of anthropological, art historical, and ethnographic approaches to the functions of cloth in various societies. The texts were multivocal but united on one theme: the conviction that cloth, clothing and adornment are central to the historical study of human relationships, past and present. Cloth's significance in Northern Algonquian societies remained to be seen, but a preliminary reading of the primary sources revealed that of the dozens of European commodities sent to the Hudson's Bay Company posts during the eighteenth century, cloth was a persistent best-seller.

Many scholars are now recognizing that the fur trade was not just about trading European goods for furs, but an interactive process more complex and dynamic than was previously realized. Francis and Morantz and Bruce White for example, have concluded that the fur trade was a process of human interaction in which the exchange of goods was a symbol for a much wider set of contacts between Indian and white traders.¹

¹ Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay 1600-1870. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983; Bruce White, "Give Us A Little Milk": The Social and Cultural Meanings of Gift Giving in the Lake Superior Fur Trade," Minnesota History, Summer 1982.

For the purposes of this thesis, the category cloth includes ready-made items such as coats, handkerchiefs, hats and shirts and blankets; and decorative materials like lace, ribbons and gartering. Flags are considered to be a special kind of ceremonial cloth.

The aboriginal groups of most interest here are the Cree and Ojibwa, two branches of the Northern Algonquian peoples of the eastern subarctic who occupied the regions between western Hudson Bay, the Great Lakes and the Lake Winnipeg basin. As much as possible, I have tried to specify which groups were indicated, although the task was complicated by the fact that they were commonly regarded as interchangeable in company records.

The Hudson's Bay Company post account books and journals in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives are essentially European business documents. As many researchers into the complexities of cultures in contact have discovered before me, such records can yield rewarding but also inadequate or perplexing evidence. But if one asks new questions, takes note of what has been omitted as well as presented, and combines these records with oral history, anthropological literature and ethnographies, it is possible to overcome their limitations.

Oral traditions offer particularly rich insights into native peoples own perceptions of their first contact with whites and the impact of cloth on their

societies. The ethnohistorical method used in this thesis acknowledges a wide variety of historical and ethnological sources, including folklore and oral traditions. Oral narratives provide emic explanations for the initial impact of European cloth on native peoples that differ from European perspectives.

For example, the Hudson's Bay Company and its governing committee in London were vexed for most of the eighteenth century by French and later English competitors, but European rivalry was not a pressing political issue for Indians. Instead, Indian traders seized it as an opportunity to establish social ties and trading conditions advantageous to themselves.

Cloth obtained through trade or gift-giving stood at the centre of an interwoven web of relationships which this thesis discusses within the broad social categories of politics (Chapters 1 and 2), gender (Chapter 3) and religion (Chapter 4). The interconnecting thread is power; how cloth expressed personal power and influence, as well as social identities and values.

My aim in Chapter 1 is to examine how the manipulation of a valuable commodity like cloth shaped power relations between European and Indian traders during the period of intense competition for furs.

Chapter 2 explores such cultural factors as reciprocity and alliance in the relationships between Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company, and the social

values and motivations that made European coats and a European-style military ritual a status symbol in the fur trade.

Women, as far as can be ascertained, did not aspire to titles of "captain" or even "lieutenant" and were not invested with European uniforms and other symbols of office. How did women perceive European clothing and textiles? Did they make inroads in women's clothing production, or was there an essential continuity of traditional technology and techniques? Chapter 3 explores the impact of cloth on women.

Chapter 4 looks at how cloth addressed questions of existential importance. As sacralized object, cloth wove together humans and other-than-human beings, and was adopted into Algonquian cosmology through rituals like the Midewiwin and the Shaking Tent.

I thank the many people whose expertise and goodwill have lightened my work on this thesis. Professor Jennifer Brown has been a splendid advisor, and I am grateful for her intellectual clarity and patient guidance, and for knowing when to urge restraint. Professors Gerald Friesen, David Topper and Claudine Majzels I thank for stimulating seminars, discussions, and steadfast encouragement. I am also indebted to my committee, Professors Marilyn Baker, Mary Kinnear and Claudine

Majzels, for making the Dreaded Defense such an enlightening and helpful experience.

Anne Morton of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, deserves recognition for her professionalism and courtesy; David Arthurs for his valuable suggestions and encouraging me to explore archaeological sources.

One final word of thanks must go to the University of Manitoba for a graduate fellowship which lightened the load financially.

Chapter 1

"All Clothed with French Cloth": Capricious Natives and French-English Rivalry

In 1684 a French ship bound for York Factory (or Fort Bourbon, as the French called it) carried Captain La Martiniere and his Jesuit chaplain Father Silvy into Hudson Bay. Silvy left an account of their memorable first meeting with the natives to the north of that place. The Eskimos were obviously no strangers to the behaviour of trade, for when they saw the ship, they "called continually and brandished in the air some piece of booty, as a sign that they wished to trade with us". The "booty" turned out to be sealskin clothing, which the Inuit readily exchanged for European goods. Each side thought that it had made the better bargain. The natives received the knives with joyful bursts of laughter, "as though they [had] gained a treasure," while the Frenchmen relished their acquisition of some fine large "very beautifully sewn" hooded sealskin cloaks.¹

A second expedition in 1697, led by Captain de la Potherie, gave rise to a similar story. On sighting the ship, several Eskimos paddled out to the ice "crying aloud to us from a great distance and leaping up with dresses of caribou and other skins which they were showing us." The Frenchmen welcomed them aboard and gave them "several

¹ J. B. Tyrrell, Documents Relating to the Early History of Hudson Bay (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1931): 39.

presents", a gesture the natives reciprocated by matter-of-factly "stripping themselves naked" and handing over their clothes to the surprised Europeans. La Potherie noted approvingly the savages' modesty in turning away to put on their newly acquired European knee-breeches.²

Stories of first contacts became a widespread, popular genre in the age of European exploration of the New World. They also found their way into North American native histories, but with some significant changes. Cree versions, for example, shift the emphasis to the Europeans' eagerness, if not greed, to obtain Indians' furs:

[The Indians'] jackets were made of fur from animals that he trapped. So people of the ship gave them some other clothes to wear. "Take your clothes off" they were told, and they understood what they were told. "Put these clothes on", they were told. [Narrator's aside: "I guess they took their clothes off where nobody could see them. There must have been a small room where they could undress."] So the woman, whose pants were made of muskrat fur, removed her pants. And they went home wearing the clothes that the people from the ship had given them.³

Such narratives detach the fur trade from its traditional economic-capitalist historiographical context and reveal it in one of its most fundamental aspect--as an exchange of clothing. Indians gave their worn furs--the

² Ibid., 198.

³ Colin A. Scott, "The Semiotics of Material Life Among Wemindji Cree Hunters" (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 1983): 230. Quoted in Toby Morantz, "Oral and Recorded History in James Bay", Papers of the Fifteenth Algonquian Conference, William Cowan, ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1984): 176.

coveted castor gras⁴--to Europeans who gave them cloth garments in exchange. But if the European traders seemed literally to be "taking the shirts off their backs", as Toby Morantz puts it, the Indians found cloth garments equally desirable. The relationship between European cloth and North American furs was a synergetic one, and affected its participants on many levels. The exchange had deeper social and cultural meanings for both groups. This chapter delineates the role of cloth in defining Indian-European relationships during the French-English competition for Indian furs.

The Hudson's Bay Company's first shipments of cloth to Rupert's Land were small, reflecting its governing committee's cautious approach to an unfamiliar world whose inhabitants' tastes for trade goods had yet to be discovered. One story suggests that the explorer Pierre-Esprit Radisson had a hand in their decision. On one of his seventeenth-century voyages--presumably the first--someone suggested sending scarlet cloth to the natives since, as everyone knew, savages liked novelties and bright colours.

⁴ Castor gras, "greasy beaver" was the beaverskins that had been worn by natives for a season or more before being traded. Wear caused the long guard-hairs to fall off, and matted together the remaining short hairs. The result was more desirable than castor sec for making beaver-felt hats.

Radisson scoffed at the idea. The Indians he knew, he said, were not interested in "Kickshaws and coloured rags."⁵

From both native and European perspectives, Radisson could not have been more mistaken. From the start, the Hudson's Bay Company's shipments of cloth goods could not keep up with demand. A typical late seventeenth century consignment such as that sent to Albany Fort in 1695 consisted of 700 yards⁶ but by 1703, such amounts were insufficient to meet the demand. According to Governor John Fullartine, in that year the Indians traded "red broad cloth, twine and powder...[at] three times the quantity of what they used to do." He predicted that 1600 yards of broadcloth (not including finished garments or decorative items like lace and gartering) would constitute a more realistic inventory. He assured the committee "there was nothing of superfluity" in his request for more cloth, adding: "that which you reckoned two years trade which came over in the Perry, I could have disposed of it all in one, if I had let the Indians have had their wills, that is as to to broadcloth."⁷

⁵ John Clapham, Introduction to E. E. Rich, Minutes of the Hudson's Bay Company 1671-1674 (Champlain Society, 1942): xxx

⁶ E. E. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, vol 1: 1670-1763 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960): 326.

⁷ K. G. Davies and A. M. Johnson, Letters From Hudson Bay 1703-40 (London: Hudson's Bay record Society, 1965): 7.

As it acquired experience, the Hudson's Bay Company began shipping larger amounts of cloth to its bayside posts, a change the factors welcomed. Their journals stress repeatedly their concerns over stocking sufficient supplies of cloth. In 1716, Thomas McCliesh felt constrained to apologize for his large indent in a letter to the Committee, but insisted that the amount of cloth destined for Albany Fort not be decreased: "Pray diminish none but make an addition to the cloth, for...here is not half a year's trade of the forementioned goods."⁸ The following year, he ran short of cloth again, being forced to "give near twice the value" for the Indians' furs because of the competition from the French.⁹ Three years later, in 1719 it appeared that his large orders were justified. In that year he confidently predicted that there would be "neither cloth nor guns left in the factory by that time our trade is over this ensuing summer."¹⁰ In 1741 Thomas Mitchell noted a similar demand for cloth at Eastmain House. Besides iron goods, he wrote, nothing would induce the Indians "to Cetch Many furrs" than cloth and clothing.¹¹ Magnus Twatt found that the Ojibwa at

⁸ Ibid., 43.

⁹ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰ Ibid., 75.

¹¹ Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, Partners in Fur: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay 1600-1870 (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983): 64.

Cumberland House, "will not trade anything for their Furs but Cloth & Guns."¹²

From 1770 onwards, the Hudson's Bay Company began expanding inland. Perhaps because of transport problems, its inland posts could not stock enough cloth to satisfy either the post masters or their Indian customers. Gloucester House, the first inland post established in 1777, reported that Indian traders were "very ill-pleased" because they had been obliged to trade shot and tobacco rather than the cloth and blankets they had come for.¹³ In 1790 a shortage of cloth--one of his "Chiefest articles"--plagued William Walker at South Branch House. He tried in vain to distract the Indians with other goods, but they persisted in their demand for only cloth.¹⁴

Encouraged by the success of their earliest staple, broadcloth, the committee soon sent more exotic textiles, resorting to what Arthur Ray and Donald Freeman call the "demonstration effect"--the introduction of an entirely new commodity.¹⁵ Such were the "lamb skins" sent to Albany "for

¹² Paul Thistle, Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press): 71.

¹³ Osnaburgh House Journal, 1793, HBCA, B.155/a/9a:45. Cloth was in great demand in the early eastern fur trade as well. A party of angry Mohawks asked Dutch traders at Fort Orange in 1626: "Why should we go Hunting? Half the time you have no cloth." Quoted in James Axtell, The European and the Indian. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981): 254.

¹⁴ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 151.

¹⁵ Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, "Give Us Good Measure:" an economic analysis of relations between the Indians and

a tryall" to see if the Indians could be induced to use them as lining for their coats.¹⁶ Silk, serge, Scottish plaids, shalloon, canvas duck and flannel were offered in the 1690s in small experimental quantities.¹⁷ Two dozen silk handkerchiefs were sent in 1732 to Moose River Fort and the master William Bevan was told to report the Indians' reactions.¹⁸ The lambskins were probably a failure, since there are no further references to them in the account books, but the handkerchiefs were a resounding success.¹⁹

Perhaps the most famous example of productive innovation was the blanket. In 1678 the committee sent six pieces of "kersey blanketting",²⁰ the forerunner of the famous Hudson's Bay point blanket. Four years later, a larger shipment also sold out,²¹ and by the 1730s "sledgeloads of blankets" were being traded.²² First shipped

the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978): 225.

¹⁶ Charles A. Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974): 32.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Mancke, A Company of Businessmen: The Hudson's Bay Company and Long-Distance Trade, 1670-1730 (Winnipeg: Rupert's Land Research Centre, 1988): 45.

¹⁸ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 164.

¹⁹ Ibid., 183.

²⁰ A glossary of the textile terminology used in this thesis is appended.

²¹ Mancke, 43.

²² Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, vol. 1: 616.

as a novelty, the blanket soon became an indispensable addition to native wardrobes and as E. E. Rich said, an "inestimable asset" to the fur trade.

Blankets, cloth and clothing played a central role in the Hudson Bay Company's continuous struggle for control of the western fur trade. The Indians' preference for English cloth became an effective weapon in the company's rivalry with French and later Canadian opponents. An early example of the use of clothing to manipulate loyalties may be drawn from one of the many battles for control of York Factory. When the French arrived at York in 1684 and wintered on the Hayes River, they immediately established friendly relations with the Cree by exchanging gifts with them, so that they might be won over. The strategy was apparently successful as the Indians "went away very satisfied, promising to come again to trade" and significantly "to bring over to us everyone whom they might meet."²³

The English tried to win the Indians from the competition with gifts of their own. The York account books of the 1690s list a number of "expenses", a term which included the amount of presents given leading Indians. The number of coats given to influential Indians was large enough to warrant a separate category.²⁴ Additionally, shirts, shoes and yards of baize, flannel and broadcloth

²³ Tyrrell, 56.

²⁴ York Factory Account Book, 1693-94, HBCA, B.239/d/5:17d.

were given to leading Indians. Fort Albany also felt the "good effect" of giving presents when forty canoes of "French Indians" deserted their French trading allies to travel to Albany.²⁵

In spite of this promising beginning, the English found that by the late 1740s French posts, situated on all the major canoe routes, were intercepting furs bound for the bay. French inland forts, however, were temporary, flimsy constructions and the Indians who came to trade found them unimpressive. A more serious obstacle for the French was the difficulty of transporting large quantities of cloth inland. The Indians soon realized that both quantity and quality were often in short supply at French posts. The lack of English woolens, especially "certain red and blue cloths, an ell and a quarter wide," as broadcloth was described in a French document of 1707, was particularly damaging to trade.²⁶

English broadcloth was the key to a profitable Indian trade and the French were forced to import three hundred pieces of stroud (broadcloth) from England in 1715. By mid-century, New France imported over 1,000 pieces annually: 1200 strouds in 1755, and 1,160 escarlatines (scarlet

²⁵ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 71.

²⁶ E. R. Adair, "Anglo-French Rivalry in the Fur Trade During the Eighteenth Century", Canadian History Before Confederation: Essays and Interpretation, ed. J. M. Bumsted (Georgetown, Ontario: Irwin-Dorsey Ltd., 1972): 153.

broadcloth) in 1756.²⁷ However the cost of transporting goods inland added considerably to their price. A less expensive alternative was to offer the Indians English cloth initially and then to substitute inferior French cloth,²⁸ presumably in the hope that they would somehow overlook the sudden decline in quality. But the Indians immediately detected the difference between stroud from Gloucestershire and the inferior textile made in Montpellier.²⁹ The results of a second attempt at imitation in 1748-9 were described by a contemporary witness as "frightful"; the cloth was wrinkled, brown instead of scarlet, and the blue undeniably inferior to blue stroud.³⁰ Another strategy was to stock a great amount of cloth and little else. One Green Bay trader received an outfit from Montreal in 1725 that consisted entirely of cloth.³¹ The Montreal trader Jean Baptiste Cadot invested almost half of his merchandise in cloth, particularly woolens, the single most important item of his trade. By comparison, powder and shot took up only 5.7 per cent of his total value in goods.³²

²⁷ Ibid., 154.

²⁸ Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, vol. 1, 414-15.

²⁹ Adair, 153.

³⁰ Ibid., 154.

³¹ Robert C. Wheeler, A Toast to the Fur Trade: A Picture Essay on its Material Culture (St. Paul: Wheeler Productions, 1985): 45.

³² Bruce M. White, "Montreal Canoes and their Cargoes", Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, ed. Bruce Trigger, Toby

The men at the bay posts, with long lists of Indian complaints in mind, must have found their faith in the superiority of English cloth frequently tested. They detailed its multitudinous defects in a constant flow of letters to London. The examples amounted to what Glyndwr Williams described as a veritable "orgy of complaints and recriminations"³³ and are too numerous to list here. James Isham's letters written at York Factory in 1739 itemized some typical complaints. He wrote that Indians rejected cloth that was "too narrow, weak and thin," blankets too short by six or nine inches, thread too coarse for the needles, unsatisfactory yarn and buttons too fragile to withstand hard wear.³⁴ Joseph Isbister roundly condemned most of the cloth goods at Albany in 1740 as "not fit for either Indians or Englishmen."³⁵

Indian criticisms may have been a strategy for playing off English and French competitors against each other, a

Morantz and Louise Dechene (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987): 175. White notes that records of fur trade licences issued by the British government were a major source by which historians characterized the merchandise carried in Montreal canoes. But only the items of interest to the British government (and perhaps male historians) such as guns, ammunition and brandy were enumerated. Cloth, in spite of its popularity, was (inexplicably) not even mentioned. White, 178.

³³ Glyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade 1670-1870", The Beaver (Autumn 1983): 31.

³⁴ London Inward Correspondence from Hudson's Bay Company Posts. York Factory, 1739, HBCA, A.11/114: 89-89d.

³⁵ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 325.

tactic to get them to lower their prices, as Arthur Ray suggests.³⁶ But complaints persisted not only during the years of competition, but throughout the entire eighteenth and into the nineteenth century. Some were undoubtedly justified. Eighteenth century mills subjected textiles to many stresses and the spinning, weaving and finishing processes often left their mark. McCliesh noticed that his yard goods were "stretched with the tenterhooks, so as the Selvedge is almost tore from one end of the piece to the other."³⁷ The committee carefully scrutinized the goods they shipped, but occasionally a defective bale escaped detection. Native criticism of defective goods was often constructive, as it motivated the London committee to look to ways of eliminating weaknesses and improving the overall quality of their yard goods. When their criticisms had been heeded and their requirements attended to, the Indians did not hesitate to declare themselves satisfied. Had their motives been purely to maximize returns, they would have found or invented cause for further complaint, but this was not the case. McCliesh was able to inform the Committee that their improvements met with the Indians' approval. Isham also reported that they received improved blankets

³⁶ Arthur J. Ray, "Indians as Consumers", Old Trails and New Directions: Papers of the Third North American Fur Trade Conference (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980): 265-7.

³⁷ London Inward Correspondence from Hudson's Bay Company Posts. York Factory, A.11/114:48d.

"extraordinary well" and the cloth "a great Deal better than the former."³⁸ Finally, complaints were a means of exerting psychological pressure; a persistent reminder and a warning to the company that with two markets to choose from, Indians could satisfy their demands elsewhere. Several factors therefore refused to raise the standard on cloth, despite the Committee's orders. Governor Anthony Beale stated flatly that he could not do so "without giving the natives a distaste" (although he did raise the standard for guns and the Indians complained equally frequently about firearms).³⁹

In the well-known speech recorded by James Isham, the Cree leaders tell the factors not only to give "Good measure in cloth", but to let them see the familiar and trusted "old measures".⁴⁰ According to Eusebius Kitchin, postmaster at Moose, the Indians objected so strongly to a yardstick that was 3 1/2 inches too short, that they refused to trade altogether.⁴¹

The committee in London, remote from Hudson Bay, and unfamiliar with native cultures, took note of the Indians' complaints and did what they could to improve their trade goods. They consulted with experienced servants like James

³⁸ London Inward Correspondence, York Factory, A.11/114:100d

³⁹ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 29.

⁴⁰ E. E. Rich, ed. James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743-1749 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1949): 86.

⁴¹ Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, vol. 1: 597.

Knights to ensure that the cloth purchased to make twelve dozen blue and white shirts would be to North American tastes⁴² and asked Captain Ford about native colour preferences.⁴³

In spite of the reputed inferiority of French cloth, the committee asked their servants to send home swatches so that they could ship out cloth of equal or better quality.⁴⁴ After examining the French samples, they were confident that fears about French textile superiority were groundless: "We have sent you strong good Cloth full-breadth, it is not weak and thin, which we hope will Satisfye ye natives[.] We have seen samples of French Cloth that were not so good as the Cloth we send you."⁴⁵

In 1760 the English conquest of Canada seemed also to favour the Hudson Bay Company's cloth trade as the French withdrew from their western posts. By the mid-1760s, however, a new threat from Montreal made inroads in the trade. This new breed of opponents (variously called "French", "Canadian", "Northwesters", or "Pedlars") had two advantages over both the Hudson's Bay factories and the former French posts. As Ferdinand Jacobs noted, they

⁴² London Minute Books, HBCA, A.1/27: 10d.

⁴³ E. E. Rich and A. M. Johnson, eds., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Commissions Instructions Outward (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1957): 61-62.

⁴⁴ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 268.

⁴⁵ London Correspondence Outward, HBCA, A.6/6:74d.

strategically located themselves "in the centre of the trading Indians" and were thus "a great inducement" to the Indians who were saved "the carriage of several hundred miles."⁴⁶ More importantly, unlike their French predecessors, they stocked large inventories of cloth of good quality. The new opponents were not the petty dealers or "pedlars" the HBC men liked to think them, but merchants of standing with powerful connections to English and American firms. John Favell noted with dismay that the Indians who usually came to Moose Factory trades neither blankets nor cloth that year (1766).⁴⁷ The trade at York also fell off because the Indians had a "ready Supply [of cloth] from the Pedlars."⁴⁸ James Bird noted the improvement in the quality of the cloth as well as their large inventories.⁴⁹ He traded only "about 300 MB" because his customers no longer needed to go to the Hudson's Bay Company posts for good cloth, and professed themselves to be "well satisfied by the Canadians."⁵⁰

In addition to a wide array of textiles the Canadians also stocked finished garments and the decorative laces and bindings the Indians desired. For example, Cadot's outfit

⁴⁶ Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company", 36.

⁴⁷ London Inward Correspondence, HBCA, A.11/43: 144-48.

⁴⁸ London Inward Correspondence, HBCA A.11/115/: 124-25.

⁴⁹ Carlton House Post Journal 1796-97, HBCA B.17/a/2: 11

⁵⁰ Carlton House Post Journal 1796-97, HBCA B.27/a/2:11-12.

from Montreal included leggings and breechcloths, French shoes and hats, womens' dresses of drap (broadcloth), shirts in men's, women's and children's sizes, and in a variety of fabrics--cotton, calico, muslin, linen. He also stocked thread, wool, yarn and ribbon. The Indians no longer had to travel long distances to get accessories such as rings, buckles, buttons, beads, bells, mirrors, combs, feathers and silver jewelry with which they decorated their clothing. The pedlars had an assortment of "many different sorts of trinkets and fine Gartering", and according to Edward Clouston, the "capricious natives" found these goods irresistible.⁵¹ George Sutherland was at first mystified as to why the Indians continued to trade with his Canadian rival Mr. Clark, whose cloth and blankets he considered inferior to his own. He concluded that it was because of the "Ribbons and Calicos and Several Jimcracks" with which the Canadian indulged even "their most Extravagant demands".⁵²

As had the previous generation of rivals, both sides tried to win Indians from the competition by giving them presents. The Canadians gave away shirts, ribbons, awls and needles in addition to the customary rum and tobacco.⁵³ Once again, the figures for gifts to leading Indians rose in the account books as the posts resorted to lavishly

⁵¹ Bishop, 239-40.

⁵² Osnaburgh House Journal, 1793-94, HBCA, B.155/a/9a: 41.

⁵³ Bishop, 319.

rewarding the Indians' loyalty.⁵⁴ One harried servant claimed that competing with the pedlars had forced him to fit "the Indians out With a Part of every article of Tradeing Goods in the Company's warehouse".⁵⁵

The most eagerly sought gifts were lengths of blue and red woolens, or clothing such as richly decorated capots. The presentation of "captains coats" to leading Indians was part of a ceremony in which certain facets of the cultural significance of clothing were enacted, as will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

To counter the threat from Canada, the company sent explorer-traders inland, but the efforts to persuade distant groups of Indians to come to the Bay had only limited success, and it reluctantly acknowledged the necessity of establishing permanent inland posts.⁵⁶

Within the traders' widening circle of contacts which now included more distant inland natives, clothing functioned as an immediately recognizable symbol of allegiance. The company servants, despite rules forbidding

⁵⁴ Ray and Freeman, 200.

⁵⁵ Cumberland House Journal, 1793-94, HBCA, B.49/a/25a:

⁵⁶ These distant groups, such as Henday's "Archithinue" (Blackfoot), and Kelsey's "Naywatamee Poets" (Atsina) hunted buffalo which provided the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, and consequently, independence from the posts' cloth. Northern caribou hunters also had little use for cloth. See Toby Morantz, "'Not Annuall Visitors': The Drawing In To Trade Of Northern Algonquian Caribou Hunters", pp.57-73 in Actes Du Quatorzieme Congres des Algonquinistes, William Cowan, ed. Ottawa: Carleton University, 1983.

the practise, had ample opportunity to develop social and kinship ties with the Indians. Although the Europeans' paternalistic terms of possessiveness that Hudson Bay Company traders applied to certain individuals and groups seem excessive today, their feelings of betrayal when Indians who were said to "belong" to a certain post sported coats obtained from the pedlars were nonetheless genuine. To the men at the posts, the Indians seemed to be deliberately flaunting their French finery, a bitter reflection which surfaces repeatedly in the journals. In 1714 James Knight was distressed at the sight of the York Factory Cree in their French cloth and blankets. To Joseph Isbister it seemed that every one of the Indians who came to Albany was "clothed with french cloth"⁵⁷ especially when he witnessed the Home Indians, whose "loyalty" the men tended to take for granted, trading with the enemy. When some inland Indians arrived with only "a few indifferent martens" to trade, he was further vexed to see them "already clothed" by the pedlars, in garments "better laced" than the company's to boot.⁵⁸ The influential Cree leader Wappennesew, the object of vigorous wooing by both sides, was finally won over by the French, to Andrew Graham's chagrin. He reported that Wappennesew had not appeared at York that year because he had gone to the pedlars instead (although he did send his

⁵⁷ Albany Post Journal, 1705, HBCA, B.3/b/1: 20.

⁵⁸ Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 550.

regrets). Wappennesew apparently became entirely frenchified: "He lives in their House all the Winter, dines at Table with the Masters, & his family are clothed with Cloth & no favour is refused."⁵⁹

One Indian chief attempted to explain his allegiance to the French to the men at Albany: "We know very well that your cloth is better than that the French are but then when my coat is wore out the french will give me another if I am not able to buy one and that is more than you would doo."⁶⁰ George Sutherland gave unwitting support to the Indian's reproach, when he agreed that "the pedlar's give away more to the Indians then what we doo when we give them the most."⁶¹ The Canadians whom he met did not consider ruffled shirts a trade item; in addition to the customary rum and tobacco, they were given away as presents.⁶² As is to be expected the Hudson' Bay company servants considered their rivals to be overly extravagant in their gift-giving. When two Indians arrived at a Canadian post bearing four meager skins, with "hardly any furr" they nevertheless received 1 1/2 yards of cloth, and on trust, two blankets, more cloth, eight yards of gartering, two dozen needles and a quantity of Brazilian tobacco.⁶³

⁵⁹ Thistle, 21.

⁶⁰ Sturgeon Lake Journal, HBCA, B.211/a/1: 23d.

⁶¹ Sturgeon Lake Journal, HBCA, B.211/a/1: 16d.

⁶² Sturgeon Lake Journal, HBCA, B.211/a/1: 27.

⁶³ Sturgeon Lake Journal, HBCA, B211/a/1: 18-18d.

French-English rivalries had little effect on Indians personally, or on their families. For example, Captain Sakie, a prominent Cree trader at Moose who received his uniform from the English, had two brothers who traded with the French for over twenty year, but their fraternal relations remained amicable.⁶⁴ They were largely indifferent to whether they bartered with French or Englishmen, as the ritual of being clothed was more important than forming specific political alliances.

Indians were disposed to extend trading relations to both sides, since their prestige (and profit) were increased by the Europeans' vying to see who could best clothe them. They often traded a part of their furs with a French trader and the rest at the Bay posts. One family arrived at Red Lake in 1790 and proceeded to divide their furs between the two rival posts established there. The son went to the Canadian house where he was "immediately cloath'd", while the father was given his clothing at the English post.⁶⁵ Captain Sakie's impartial business dealings with both the French and the English at Moose Factory was a constant irritant to the latter, but they were powerless to stop him. Sakie found that the traders at Moose would tolerate almost any kind of "insubordination" on his part, so long as he did

⁶⁴ Edward Rogers, "The Queen: A Cree Burial at Moose Factory, May 27, 1747", Arctic Anthropology 24, 2 (1987): 33.

⁶⁵ Red Lake Journal 1790-91, HBCA, B.177/a/1: 21d.

not trade with the French. The great leader Matonabee who led Samuel Hearne's 1770 northern expedition had only to threaten to take his trade to the Canadians to bring Hearne to heel. Hearne gave him large quantities of cloth and other goods for himself and for distribution to his followers in an effort to keep him loyal to the English.⁶⁶

The European flags Indians displayed in their canoes as they travelled down the rivers on their way to the posts were particularly inflammatory symbols of partisanship. Hudson Bay Company ships had flown flags as early as 1667, and by 1695 began carrying them as trade items. These Indian flags were embellished with a border of lace to make them even more attractive. A large flag "edged round with lace which took 36 yards" which, in the factor's opinion, was "an ornament to the House", was displayed on a 70-foot pole at Osnaburgh, to see how the Indians responded.⁶⁷

Indian response to flags is less clearcut than European, but they were aware that this particular piece of cloth had significance for white men as they undoubtedly witnessed its political role during the French-English hostilities. Posts were captured, recaptured and returned; York Fort had changed hands six times by 1697, and seen

⁶⁶ Ray and Freeman, 199-200. Matonabee received trade goods valued at 400 MB for his present and 700 MB for distribution. Glyndwr Williams, "The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870", The Beaver (Autumn 1983): 30.

⁶⁷ Invoice Books of Shipments to Hudson's Bay, HBCA A.24/37: 170.

numerous raisings and lowerings of French and English standards. Captain (later Governor) James Knight's description of the procedure following the English victory and the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 is typical: The defeated French governor "Strook his fflag & as his came down with. one pt. of ye Halliards, I hoisted ye Queene with ye other Part".⁶⁸ What the Indians thought of this strange rite is not known. But European deference for these rectangles of cloth combined with Algonquian respect for unknown but potentially useful phenomena predisposed them to regard flags as desirable things to possess and adopt for their own purposes. A trading captain at Brandon House felt his status was diminished because he had lost his flag. He asked the master, Robert Goodwin for another. Goodwin had none at hand but expeditiously had one fashioned from an old flag.⁶⁹

As fitting tributes to their importance, the Indians insisted on large flags, at least two yards long and 1 1/2 yards wide, and made of shalloon, a lightweight material that could catch the slightest breeze. Thomas Stayner at Churchill wrote to York in 1794 requesting any spare flags. The ones he had were "about the size of Pocket handkerchiefs & complained much of by Natives, 6 of them not being so big as one Canadian Flag."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ York Factory Journal 1714, B.239/a/1: 11.

⁶⁹ Brandon House Journal 1798-99, HBCA B.22/a/6: 33d.

⁷⁰ York Factory Journal, HBCA, B.239/b/58: 63.

Some Indians apparently adopted flags as a symbol of alliance.⁷¹ According to Father Silvy, they considered the English flag as representative of "bad" people and preferred to follow the white flag of the French.⁷² Silvy's chauvinistic claim is unintentionally supported by Governor Knight who related in 1714 that when he hoisted the Union flag, an Indian came to him and told him "he did not love to see yt he loved to see the White one..."⁷³ One "English" chief at Michilimackinac imprudently raised the British flag in the presence of his zealous "French" countrymen who fell on it in a rage and ripped it to shreds. According to Alexander Henry the Elder who witnessed the event, the chief gathered up the pieces and grieved long over his loss.⁷⁴ The Indians at Shell River in 1794 were reportedly "proud" of

⁷¹ This appears to contradict my earlier statement that Indians were indifferent to forming specific political alliances. However, the inconsistency dissipates if we take into consideration Fred Gearing's concept of "structural pose", which he developed in his study of eighteenth-century Cherokee society: "A structural pose is the way a society "sees itself to be appropriately organized at a particular moment for a particular purpose". Given Algonquian notions of social etiquette and willingness to accommodate the newcomers, it is possible that they enacting (and enjoying) the role of "loyal ally" the Europeans expected of them. See Jennifer S. H. Brown, "Northern Algonquians from Lake Superior and Hudson Bay to Manitoba in the Historic Period", in Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience, R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986): 218.

⁷² Tyrrell, 56.

⁷³ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 34.

⁷⁴ Henry, 58.

the HBC flag and rallied round it until a Canadian rival lured them away by hanging out "some silk Handkerchiefs".⁷⁵

Flags added a festive and colourful note during European religious celebrations at the posts. Albany Fort celebrated Easter Sunday in 1706 by treating the Indians with "Deare's Tongue" and "Flower and Plumbs to make them a Puding"; as a special contribution to the festivities, the factor hoisted the post flag.⁷⁶ Six flags to celebrate St. George's Day were sent inland in 1796.⁷⁷ The flag became a significant addition to the annual trading ceremony at the posts, and an experienced factor had flags flying when visitors or customers were expected.⁷⁸ The native traders were appreciative of the honour, and quick to respond when it was absent. When Robert Goodwin forgot to raise the standard at Brandon House, the Assiniboine who came to trade abruptly ordered him to "have the large Flagg hoisted."⁷⁹ A shrewd trader kept a ready supply of clean new flags on hand. James Sutherland, competing for furs with the Canadian Duncan Cameron at Red Lake in 1790, envied the latter his flag especially since his own was an "old dirty thing" which

⁷⁵ Shell River Journal 1794-95, HBCA, B.199/a/1: 12d.

⁷⁶ Albany Fort Journal, HBCA, B.3/a/1: 33d.

⁷⁷ York Factory Account Book, HBCA, B.239/d: 26.

⁷⁸ Shirlee A. Smith, Letter to B. Gough. Winnipeg, February 4, 1988. HBCA Search File, "Flags".

⁷⁹ Brandon House Journal, HBCA, B.22/a/6:

he feared would provoke derision among the Indians.⁸⁰ By comparison, the Indians who arrived to trade with Cameron were treated to the gratifying sight of the Canadian dressed "fit to appear at Court", with his "beautiful shalloon flag" flying and saluting their arrival with twenty rounds from "a large brass blunderbuss."⁸¹ Cameron's appreciation of the formalities was more in keeping with Algonquian notions of proper social interactions.

In sum: French-English rivalry for furs in the eighteenth century was the stage, and cloth the historical backdrop against which social interchanges between European and Indian were enacted. By manipulating situations which involved the trading of furs for cloth, Indian traders were able to exercise autonomy and to control to a considerable extent their powerful European trading partners.

⁸⁰ Red Lake Journal, HBCA, B.177/a/1: 23-23d.

⁸¹ Red Lake Journal, HBCA, B.177/a/1: 11d.

2. Coats, Flags and "Badges of Eminence": Trading Captains and Cloth

In spring after the opening of the rivers, the bayside factories were the scene of a ritualized enactment of the alliance between Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company in which the investiture of Indian "captains" took centre stage. During these trading visits, the governor or chief factor ceremoniously conferred European military uniforms and symbols of office such as flags and medals on their Indian trading allies. In turn, the captains, following their own cultural codes, bestowed on the factor a gift of furs and a "toggy" (a coat made of beaver).¹

York Factory, which saw the largest numbers of Indians coming in to trade, was the site of the most flamboyant ceremonies. Andrew Graham's detailed account of one such ceremony in the 1760s was based on his observations at York, but he added that they were "similar everywhere" although perhaps not as elaborate. Neither a purely native, nor entirely a European ceremony, the event at York bore imprints from both cultures, although both sides were motivated by the common impulse to establish alliance. In the inhospitable subarctic environment, alliance was the pivot around which successful trade and life itself revolved. It was critical for the English at the bayside posts: the physical survival of the men and the economic survival of the company depended on the attention and support of Indian allies. From an Indian

¹ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 318.

perspective, business could not be conducted without first establishing alliance and its mutual obligations and responsibilities.

Both sides then, had a parallel motive--to establish alliance--and both manipulated European symbols of office to achieve it. However, motivations diverged in the meanings these objects had in European and Indian social domains. What social and cultural values did uniforms, flags and medals embody for the company, and for the captains? The principal aim of this chapter is to examine how European clothing and accoutrements acquired symbolic value in the differing domains of Indian and European cultures.

Who were the trading captains and why were they, and not just any Indians, the recipients of the Hudson's Bay Company's honours? "Indian Captaines" were well-known to Radisson in 1692² and in 1705 Albany Fort was visited by "leading Indians" who received gifts of laced coats. There is however no mention of a ceremony at these early dates. We do not know with certainty when the trading captains were organized into a system on the western coast of Hudson Bay. Toby Morantz suggests that the captains operating in the regions east of Hudson and James Bay were a special group with eighteenth century origins, organized to meet the challenge of the

² E. E. Rich and A. M. Johnson, eds., Hudson's Bay Copy Booke of Letters Outward (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1957): 168

French-Canadian bid for control of Rupert's Land.³ There is a further complexity: both homeguard and inland leaders were referred to as captains.⁴ The former were leaders of local bands recruited from Indians who wintered on the coast close to the factories and supplied the posts with provisions. The inlanders, however, spent their winters hunting in remote areas, and provided the Company with most of its furs. Their distance from the posts meant their relations with the Company were geographically and socially more tenuous than the homeguards', a factor that played a major role in its governors' willing participation in native ceremonies of alliance.

³ Toby Morantz, "James Bay Trading Captains of the Eighteenth Century: New Perspectives on Algonquian Social Organization", in William Cowan, ed. Papers of the Eighteenth Algonquian Conference (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1977): 79.

⁴ The homeguard captains also received coats and other gifts, although not within the context of an elaborate ceremony such as at York. Carol M. Judd, "Sakie, Esquawenoe, and the Foundation of a Dual-Native Tradition at Moose Factory", in The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations ed. Shepard Krech (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984): 87. There is a further scholarly divergence of opinion concerning the problem of whom the HBC traders meant when they referred to "captains". Glover claims that the captains were also those men referred to as "leading Indians". But Morantz argues that "leading Indians" were not necessarily the same as the "captains" mentioned in HBC records. Heidenreich and Ray believe the term was applied by the English to precontact aboriginal band leaders. Richard Glover, Introduction to K. G. Davies, ed., Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965): xxvii. Toby Morantz, "James Bay Trading Captains", 84. Conrad Heidenreich and Arthur J. Ray, The Early Fur Trades: A Study in Cultural Interaction (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976): 75.

Before the Indians embarked on a trading expedition to the Bay, they chose one or more skilled negotiators to take charge of their business and to promote their interests at the factories. Variousy described as men of intelligence and courage, "the most venerable" in their communities, adept in the art of delivering "long harangues", they were respected in Indian and European circles alike.⁵ James Isham, governor of York and meticulous chronicler of life in the northwest, noted that the chief trading Indian was addressed as "Ukamaw" by his followers⁶, a term of respect that sheds light on yet another quality of leadership of the captain's that motivated men to follow him. The word ukamaw (uuchimaau, in a contemporary Cree dialect) derives, according to Colin Scott, from the verb "to give away."⁷ The captain attracted followers in direct proportion to his generosity in bestowing goods such as clothing, tobacco and alcohol on members of his gang. Paradoxically (in European perceptions) the act of giving rather than possession of goods augmented a person's prestige.

The profile of the captain that emerges from Hudson's Bay Company sources is that of a prudent individual, but of strong personality, a good hunter, an experienced, mature man with a

⁵ Rich and Johnson, Letters Outward, 168.

⁶ E.E. Rich and A.M. Johnson, eds. James Isham's Observations on Hudsons Bay, 1743 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1949): 82.

⁷ Colin Scott, "Ideology of Reciprocity Between the James Bay Cree and the Whiteman State," Outwitting the State, Peter Skalnik, ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1989): 85.

family. Of his many admirable qualities, the most important from an Algonquian perspective was his ability to speak well and persuasively in order to gain many concessions and gifts for himself and his followers.⁸

As captain, an individual was accorded certain honours and preferential treatment not extended to the "common Indians". He was distinguished from others by an ensign hoisted on a stick and placed in the stern of his canoe.⁹ Upon arrival at the post, he was permitted to enter the factory to transact business and to ensure that the Company's servants distributed goods fairly. The rest of the Indians were excluded from communication with the Factory and sent to conduct their business through the window of the trading room. By contrast, the governor and officials extended many courtesies to the captain. They solicited his advice about the quality of goods and then acted upon it, and invited him to dine at their table. They presented him with a tangible sign of his special status, a coat of better quality than that of his immediate subordinates, the so-called "lieutenants" and "common Indians" who comprised his gang. It would seem an individual had much to gain by assuming a captaincy; the Indians accordingly considered the position a prestigious

⁸ Arthur J. Ray and Donald Freeman, "Give Us Good Measure": An Economic Analysis of Relations Between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company Before 1763 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1978): 63.

⁹ Edward Umfreville, The Present State of Hudson's Bay (London, 1970): 47, microfiche.

one.¹⁰

The most detailed description of the annual spring trading ceremony at York is in Andrew Graham's "Observations" of 1767-1791, a journal he kept during his twenty-four years' residency. Graham had a keen eye for detail, and his vivid word sketch of the arrival of the captains and their flotilla of canoes indicates that it must have been a memorable and picturesque occasion.¹¹ From Graham we learn that flags were hoisted and guns discharged during the three-week event. When the Indians sighted the post they discharged several gun salutes in honour of the occasion and to announce their arrival. Their approach was acknowledged by a thunderous "round of twelve pounders" and the raising of the "Great Flag flying from the Fort", as it continued to do every day of their visit.

After the Indians disembarked, the women set up camp on the grounds surrounding the factory, while the captain delegated various tasks.¹² Then he and his lieutenants entered the factory's trading room, where the governor had

¹⁰ Ray and Freeman, 70.

¹¹ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 315-324.

¹² Women and children did not attend all trading ceremonies, as for example, at Eastmain House in the 1740s. Their presence at York, according to Graham's evidence, was required because the captains were too consequential to pitch tents and prepare the food such large gatherings entailed. They were also useful for their tenacious memories, and one of their roles was to memorize the instructions on the medicine bottles their husbands received. See Francis and Morantz, 47; Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 320.

placed a row of chairs and a table with pipes filled with tobacco. The chief was permitted to sit on a chair while the rest of his band members sat on the floor.¹³ The captains, by right of their special status, placed themselves on each side of the Governor, and the pipe ceremony began. The Governor in accordance with native tradition pointed the calumet in four directions, took several puffs and passed it to his neighbour. At length, when everyone had smoked, the silence was broken by the captain as he and the governor exchanged courtesies and news of the events of the year's inland activities. The captain's speech stressed friendship ("The Indians Love the English"), the fact that he had kept his promise "to bring many Indians", and the expectation of continued reciprocal relations with the company: "We come a Long way to See you, the french sends for us but we will not [go t]here" he said, calling attention to the fact of his "loyalty" in trading only with the English.

Following a further reaffirmation of friendly relations between Indians and the Company, the captain's talk turned to the business of negotiating good bargains for himself and his people. He cautioned the English to give good value for the Indians' furs, and not put their thumbs into the bowl as they measured out gunpowder. Nor should the yardstick by which cloth was measured fall short. When the captain had examined

¹³ Among Plains Cree, the prestigious Warrior Society used back rests in their ceremonial lodges. They were considered a status symbol not found among ordinary household furnishings. Mandlebaum, 113.

and professed himself satisfied with the trade measures, the governor rose and placed a new suit of clothing consisting of coat, waistcoat, breeches and hat before him, as well as bread, prunes, tobacco and brandy for his followers. Although specific details on how the captain was "robed" are lacking, it is likely that his investiture followed customary European procedures. Graham does inform us that the governor himself placed the hat on the captain's head. Captains, lieutenants, company servants, and the governor then filed out of the Factory gates to the Indian encampment, a colourful procession:

In the front are the spontoons [halberds mounted on six-foot poles] and ensigns, next the drummer beating a march, then several of the Factory servants bearing the bread, prunes, etc. Then comes the captain, walking quite erect and stately, smoking his pipe and conversing with the Governor and his officers..."

In the encampment, all was in readiness for their arrival. The women had prepared a tent for the august company in the meantime, with clean birchbark or beaver coats spread on the ground for the leaders to sit on. The procession entered, the captain and governor seated themselves, and the distribution of the presents began. The captain, conscious of his status, gestured to his lieutenant to dispense the gifts, including the "common coats" to the members of his gang.

After a celebratory interval of several days during which the brandy and edibles were consumed, another ceremony had to be enacted with everyone, men, women and children, in

attendance--the presentation of the puc'ca'tin'ash'a'win, the gift of furs to the governor.

The object of the presentation of this gift was to renew the Indians' "league of friendship" with the Hudson's Bay Company.¹⁴ It was conducted with "the greatest solemnity" and strict observation of correct ceremonial etiquette. The governor, "genteely dressed after the English fashion," placed himself in the middle, and the chief men and the captain were permitted once again to sit "on either hand on chairs"; while others sat "round on the floor". The factor's speech as he accepted the puc'ca'tin'ash'a'win was mimetic of the Indians expression of alliance and mutual obligation, with a significant difference. He declared that "England [not "the English", or "we"] loves the Indians well", thus conflating loyalty to the company with allegiance to Britain.

At five o'clock the following morning, a drum roll announced that the factory was open for business, and trading could now begin. The captain, dressed in his uniform, was admitted into the trading room of the warehouse while the rank and file waited outside for the window to open. He supervised the trading procedures to see that "everything is measured fair, and that [the Indians] have their due." When he was not overseeing the company servants' activities, Graham observed, "He frequently talks to his followers out of the window, receives their furs, and carries the goods in exchange now and

¹⁴ Ray and Freeman, 57.

then to show his familiarity and consequence with the English."¹⁵

Some Indian leaders combined their captaincy with their spiritual role as medicine men and were thus doubly powerful and influential. According to Graham, these captains and their wives were taken aside and presented with an additional gift of European medicines and ointments.¹⁶ The company hoped thereby to impress favourably important religious leaders.

Prior to their departure, the captain gathered his men around him, and "assuming an imperious air and voice" informed them of two things, that the presents he had received from the factor would be distributed at a feast that he would host shortly, and that he intended to come again the following year, as he had "been very well used" at York, with "good measure and fine goods".¹⁷ The factor presented each leader with a generous parting gift of various goods, and as a final gesture of respect, ordered the firing of the fort's cannon as the flotillas headed homeward.

Turning now to the question of European constructions of the trading ritual, it is clear that in large part, the actions of the European participants were predetermined by Indian norms of ceremonial and social etiquette. However, the use of the objects around which much of it centred, the

¹⁵ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 320.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 322.

military uniforms, flags, medals, and gun salutes was a European introduction. The company further established such rules and marks of rank, as who had the right to display a flag, the numbers of gun salutes, whether the factor would rise to greet the captains, placement of people during the ceremony, and grading of the coats. The company's recourse to military titles conferred rank on Indian traders according to a European hierarchy. It employed European status symbols to appeal to the captain's vanity and self-importance and to impress his companions.

The captains wielded considerable influence over the members of their communities, and the company realized that successful trade depended on their cooperation. Thus when the captains acted autonomously, it was viewed as "insubordination" by the English. As Umfreville noted, "[The captains] set a great value on their services, and omit no opportunity of letting the factors know, that they are able to form a proper estimate of their consequence."¹⁸ Faced with powerful Indian leaders whose activities were conducted in remote inland settings, the company affirmed their importance to the fur trade by using the best possible means at its disposal.

The coats were a means to tie the captains firmly to the company and to curb their tendencies to trade at posts to which they did not "belong". It was possible, at least in

¹⁸ Umfreville, 72-73

theory, for a captain to be in effect "declothed" if he had "dishonoured" his uniform in any number of ways. The most serious offence appeared to be not a decline in trapping success or production, but trading with the company's rivals.

One way the factors encouraged the "loyalty" of their captains was to present them with a flag and to raise flags on all occasions of the captains' visits. Displayed over the forts as emblem of English sovereignty, the purpose of flags in English terms was to announce the Hudson's Bay Company's authority in Rupert's Land. By extending the "privilege" and "honour" of the use of flags to captains, the company sanctioned their power over their followers. It also found innovative ways to capitalize on the British flag as a symbol with which the Indians could identify, as the following example illustrates.

On 29 May 1680, the committee instructed Governor Nixon to "contrive to make compact wth. the Captns or chiefs of the respective Rivers & places, whereby it might be understood by them that ...they had transferred the absolute propriety to you, or at least the only freedome of trade." Nixon was then told to "do some act wch by the Religion or Custome of their Country" would make the "Contracts", as they called them, sacred and binding.

...we have caused Iron marks to be made of the figure of the Union Flagg, wth wch wee would have you to burn Tallys of wood wth such ceremony as they shall understand to be obligatory & sacred, The manner whereof wee must leave to your prudence as you shall find the modes & humours of the people you deal with, But when the

Impression is made you are to write upon the Tally the name of the Nation or person wth. whom the Contract is made and the date thereof, and them deliver one part of the stock to them, and reserve the other.¹⁹

The company was clearly attempting to construct rituals of alliance in an idiom that was meaningful to the captains, while serving its own economic ends. The introduction of medals as trade goods was a further experiment in formalizing ritual.

The medals were of silver "with the Kings Empression on One side and the [company'] Coat of arms on the other." But their symbolic possibilities were not recognized at first, when in 1742 the committee sent "12 doz of Yellow Medals, with a hole pierced through for the Indians to hang about their Necks which we doubt not but will be well pleasing to them" priced "at 8 per Beaver."²⁰ Governor Thomas White of York stated that he believed they would "take very well."

The medals were so successful that in 1776 Thomas Hutchins suggested they be used exclusively as gratuities for the captains, and not as trade commodity. Balancing considerations of immediate economic returns with the long-term benefits derived from the ritual enhancement of the captains' status, Hutchins decided in favour of the latter:

¹⁹ Radisson probably set the precedent for Rupert's Land when he was awarded a medal for his service to King Charles in establishing an English factory at the Bay: "At his Returne to England, & the said factory being settled, the King Publickly acknowledged his great service to the nation, & presented him a medall with a gold Chaine to weare, in Token of his favour." Rich and Johnson, Letters Outward, 12-13.

²⁰ London Correspondence Outward, HBCA, A.6/7: 74

Medals also are much esteemed amongst them if large, and if presented with ceremony when the Calimut is smoaked, will be not only deemed a mark of distinction but perhaps be a means of binding the Leaders more securely in your Interest... Perhaps your Honours will judge it necessary not to put them upon Trade; for whilst any common Indian can obtain them for his Furrs, they cease to be an incitement to emulation, or regarded as a Token of Approbation, and Badge of Eminence.²¹

Clearly, by mid-century, the company had made great strides in its understanding of and knowledge about native customs and ceremonial conduct. It recognized the force of ceremony and ritual as an integral part of its interaction with Indians. The letter indicates that its intentions were to maximize profits for the Company, and at least some factors exercised sufficient insight into Cree culture to be able to manipulate the captains' desire for status to this end.

In addition to flags and medals, the captain's coat and other items of European dress served as visual sign of his status:

A coarse cloth coat, either red or blue, lined with baize with regimental cuffs and collar. The waistcoat and breeches are of baize; the suit ornamented with broad and narrow orris lace of different colours; a white or checked shirt; a pair of yarn stockings tied below the knee with worsted garters; a pair of English shoes. The hat is laced and ornamented with feathers of different colours. A worsted sash tied round the crown, an end hanging out on each side down to the shoulders. A silk handkerchief is tucked by a corner into the loops behind; with these decorations it is put on the captain's head and completes his dress.²²

Notwithstanding Graham's eye-witness account, fine broadcloth, and not "coarse cloth" was more commonly used in

²¹ London Inward Correspondence, HBCA, A.11/4:27d.

²² Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 317.

the manufacture of these coats. The account books list blue corded cloth and "Fine skie Collour'd Cloth", almost certainly broadcloth, to be used in the making of captains' coats.²³ Shalloon (rather than baize) linings and lace were also intended for the captains' accoutrements.²⁴

The captains' clothing was modeled on eighteenth-century English military dress, which consisted of a coat (mainly red) with variegated facings, waistcoat, breeches, stockings, shoes, and a cocked hat trimmed with feathers, lace or braid. Officers' dress was more ornamented than that of the ordinary soldier; typically of scarlet cloth with broad edgings of lace on collar and cuffs, and shoulder cords or epaulettes. Extravagant decoration continued to embellish military uniforms long after it had passed out of fashion in civilian dress, peaking in the 1820s in an "epoch of pure dandyism".²⁵ The large amounts of orris lace, bindings and "tape" listed as "expenses" (gifts) and items of trade in the account books confirm that the captain's coat was as ornate as an English officer's. The hat given the captains was embellished and

²³ See for example, Albany Fort Journals, B.3/d/38:24d and B3/d/38:11d; York Factory Account Book, B.239/d/36:10d. The committee, hoping to keep the cost of the coats down, disapproved the use of expensive corded cloth. James Isham's letter of 27 July 1740 expressed his regret about their decision since corded cloth was a "great encouragement to the leading Indians." Rich and Johnson, Letters Outward, 274.

²⁴ York Factory Account Book, HBCA, B.239/d/2: 4d.

²⁵ Charles Francis Atkinson, "Uniforms", Encyclopedia Britannica, eleventh edition (Cambridge University Press, 1911): 583.

"laced with gold Tincy [probably orris lace] and papered and lined with Glazed linen"²⁶ and the hatbands and coloured ostrich feathers listed in the inventories were also intended for hats.

The lieutenants, on the other hand, were given unlined coats, and shirts and caps of coarser manufacture, like "those worn by mariners."²⁷ Their coats were also differentiated by colour to indicate their lower status, and the "plaine hats" in the company's storeroom were probably intended for them as well. The remainder of the captain's gang, called the "common soldiers" by the English, received "plaine coats" which were not presented to them in the formal ceremony, but distributed by the captain a deliberate strategy meant to reinforce his influence within the band. On one occasion when Richard Staunton asked the committee for lace to put on the common trading coats, he did so tentatively, adding "if your honours think proper."²⁸ The committee was unresponsive and Staunton's further suggestion that they send "some cloth better than common" for these coats also fell on deaf ears. The committee had decided in favour of giving large presents to the captains to ensure their loyalty but insisted it be done "privately" so the "Comon Indians" would not also demand similar

²⁶ London Minute Books, HBCA A.1/34: 365.

²⁷ Umfreville, 59.

²⁸ K. G. Davies and A. M. Johnson eds, Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, 272.

recognition.²⁹ The spreading about of status and privilege was to be avoided, lest it encourage a "tendency to diminish a due subordination" in the captain's followers.³⁰

The ceremony at York highlights the capacity of the Hudson's Bay Company to enhance the prestige of the captains by investing them with European power symbols within a context of native ritual. Motives were undoubtedly pragmatic for the company which recognized the need to establish alliance with the captains as a means of expanding its own trade and exerting control over a group of powerful and independent leaders.

Turning now to Indian constructions of the ritual, the first question that arises is "What motivated Indians to participate?" The captains' part in the ceremony is explainable in terms of the Algonquian concept of power, one of the guiding principles of life. Power did not operate solely in a secular, economic domain as it did for the Hudson's Bay Company, or manifest itself as control over someone or something. It resided in everything--the sacred-secular dichotomy did not apply in native social domains. For the captain, power was a generalized concept, an attribute of human and non-human beings, as well as objects, and its presence called for respectful negotiation of possibly sensitive or dangerous situations. The governor was

²⁹ Rich and Johnson, Letters Outward, 186.

³⁰ Morantz, "James Bay Trading Captains", 84.

approached with "respectful talk", in the form of pleas for "pity", a typical Algonquian technique for handling conditions that were in some aspects beyond one's control.³¹

Although power resided in all things animate and inanimate, it was not dispersed equally among human beings, as some skilled and gifted individuals were obviously more influential than others. Captains were recognized as men of power with whom a respectful (and profitable) relationship might be established. But however much individual autonomy was valued, it was not separate from the facts of dependence and interdependence. The relationship between the captain and his followers entailed certain responsibilities.

The captains often gave their coats away to their followers, a practice which baffled and exasperated the factors to whom they represented a life-time investment. Captain Sakie, for example, received a fine captain's coat from James Duffield, who had to admonish him not "give it away, but appear like a captain in his own jurisdiction and use his utmost interest with all his Indians" for the company's benefit.³² Unlike Europeans, Indians placed little

³¹ Mary Black Rogers, "'Starving' and Survival in the Subarctic Fur Trade: A Case for Contextual Semantics", Bruce Trigger, Toby Morantz and Louise Dechene, eds., "Le Castor Fait Tout": Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, 1985 (Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987): 626

³² Moose Post Journal, HBCA, B.135/a/11: 62. Quoted in Carol A. Judd, "The Foundation of a Dual-Native Tradition at Moose Factory", The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations, Shepard Krech, ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984): 87.

value on the accumulation of material goods nor was their storage even practicable. For the captain, power and status inhered in his ability to distribute gifts, including his English clothing and his captaincy, to his followers or members of his family.

The position of captain seems also to have been a patrimonial good. In 1744, after the death of Captain Achmet of Moose Factory, his three sons came to the fort to announce that the family had appointed the eldest to succeed his father. The son was wearing his father's coat and carrying his flag, so Chief Factor Joseph Isbister took the young man aside and improvised a brief investiture, or as he put it "re-delivered the flag".³³

European flags, medals and clothing may have been seen as both manifestations and repositories of power. Cree interest in flags is explainable within the context of the Algonquian power belief system. Graham's reference to the flag displayed during the trading ceremony is likely to the "Red Ensign", a Union Jack with the white letters "HBC" in the centre, or the "Governor's Flag", with a Union Jack in one corner and the company's coat of arms in the fly.

The link between the letters and visual images on the governor's flag and Algonquian respect for the power within markings on wood and rock is a potentially valuable topic, but lack of eighteenth century documentation prohibits a detailed

³³ Ibid., 91.

analysis.³⁴ Some possibilities may be suggested here. Records of the activities of religious societies such as the Ojibwa Midewiwin (Grand Medicine Society) in the form of drawings were preserved on birchbark scrolls. Native people recorded dreams with highly condensed visual representations. Imprints of flags on "tallys of wood" could have been readily assimilated into native religious thought because they resonated with a long-established iconography of Algonquian dream images. The dream figures--animals, plants or objects--were recorded on rock and imbued with the power the animal represented. Thus power also inhered in the drawings and letters on the labels of medicine bottles the shaman-captain received as part of his gift from the governor at York. The manner in which trade cloth entered religious domains will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

The sharing of food on festive occasions was yet another time-honoured custom, a typical expectation within native reciprocal relationships. Indians consistently refused to regard edibles such as oatmeal and prunes as trade items and accepted them only as gifts.³⁵ Such items resisted commoditization in Algonquian norms of social interaction, in

³⁴ J. G. Kohl, writing in the 1850s about treaty making festivities in the southern Great Lakes area, noted that an Ojibwa chief who was given a coat that still carried the manufacturer's label considered the latter a mark of distinction. Johann Georg Kohl, Kitchi-Gami: Life Among the Lake Superior Ojibway, translated Lascelles Wraxall (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985): 116.

³⁵ E. E. Rich, "The Indian Traders", The Beaver (Winter 1970):19

which they were transformed into means by which the bonds of relatedness were strengthened.

Any interpretation of the ceremonial clothing exchange at York must be placed in the context of traditional social relationships and alliance. Relatedness averted potential hostilities between strangers, as when the captain presented the puc'ca'tin'ash a'win in exchange for European dress. When the Ojibwa leader Okeemakeequid exchanged clothing with a Dakota, a potential enemy became a "brother". In the same way, the European trader became "kin" when he exchanged his clothing, cloth and blankets for the captains' furs.³⁶

Kinship terminology was a sign of respect in situations which required circumspection and discretion. Algonquians thus addressed spirit beings and sacred objects like the Ojibwa medicine drum as "our grandfathers".³⁷ Europeans who clearly manifested power were similarly addressed. Accordingly, furs brought to the posts were sometimes not given to an impersonal company, but to an individual trader, a symbolic "father" or "brother", (or actual son-in-law) with whom a captain stood in some sort of relationship. When such a trusted trader was transferred, some captains, at considerable disadvantage to themselves, took their furs to his new post. Some Indians

³⁶ Bruce White, "'Give Us A Little Milk': The Social and Cultural Meanings of Gift Giving in the Lake Superior Fur Trade", Minnesota History (Summer 1982): 64, 69.

³⁷ A. Irving Hallowell, Culture and Experience (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1988): 162.

regarded their debts as personal obligations to a trader rather than something they owed the company.³⁸

Indians readily adopted the exchange of clothing at York Factory as a method of incorporating outsiders into alliance. Thus the allegiance to England which the factor promoted at York was welcomed as a means to extend ever-widening circles of relationships.

Thomas McCliesh's account of one important captain's gift to Sir Bibye Lake, the company's governor in London, serves as an example of this concept. The captain requested McCliesh to write to the governor on his behalf to send "some fine cloth for a coat, likewise a laced hat, somewhat finer than our trading hats, that he may be distinguished from a common soldier". In anticipation of the coat, the captain packed "a fine twelve skin beaver coat with a fine leather pouch" and gave specific instructions to the ship's captain to deliver his gift personally to Sir Bibye in England.³⁹ The story is important in another way: The captain clearly saw himself as of higher status than some of his countrymen, a fact that queries our current understanding of Algonquian leadership patterns as egalitarian and non-stratified.⁴⁰

³⁸ Arthur J. Ray, "The Hudson's Bay Company and Native People", in Handbook of North American Indians, Vol.4. William C. Sturtevant, ed. History of Indian-White Relations, Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed. (Smithsonian Institution, 1988): 341.

³⁹ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 71.

⁴⁰ See also Morantz, "James Bay Trading Captains of the Eighteenth Century", 86.

A further motive was surely aesthetic--the newness and beauty of trade cloth made it desirable for its own sake. An exuberant array of textiles was available at the posts, a visual feast: painted and speckled calico, serge embossed with floral patterns, scarlet and blue broadcloth, silk sashes, as well as quantities of orris lace shot with silver and gold threads, multi-coloured gartering, luminous ribbons, and worsted bindings and gartering in a rainbow of colours, to mention but a few examples. "European cloth, metal, and beads appeared at first as almost magical substances", Ruth Phillips notes, "imbued with the same beauty and power as the gifts of the spirit."⁴¹ The York Factory captain's speech to Governor James Isham hinted at the life-enhancing potential of finery and ornamentation in native dress when he reminded the factor to give "Good measure, in cloth" for the young men, he confided "Love to Dress and be fine."⁴² His comment squares

⁴¹ Ruth B. Phillips, "Like A Star I Shine: Northern Woodlands Artistic Traditions", The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987): 76.

⁴² Rich and Johnson, James Isham's Observations, 86-7. The account books of the formative years of the company show that the committee in London had very different notions from the captains as to what constituted suitable clothing for the uncivilized inhabitant of the New World. The Committee assumed that the Indians, accustomed to fur would naturally be drawn to clothes that resembled its texture. A wide array of rough, durable fabrics commonly worn by the lower classes of Europe--flannel, duffel, drab, fustian, baize and perpetuana--were thought appropriate for Indians. Ready made garments such as breeches and shirts were of "fearnought", a thick furry material worn by slaves in colonial America, and "ossenbrigg" (osnaburgh), commonly used for sacking and farmer's clothing. See Florence Montgomery, Textiles in America 1650-1870 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984).

with David Thompson's speculations about the connections between well-being and fine clothing in various native societies. In 1797 he wrote that when beaver were plentiful, native "Women and children, as well as the Men, were covered with silver brooches Ear Rings, Wampum, Beads and other trinkets. Their mantles were of fine scarlet cloth, and all was finery and dress."⁴³

Such finery did more than cater to human vanity, pace Richard Glover.⁴⁴ A more Algonquian-centred explanation of the significance of ornamentation is that of Phillips, who suggests that European goods "were readily adapted to the existing concept of clothing and ornament as a means of enhancing personal efficacy."⁴⁵

Personal power and prestige were attributed to dress and ornament in a number of subarctic native societies.⁴⁶ In Indian thought, the deference paid to the governor as opposed to the company's treatment of ordinary servants was undoubtedly linked to his fine coat of broadcloth which separated him socially from the servants in their flannels and fustians. Governor James Knight, for example, wore a

⁴³ David Thompson, David Thompson's Narrative, Richard Glover ed. (Champlain Society, 1962): 156.

⁴⁴ Richard Glover, Introduction to Letters from Hudson Bay 1703-40, K. G. Davies, ed. (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1965): xxix.

⁴⁵ Phillips, 77.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 79.

fashionable English "Coat with new bathe Mettle Buttons."⁴⁷ No further literary description of the governor's appearance has been found, but as an important representative of a great commercial enterprise he would have worn the respectable fashions of the prosperous merchant class of the time.⁴⁸

Although of humble origin, when in 1693 he recaptured Albany Fort from the French, a gratified company elected him to the committee, and thereafter referred to him as "James Knight of London, Gentleman."⁴⁹ Knight's clothing would have reflected his new status. Judging from extant portraits, a "gentleman" of the Honourable Company wore a coat of fine broadcloth of a sober colour, trimmed with lace and brass or pewter buttons, a waistcoat, breeches tied at the knee with a garter, and fine worsted stockings. The whole ensemble was crowned with a three-cornered hat of beaver felt, ornamented with an edging of lace.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 62. The French posts were similarly stratified according to dress. Henday observed that the Master at Basquia (the French post at the Pas) was "dressed very Genteel, but the men wear nothing but thin drawers & striped cotton shirts..." Lawrence J. Burpee, The Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55 (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1973): 46.

⁴⁸ See Anne Buck, Dress in Eighteenth Century England (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979): 86-99.

⁴⁹ Ernest Dodge, "James Knight", Dictionary of Canadian Biography (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969): 318-19.

⁵⁰ The appearance of Governor Thomas Knapp is typical, even slightly old-fashioned in its conservatism. The long cravat he wears was several years out of fashion by 1746, the year he assumed office. Reproduced in The Beaver (Autumn 1983): 14.

The Indians were more likely to take their furs to a fort where the master knew how to dress in a fashion befitting his station, a fact brought home repeatedly to the Hudson's Bay Company servants who had a tendency to disparage their more elegantly attired Canadian rivals.⁵¹ The example of the Sutherlands, George and James, at their respective inland posts are illustrative of the importance of presenting a good appearance. They were upstaged not only by the Canadians' sartorial splendour but by their Indian visitors' impressive appearance as well. At Red Lake, James Sutherland witnessed the arrival of several "strange Captains" and five Indians from Lake Superior under the leadership of Captain Miscutchechappo. They went first to the Canadian post to receive their coats and then to Sutherland who described the captain as "a real chief and warier [warrior]," wearing "a large Silver Medal 2 1/2 Inches diameter given by the Commander of Michillimacanack." The captain also had "a beautiful Shalloon Flag which with the other Captains both being hoisted made a very grand appearance on the Lake as they came toward the Houses" while Sutherland's flag, an "old, dirty thing" was unfit to display. By good fortune, he did however have "a new gun to salout them with", the occasion clearly calling for the best means at his disposal to honour such an impressive personage.⁵²

⁵¹ Sturgeon Lake Journal 1779-80, HBCA, B.211/a/1: 14

⁵² Red Lake Journal, HBCA, B.177/a/1: 23-23d.

The inland posts were not as well equipped as the bayside factories with the means to present elaborate coats to the captains. They lacked the services of a tailor in addition to a good supply of the decorative trim without which a suitably ornate coat could not be fashioned. A hard-pressed James Sutherland, for example, sat up until three in the morning sewing coats for the Indians, one of the "many disadvantages to struggle against" at his inland post.⁵³ George Sutherland at Sturgeon Lake commented that the Canadians had a considerable advantage in that their "Coats Stockings and Sleeves are Rady made, and all trimed round with gartering very neatly. This article Gartering the Indians are very fond of and they are not able to purchase it at our settlements." Their supply was so plentiful that they "think nothing of giving away a whole Roll to an Indian at a time."⁵⁴

James Sutherland envied the Canadians their captain's coats which attracted more Indian customers because they were "far more ornamental" than the HBC's and "their Orris Lace and Hatts [are] much better and has very genteel buttons in their Cloaths." He was further chagrined by his rival Duncan Cameron's two chests of fine clothing and array of elegant European refinements such as clean table linen and excellent food and wine.⁵⁵ Cameron lived in a style "fit for a

⁵³ Red Lake Journal, HBCA, B.177/a/1: 11d

⁵⁴ Sturgeon Lake Journal, HBCA, B.211/a/1: 28.

⁵⁵ Red Lake Journal, HBCA, B.177/a/1: 10d.

gentleman" and Sutherland attributed the Canadian's business success with the Indians to these objects.

The above examples indicate the significance of dress and appearance in native societies. To the Indians an unprepossessing appearance was indicative of low social status and lack of power. As in most cultures, in the Algonquian's language of clothing, people in dirty, weather-beaten coats were not worthy of respect. Clothes visually communicated information about the groups to which individuals belonged, and the status of individuals themselves. An early narrative relates that a Micmac chief considered the French a "poverty-stricken people," because they "glory in our old rags and in our miserable suits of beaver which can no longer be of use to us."⁵⁶ The Cree regarded the Iroquois as a "dirty people for sleeping in their clothes", a boorish custom they thought "very contrary" to their own practices.⁵⁷ Fur clothing no less than cloth was invested with cultural status. Thus the Cree also felt superior to the Assiniboine because they were a "people who did not know how to kill beaver" and had to wear buffalo skins, "a thing we did not require."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Carolyn Gilman, Where Two Worlds Meet: The Great Lakes Fur Trade (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1982): 5.

⁵⁷ David Thompson, David Thompson's Narrative 1784-1812, Richard Glover, ed. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962): 233.

⁵⁸ E. E. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870 vol.1 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960): 528.

The Europeans' appearance was scrutinized and ranked according to similar standards. The Northwester Charles McKenzie recorded native incredulity at the suggestion that men who dressed in what they considered to be a slovenly fashion could be important personages. McKenzie concluded that "Men of dignity must deck themselves better than the common voyageur if they wish to be considered as they should be...there must be something in the outward appearance to attract notice and command [the Indians'] respect."⁵⁹

To conclude, the ceremony at York Factory was not simply a one-way procedure whereby Indians took the initiative to establish alliance with Europeans, but a phenomenon in which Europeans adapted familiar rituals of investiture to an Indian cultural situation. The Hudson's Bay Company's conferral of European symbols of rank and office may be understood as a ritual of alliance intended to maximize profits by incorporation of powerful Indian captains; and the uniforms, flags, medals the means by which it was effected. These objects conferred rank on Indians within the trading captain system.

For the Europeans, they were political gifts, used to direct actions to economic ends by establishing favourable trading relations with the captains. For the Indian captains, establishing alliance with powerful Europeans and their trade

⁵⁹ Charles McKenzie, "The Missouri Indians: A Narrative of Four Trading Expeditions to the Missouri 1804-1805-1806", in Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, Louis R. Masson, ed. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960): 385.

goods meant access to exotic new sources of status that enhanced their personal power in Indian and European circles alike.

Chapter 3

"Sewing Their Leather Clothing": Cloth and Women

Participation in the fur trade brought Algonquians into contact with new technology, but fur trade scholars have paid little attention to the idea that women and men were affected differently by the impact of European goods.¹ As I showed in Chapter 2, men exhibited interest in cloth, clothing and related accoutrements for their prestige and ritual associations. At the risk of oversimplifying, it may be said that men's relationship to these things was one of conspicuous consumption. Women's relationship to cloth is less clearcut; obscured, perhaps, by the flamboyance of male display and ritual and men's dominance of the historical record. To ascertain what women thought and how they acted in relation to trade cloth, one must look at such things as needles, awls, sinew and thread--the ordinary tools of domestic work. This chapter attempts to answer the questions: How did women respond to European clothing and trade cloth? Did they regard cloth as a labour-saving innovation that quickly replaced hide? Or was there an

¹ Sylvia van Kirk raised this issue in her paper "Toward a Feminist Perspective in Native History" Papers of the Eighteenth Algonquian Conference, William Cowan, ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1987): 36. More recently at a fur trade and native history workshop in Edmonton, the subject surfaced again in Jennifer Brown's and Arthur Ray's discussions as one still in need of research. Newsletter, Rupert's Land Research Centre vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 17.

essential persistence of traditional materials and the tools and techniques for working them?

First it is necessary to look at the ways in which women were involved in aboriginal textile production, and the value they and others placed on their work. In most aboriginal societies, women were the main producers of textiles, clothing and woven goods like mats and baskets. Andrew Graham noted that the chief employment of the Cree women around York Factory was making and ornamenting their families' clothing as well as that of relations and friends.² To the North West Company trader W. F. Wentzel, it seemed that the Beaver women he encountered were employed solely in making clothing; it was their "only business", while their men did everything else: hunted, pitched camp, and chopped wood.³

Archaeological excavations in the area of York Factory and other parts of Manitoba tell us that weaving was a practice of its aboriginal inhabitants. In his study of the Mistikwas (Cree) culture which lasted from A.D. 850 to 1700, Leo Pettipas pointed out that "the work of preparing hides with stone and bone scrapers, sewing with bone or copper

² Glyndwr Williams, ed., Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay 1767-91 (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1969): 144.

³ W. F. Wentzel, "Letters to the Hon. Roderic McKenzie, 1807-1824", Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, L. R. Masson, ed. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960): 87.

awls, sleeping robes, pouches and clothing...was primarily in the hands of women."⁴

The remains of Francois' House, a pedlar's post constructed in the late 1760s in present-day Saskatchewan, help illuminate women's attitudes toward European goods. The excavations unearthed European beads, tinkling cones, rings earrings, buttons, metal awls, kettles and cloth. The native artifacts included awls, scrapers, elk's teeth, and stone knives, tools traditionally associated with women. The former were found inside, while the latter were clustered outside the west and north walls of the post which faced the river. Alice Kehoe, an anthropologist who analysed the artifacts, speculates that they were left there in the late 1700s by native women who sat in the shade of the walls, catching the breeze off the water as they performed their tasks. She concludes that in spite of the ready availability of "superior" European goods, the women preferred traditional technologies:

These women may have conceptualized their sex-based role performance to include not only the activities, but also the technology, of their mothers; too, some of the Native artifacts were as efficient, or...superior in comparison to European manufactures when used for traditional Native women's tasks.⁵

⁴ Leo Pettipas, ed. Introducing Manitoba Prehistory (Manitoba Department of Cultural Affairs and Historical Resources) 1983): 128.

⁵ Alice B. Kehoe, "Ethnicity at a Pedlar's Post in Saskatchewan", The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology 6, 1 (1976): 59.

All the materials a woman needed to carry out her work successfully could be found in the environment. The subarctic Canadian Shield abounded in streams fringed with willow and cat-tails, waiting to be harvested for thread in the weaving of bags, pouches, fishnets and cord. Sweetgrass was a common source of fibre for moccasins and rope, and cat-tails for mats.⁶ Nettle fibres and milkweed produced an especially fine but strong thread which needed little preparation. The trader John Long noted that fishing lines made from the bark of the willow cut into strips and twisted together yielded a strong twine.⁷ Ojibwa women processed bark of the tamarack, cedar, basswood and slippery elm to make bags and containers for the family's goods and food. They stored wild rice in muckucks (bark boxes), and the family's valuables in woven cedar bark bags placed along the wall of the wigwam. Baskets were also woven of roots, which were split and boiled to render them pliable.⁸ The hair of the moose, porcupine, caribou, and white deer supplied the "wool" used in the weaving of garments and ornaments.⁹

⁶ A. C. Whitford, Textile Fibres Used in Eastern Aboriginal North America, Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History (New York: The American Museum of Natural History, 1941): 8-11.

⁷ John Long, Voyages and Travels of an Indian Interpreter and Trader. Orig. published London, 1791 (Toronto: Coles, 1971): 62.

⁸ Frances Densmore, Chippewa Customs. Smithsonian Institution Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 86 (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1929. Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1970): 157-8.

⁹ Ibid., 161.

Birchbark, according to contemporaneous witnesses like James Isham was plentiful around York Factory, at least in the eighteenth century, and was used for a great variety of purposes: making canoes, mats, containers, and dwellings.¹⁰

Women took pride in their ability to clothe themselves and their families with indigenous materials and spent much time and effort in preparing them. Clothing, footwear and accoutrements were lavishly decorated with porcupine quills. Encountering an encampment of Slavey and Dogrib Indians on his famous Arctic voyage in 1789, Alexander Mackenzie marvelled at the appearance of their caribou and mooseskin garments. They were "embroider[ed] very neatly with Porcupine quills & the Hair of the Moos Deer painted Red, Black, Yellow & White." He judged woven quillwork on belts and garters "the neatest thing of the kind that I ever saw."¹¹ At York, Isham observed Cree women weaving similar beaded bands on simple sapling looms, while women at Churchill engaged in "making bead belts for the trade".¹² Women also apparently manufactured cradleboards, richly decorated with bead and quillwork, for the Hudson's Bay

¹⁰ David Thompson, David Thompson's Narrative 1784-1812, Richard Glover, ed. (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1962): 58.

¹¹ W. Kaye Lamb, ed., The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970): 184.

¹² E. E. Rich and Alice Johnson, eds., James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743-1749 (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1949): 107.

Company, at least in the nineteenth century. They were a highly desirable luxury item only the wealthy could afford.¹³

Hide remained the preferred material during most of the eighteenth century as Andrew Graham observed. Cree dress consisted of

a close jacket of moose or deerskins finely dressed...Over this in winter they wear another made of deer or beaver skins, with the hair on, but the sleeves are not joined to the body, in order to leave the arms at greater liberty. Over this is thrown a blanket or a garment made of deer, otter or beaver skins...The lower end of this, as all other apparel made of skins or leather, is cut into slips to resemble fringe. Round the waist next the body is tied a string of leather called Nutabee, over which is tucked the Assean [loincloth] a strip of leather or cloth which comes up between the legs...This is also finely ornamented with beads and porcupine quills.

Graham noted further that although "those Indians who harbour about the Factories make their socks of blanketing or duffel," the leggings of inland Indians continued to be made of "skins of deer or hare".¹⁴

Such detailed descriptions of native dress abound, although, unfortunately, early European observers tell us little of the individual women who made them. But as June Helm explains, "in the native world...the creator of every piece of woman's craft was known. Her husband served as a

¹³ David G. Mandelbaum, The Plains Cree (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1979): 140. Cradleboards were very expensive since most were heavily beaded. In the 1850s a lavishly trimmed cradleboard made partly of "sky-blue cloth" and two or three pounds of beads sold for ten dollars. Kohl, 8.

¹⁴ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 145-6.

kind of travelling art gallery...The embroidered or beaded yoke of her husband's parka and his decorated moccasins, newly-made for him to wear at the fort, advertised a woman's handiwork afar."¹⁵ Men often brought specimens of their wives' work to the forts and exhibited them with much pride.¹⁶ The decoration was but the finishing touch to a woman's finely crafted handiwork. Her efforts began with the hide itself and was reflected in the care she took to make it supple and smoked to an even golden brown.¹⁷ Only the best hides would do. Thomas Mitchell at Albany complained of the "northern Indians" that rather than bring them to the factory, "ye Best of there Dear [caribou] Skins they dress wth ye hare on for winter Clothing."¹⁸

Algonquian women who excelled in domestic arts were regarded as gifted and treated with respect because it was thought they were the recipients of spiritual power.¹⁹ New styles for tailoring moccasins and the mythical beings she embroidered or quilled onto clothing were revealed to a woman through dreams.

¹⁵ June Helm "Women's Work, Women's Art", Out of the North: The Subarctic Collection collection of the Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Barbara A Hail and Kate C. Duncan, eds. (Bristol, Rhode Island: Brown University, 1989): 121.

¹⁶ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Eastmain House Journal 1744-45, HBCA B.59/a/12: 25d.

¹⁹ Densmore, Chippewa Customs, 6.

In his study of North American native clothing, Evan Maurer states that the act of making a garment was often believed to be under spiritual guidance.²⁰ The very materials a woman used, such as animal parts like claws, had spiritual meaning, and signified a dream involving the animal.²¹ Thus to some women's reputations for skill was added the prestige accorded any visionary.²²

Some Algonquian societies like the Blackfoot traditionally regarded woven material with great reverence, and both maker and object achieved power in the religious sphere. According to the testimony of the wife of a Blackfoot chief, the practise of this domestic art was considered so powerful that it was restricted to certain women.²³

²⁰ Evan M. Maurer, "Symbol and Identification in North American Indian Clothing", in The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment, Justine M. Cordwell and Ronald A. Schwartz, eds. (The Hague: Mouton, 1979): 122.

²¹ Edna J. Garte, "Living Traditions in Ojibwa Beadwork and Quillwork", Papers of the Sixteenth Algonquian Conference, William Cowan ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1985): 12.

²² Ruth Landes, The Ojibwa Woman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938): 9, 16, 20.

²³ Royal Ontario Museum, Quillwork by Native Peoples in Canada (Toronto, 1977): 4. For studies of women weavers and clothing producers in other parts of the world who were esteemed in their societies see Paula Gustafson, Salish Weaving (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980); Louise Allison Cort, "The Changing Fortunes of Three Archaic Japanese Textiles" Cloth and Human Experience, Annette B. Weiner and Jane Schneider, eds. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989); Caroline Karlake, "The Language of Woven Images Among the Tzotzil", Canadian Journal of Native Studies 7, 2 (1987); Evan M. Maurer, "Symbol and Identification in North American Indian Clothing", The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and

Most museum-held clothing dates from the late nineteenth century, but a relatively early (1844) example of a coat with representational dream imagery belonged to Reverend Peter Jones, the native author of a history of the Ojibwa that records many traditional beliefs and practices. Interestingly, although he was also a Christian missionary, the quilled thunderbirds and serpents on his coat are derived from a pre-Christian religious iconography.²⁴

Clothing production then, offered scope for the exercise of female power, if power is defined as the ability to influence cultural change as well as preserving traditions deemed important. While men were more likely to seek power by developing physical endurance, perfecting hunting techniques, actively seeking visions, and engaging in public ritual, women commanded deference by fulfilling material needs. Technical competence, and control over the domestic sphere gave women an important power base from which to operate.²⁵

This is not to suggest that there was a rigid polarization of social spheres along gender lines in native societies. From a cloth-related perspective the categories that are often used to define oppositions between men and

Adornment, Justine M. Cordwell and Ronald A. Schwarz, eds. (The Hague: Mouton, 1979): 122.

²⁴ Phillips, "Like A Star I Shine", 74.

²⁵ Kehoe, "Old Woman Had Great Power", Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology 6, 3 (1976): 69.

women (public/private, sacred/secular, for example) are too simplistic.²⁶ Male and female worlds intersected and continually impinged upon one another. To give two examples: when a Naskapi woman produced a finely beaded and quilled game bag for her husband, the beauty of her stitchery and brightly coloured beadwork pleased the animal who willingly gave itself up to be killed, ensuring both the hunter's safety and food for the family.²⁷ Thus she spiritually protected the hunters who secured food for herself, her family and the community. Blackfoot women erected and owned the family tipi, and if a man was guided by his dream spirit to paint a design on the door, he first had to obtain his wife's permission.²⁸ Such mutual interdependence meant that women's and men's combined relationships were essential to each other's, and the community's well-being.

Women's widening sphere of influence in the eighteenth century extended beyond her community to the Hudson's Bay Company posts. Although initially reluctant, the company came eventually to rely on women's traditional skills for its employees' fur garments, moccasins, snowshoes and

²⁶ Annette Weiner and Jane Schneider, eds. Cloth and Human Experience (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989): 25.

²⁷ Frank G. Speck, Naskapi: The Savage Hunters of the Labrador Peninsula. (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977): 107.

²⁸ Mandelbaum, The Plains Cree, 91.

canoes. The company's first century was dominated by its persistent policy against allowing its servants to communicate in any way with natives, especially women. Indians other than the trading captains were not to be admitted into the post under any circumstances. In the interests of self-sufficiency, the men's stores were stocked with a variety of coats, breeches, shirts and shoes, in the hope that European clothing would be adequate attire for life in the subarctic. The committee also sent leather for shoes, but as there were no professional shoemakers among the servants, the lot of keeping the company servants warmly shod fell to the tailor. Initially, he used materials from the stores, managing on one occasion to fashion "shoe clouts" from the left over French trade blankets the Indians had rejected.²⁹ When makeshift cloth shoes proved inadequate, he turned to furs intended for European markets. In 1688, a York Factory tailor cut up thirteen deer, one buffalo, thirty beaver and twenty moose skins to make "mittens, shoes &c for the factory service".³⁰

As was to be expected, the committee in London took exception to this practice and wrote to the governor insisting that "Under no circumstances are Moose skins [or any other furs] to be cut for clothing or shoes for the factory." They pointed out that they had supplied

²⁹ York Factory Account Book 1696-97, HBCA B.239/d/6: 70.

³⁰ York Factory Account Book 1688-89, HBCA B.239/d/1: 13d.

"sufficient Quantities " of "Clouthes" from England to outfit the men. Should these prove inadequate, there was English "leather for shoes & cloth for Breeches" at the tailor's disposal.³¹ But it was soon obvious to everyone on the Bay that non-Indian materials were not an effective replacement of hide, and so, in spite of the ruling, traditional moccasins and mittens remained the fashion for the next two centuries.

The reference to "shoe clouts" indicates that women probably did not work in the factories at this early date. No self-respecting Cree craftswoman would have made shoes of shoddy goods, and certainly not of inferior blanketing when quality moccasins could be made. It is not until the 1730s that references (discreet and indirect, to be sure) to women can be discerned in the records. Another thirty years passed before women were openly acknowledged and admitted into a post (Eastmain) in order to knit snowshoes and fish nets.³² By the end of century their presence had become so commonplace that the committee decided that further prohibitions of contact between its servants and Indian women were futile and resorted instead to complaining about the cost of clothing them and their children. The men

³¹ Rich and Johnson, Letters Outward, 201, 236.

³² Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz, Partners in Fur: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay 1600-1870 (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983): 86.

returned a "very sharp reply" and a list of the useful work undertaken by women:

We wish to remark that the women are deserving of some encouragement and indulgence from your Honors ...They prepare Line for Snow shoes and knit them also without which your Honors servants could not give efficient opposition to the Canadian traders they make Leather shoes for the men who are obliged to travel about in search of Indians and furs and are usefull in a variety of other instances..."³³

One of the "other instances" was undoubtedly a reference to women's manufacture of hide clothing. Clothing at the factories came from two sources: importations from England and local provisions. The former included ready-made shirts, coats, breeches, stockings and caps the employees could purchase with their annual wages. However, as Andrew Graham noted, there was "very little English clothing being used here excepting waistcoats, shirts and a few other trifles, we being all of us dressed in the Company's furs in winter, and the working men in leather toggies [a loose-fitting cloak usually made of beaver skins] and such like in summer."³⁴ As late as 1779, HBC traders were still wearing clothing made of hide.³⁵ And much later, the novelist R.M. Ballantyne who worked for the company at York Factory for a few years in the 1850s, wrote that Cree women made all the hide mittens, moccasins, caps and coats

³³ Quoted in Glyndwr Williams, "Family and Community in the Fur Trade", The Beaver (Autumn 1983): 70.

³⁴ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 248.

³⁵ Long, Voyages and Travels, 125-6.

the Company servants required, and provided laundry service as well.³⁶

Numerous journal references support the view that women's dexterity in making moccasins, showshoes and the sewn portions of birchbark canoes, as well as supplying the Europeans with clothing suited to a subarctic climate was highly valued in fur trade circles. Officially, the post's tailor was supposed to keep the servants outfitted in warm clothing and footwear. Much of his employment, however, seemed directed toward the production of clothing for the Indian trade, the elaborate captains', lieutenants' and common coats for the spring trading ritual. "Two tailors at work for Trade" wrote Joseph Colen at York in 1786 in a typical entry, adding that they had been "employed nearly Six Weeks on this Duty."³⁷ The bulk of the men's winter clothing--moccasins, leggings, mittens and coats--were "country made".

Relations between tailors and their employers were strained at times. At York in 1727 their annual wages (6 to 10 pounds) were lower than those of other skilled tradesmen and labourer. Wages were also low at Albany and the tailors there refused on one occasion to renew their contracts without an accompanying rise in salary.³⁸ The company was

³⁶ R. M. Ballantyne, Hudson Bay: or Everyday Life in North America. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1859): 24.

³⁷ York Factory Journal 1786-87, HBCA B.239/a/87:28.

³⁸ K. G. Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay, 1703-40, (London: Hudson Bay Record Society, 1965): 291.

reluctant to comply since few tailors were professionally trained, and often doubled as accountants or sailors. Some proved so unsatisfactory they were sent home to England, a drastic and expensive final resort. Charles Stuart, for example, was sent home because his age and infirmity rendered him of "very little use" to the company. His replacement (aptly named John Wooley), was "regularly bred up unto the tailor's trade", a feature uncommon enough to warrant a journal entry.³⁹ The incompetence of some of the post tailors would have made women's skills all the more valuable to a factor.

The journals are, as usual, silent about women, but an imaginative reading between the lines helps to support this suggestion. In the autumn of 1801 Governor John Ballenden mentioned the presence of women and their children at York, followed by an entry about the tailor who was busy with fitting the men out with "Winter Cloathing." The juxtaposition of these statements leads one to speculate that the women and whom one officer called "virtually Your Honour's Servants", would have assisted (supervised?) the tailor struggling to meet his spring deadline.

Besides manufacturing garments for the men, women and their needlework were useful in other ways, especially on the inland probes the Hudson's Bay Company undertook in the second half of the century. The first clear record of their utility was Anthony Henday's voyage across the plains in

1753. His journal is dotted with references to the women in his expedition making snowshoes and moccasins, and provides a valuable account of the seasonal nature of clothing production. "Women dressing Skins for Shoes" he wrote in September. By October, the "Skins" had been used up, and with winter fast approaching, the party stopped to kill several beaver as "Some families have not got half enough of skins for cloathing." During most of that month and the next, the women scraped, dressed, and tanned "Beaver skins for cloathing" and footwear. "My winter rigging is almost in readiness", he wrote in November. By January, the party was comfortably clad, and the women turned their attention to "knitting Snowshoes" without which further travel would have been impossible.⁴⁰

The waterproof hide bags which kept foodstuffs like pemmican dry were also produced by women. Imported canvas ("vitry") was mentioned in the account books as material intended for bags in which to store gunpowder, but the men found that it was inferior to native deerskin bags.⁴¹ Some vitry furnished roof coverings on the outbuildings but aboriginal skin and bark tent covers were also used.⁴²

⁴⁰ Lawrence Burpee, ed. A Journal of Anthony Hendry, 1754-55 York Factory to the Blackfeet Country. (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1973): 29-39, passim.

⁴¹ Davies, Letters from Hudson Bay, 208.

⁴² As late as the 1930s, canvas did not entirely replace birchbark. A combination of both materials was used in the construction of lodges. Cooper, 31.

Ojibwa women made tent-cloths of "rush mats neatly made, sometimes of Birch Rind" according to David Thompson⁴³ a practise that persisted in the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Chief Fine Day recollected that cutting the bark, and stripping it off the tree in one piece without tearing it was a skill the women in his village had perfected. When his grandfather attempted it, the bark he managed to remove was so full of holes that his grandmother threw it away and went into the bush to get her own.⁴⁵

The manufacture of canoes, as essential a commodity to the fur trade as moccasins and snowshoes was yet another traditional female occupation that the men appreciated. Without this mode of travel, a large-scale fur trade would have been impossible. The construction of a typical canoe required six persons, including two men whose job it was to build the frame. After the frame was ready, the women sewed together sheets of bark for the covering.⁴⁶ Before embarking on a voyage, women ensured that they had sufficient amounts of extra gum, wattap (spruce root for thread), and bark for emergency repairs, as the canoes sprung many leaks during the course of travel. In areas

⁴³ David Thompson, 184.

⁴⁴ Densmore, Chippewa Customs, 24. Ruth Landes, Ojibwa Religion and the Midewiwin (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968): 223.

⁴⁵ Fine Day, My Cree People, 51-52.

⁴⁶ Lyford, 55-56.

where birch was scarce or unavailable, a resourceful woman knew how to improvise. The women in Henday's party of Crees made canoes of willow which they covered with parchment moose skins.⁴⁷

Women were adept at meeting the requirements of canoe construction, and the company depended on them for its canoes throughout most of the eighteenth century. It was apparently a skill some European men found difficult to master, as an example from South Branch House indicates. Company servant Magnus Twatt was reported to be building canoes in May 1783, while other employees attempted to gather bark and wattap to repair old ones. But the European creations were not always serviceable, as the postmaster William Tomison wrote, being "so ill constructed that I had some difficulty to get the men to take them".⁴⁸

In trading with Europeans, women's traditional skills and labour became valuable commodities which they exchanged for what they needed at the posts. The annual spring trading expeditions at York included women, and they engaged in trade on their own initiative. Direct documentation for this, however, and the kinds of goods they chose in exchange for their labour is virtually non-existent and so one must read between the lines once more and look elsewhere for information about female consumer choices. Fortunately, what

⁴⁷ E. E. Rich, Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870, Volume 1: 1670-1763. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960): 633.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Thistle, 56.

the account books lack in directness, they make up for in consistency. Under the category of "expenses" (payments) the laconic entry "Given for knitting snowshoes" is typical and its frequency attests to an active female work force at York. The payment the women received was in the form of trade goods from the company's store room. In return for supplying the forts with snowshoes, moccasins and clothing, women could choose from a variety of goods like awls, knives and guns as well as ready-made clothing, cloth, lace, ribbons and gartering.

Women apparently preferred tobacco, alcohol and ammunition to cloth (Table 1). By comparison, the list of goods received by men for carrying packets between factories in 1770 includes brandy and ammunition, but also blankets and three varieties of cloth (duffel, corded broadcloth and flannel).⁴⁹ Table 2 lists the goods given women in exchange for lacing snowshoes, and Table 3 the goods requested by male leading Indians. Although one could argue that the two groups were not engaged in comparable work, the data are nonetheless an illuminating comment on gender preferences. They also support my finding that cloth, lace, gartering, feathers and the like functioned mainly in a male realm.

The women's lack of enthusiasm for European clothing is striking in comparison to the men's active interest in the wide array they were offered at the posts: two kinds of

⁴⁹ York Factory Account Book 1770-71, HBCA B.239/d/61: 11d.

coats, laced and plain, in men's, youths' and children's sizes, as well as waistcoats with pewter or metal buttons. Shirts were "fine", "plain white", and of "painted calico". There were silk and worsted sashes, black hats, laced and plain caps, knit gloves, three kinds of shoes (pumps, "plain", and "French fall"), and three varieties of stockings (Irish, knit and worsted).⁵⁰

Some women who had access to a cash economy were not interested in anything the trader had to offer, and negotiated instead for monetary remuneration. John Long, conducting trade in the Lake Nipigon area in the late 1770s, paid an unspecified sum to an Indian woman "of the Rat nation", for making and mending snowshoes.⁵¹ From about 1779 to 1785, the Montreal merchant Maurice Blondeau carried on trade in the Lake Superior region, where he hired local seamstresses, likely Ojibwa, to make trade clothes on a seasonal basis. They produced two varieties of capots, and charged "one-half livre" for the plain ones, but four times as much for the capots made "de facon". Intended for eminent trading captains, the latter were decorated with ribbon, beadwork and gartering, a more costly product in terms of materials and labour.⁵² At Red River in the 1790s, the

⁵⁰ York Factory Account Books 1688 to 1697, HBCA B.239/d/1 to B.239/d/6.

⁵¹ John Long, Voyages and Travels, 91.

⁵² Bruce White, "Montreal Canoes and their Cargoes", Le Castor Fait Tout: Selected Papers of the Fifth North American Fur Trade Conference, ed. Bruce Trigger, Toby

Nor'wester John McDonnell paid a Cree woman, Mary Lafontaine, for her work: "Lacing 14 pairs of snowshoes, and ten buffalo skins she dressed and cut into cords for the packs, and for cutting ten more skins into thongs that were dressed [by] her hand."⁵³

Such work required durable and rust-proof tools. From the beginning metal trade awls found a ready market among native dressmakers. European needles did not. England in the mid-1600s had a thriving industry which produced steel needles, which were very likely available at the Hudson's Bay Company posts. One would assume that steel would be strong enough to withstand subarctic climatic conditions and hardy usage, but documents such as the York Factory account book of 1689-97 recorded a brisk trade in awls, while the sale of needles languished. The records for the years 1700-1715 are lost to us but when they resume in 1715, awls were still popular, and remained so until the nineteenth century. Table 1 indicates that in the early years of the fur trade and throughout the 1700s, awls consistently outsold needles (See Table 1). In Graham's time at York in the 1760s Indian women still used awls "chiefly in sewing" and "the sinews of the elk, deer etc" as thread.⁵⁴ But as the eighteenth

Morantz and Louise Dechene. (Montreal: Lake St. Louis Historical Society, 1987): 172.

⁵³ John McDonnell, "Extracts from Mr. John McDonnell's Journal 1793-1795", Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960): 288.

⁵⁴ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 188.

century drew to a close, the gap between sales of needles and awls began to narrow. By the 1790s, David Thompson stated with confidence that women found needles as desirable as awls: "Show them an awl or a strong needle and they will gladly give the finest Beaver or Wolf skin they have to purchase it."⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it was not until 1800 that needles outsold awls for the first time.

What accounted for the decline of awls and the demand for needles? One plausible answer is that the depletion of large fur bearing animals resulted in a deficiency of hide for clothing⁵⁶ and so awls were no longer required. Or perhaps hides were becoming more valuable for trade rather than for domestic use. Equally important was the changing social climate of Rupert's Land which entailed increased cloth consumption. As Indian women became the wives of white fur traders, European ideals of femininity demanded that they adopt European dress fashions.⁵⁷

The trade in European thread paralleled the trade pattern for needles. Ojibwa women in what is now Minnesota traditionally made thread by cutting a sheet of basswood

⁵⁵ David Thompson, David Thompson's Narrative, 45. Thompson's comment indicates that the strength of needles was an important consideration.

⁵⁶ Charles A. Bishop, The Northern Ojibwa and the Fur Trade: An Historical and Ecological Study (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974): 280.

⁵⁷ Sylvia van Kirk, "Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870 (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980): 7.

bark into 4" strips, and soaking it until it was slippery and soft. The rough outer bark was then discarded, and the soft inner bark cut into narrow strips and twisted until fine enough for weaving purposes. Basswood bark was used so frequently that a woman had quantities at hand, in varying thicknesses. The thread obtained from plants involved laborious twisting and spinning and yielded thread so fine it could be woven into textiles, but of such strength it made excellent bowstrings.⁵⁸

Eighteenth-century European thread was neither strong nor versatile enough to meet women's exacting standards, as Isham was informed. He relayed the complaints about weak thread to London, where the committee attempted (unsuccessfully) to improve its quality. The new product, (possibly flax thread which was strong but coarse) was too thick for the post tailor's European needles.⁵⁹ The trajectory of this item, traced at five year intervals, demonstrates that it made no inroads into the native dressmaking process. The amount of thread traded from 1720-1745 averaged approximately 2 pounds per year. After 1750, none was traded until the nineteenth century when interest in thread began to rise. In 1800, for example, thread sales jumped to 64 pounds. A possible factor may be that by the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 154. Carrie Lyford, writing in 1940s, notes that some western Great Lakes Ojibwa women still wove extremely fine nettle fibre into a textile that was used to make underskirts. Lyford, 45.

⁵⁹ Rich and Johnson, James Isham's Observations, 284.

nineteenth century European manufacturers had access to improved technology and could produce a satisfactory thread.⁶⁰

The fate of the cloth sleeves sent from England is perhaps the prime example of women's indifference to European clothing. Having been informed by their factors of a peculiarity--detachable sleeves--in Cree female dress the committee sent cloth sleeves made in England in the hope that women would find them appealing. The York Factory outfits for 1688 to 1694 included sleeves trimmed with "galloons" (lace trim, similar to orris) but in spite of the added finery only three pairs were traded. The rest gathered dust on the shelves until someone thought of cutting them up to make children's coats. In 1690, 22 pairs of women's sleeves were "made into ye present coats and 30 childrens' laced coats". In 1693, 65 pairs were altered to make ninety-one childrens' laced and plain coats.⁶¹

A further example of female independence of European dress is the following entry in the York account book of 1689. A "Slave [Northern Athapaskan] man and woman" were given a variety of trade goods for service to the company. They included a man's cap and a dozen waistcoats and pewter

⁶⁰ But even in the twentieth century, when strong cotton thread had been available for a century or more, sinew was preferred. One western Ontario Ojibwa woman told Ruth Landes that unlike thread, sinew "never breaks". Landes, 126.

⁶¹ York Factory Account Book 1691-92, HBCA B.239/d/4: 8d.; York Factory Account Book 1693-94, HBCA B.239/d/5: 17d.

buttons for trim, but no sleeves or caps for the woman.⁶² An eighteenth century Ojibwa woman was more likely to unravel cloth goods, dye the yarn with native dyes, and reweave the wool with nettle-stalk twine.⁶³

On the other hand, European decoration like ribbon and gartering had the potential to enhance, but not replace, traditional clothing techniques, and was consequently in demand. Small amounts of cloth averaging 1/2 yard were also acceptable because they could be cut into decorative patches and attached to hide with leather thongs, or provide backing for quill or beadwork. Ribbon, lace and gartering, however, did not entirely replace traditional decoration. Seed beads, shells, deer hooves, elk's teeth, birds' beaks and feathers survived and even thrived in conjunction with European ornaments like glass beads, hawk bells, thimbles, buttons and ostrich feathers.

To conclude: Unlike men, women's status did not derive from the monopolization of fine cloth and European accoutrements. Nor was their identity as leaders ostentatiously defined by a European uniform and public

⁶² York Factory Account Book 1689-1690, HBCA B.239/d/2: 13d. Perhaps a distant ancestress of Annie Ned, a twentieth-century Athapaskan woman who recently told the anthropologist Julie Cruikshank that "in the old days" people such as the coastal Tlingit who had only cloth clothing, (which she dismissed as "ground hog clothes") envied Athapaskans their richly quilled abundance of caribou, buckskin, and foxskin "parkys" and moccasins. They were eager to acquire both the clothes and the women who made them. Cruikshank et al, Life Lived Like A Story, 271.

⁶³ Lyford, 65-66.

ceremony. Although there were notable exceptions, most women did not aspire to positions of power in the male realm. Women had significant channels of power springing from practical and pragmatic concerns within their own social sphere.

A Eurocentric historical perspective might assume that bone awls, sinew, and hide should have been abandoned at the earliest introduction of steel needles, thread and cloth, but this was not the case. Women's production of clothing and other goods in the eighteenth century was characterized by continuity rather than dramatic change. Even after cloth eventually made a dent in the native dressmaking process, women maintained their traditional techniques.⁶⁴ They continued to design clothing patterns according to Indian concepts, which prevailed over the demands of the new materials. For example, a rectangular piece of broadcloth presented no particular challenge to a native woman who simply cut a neck hole in the middle, and joined the sides by inserts, the traditional manner of constructing a garment using two skins.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Young Minnesota Ojibwa women in the 1930s considered their mothers' and grandmothers' bone awls, needles and fleshers valuable heirlooms. Blessing, 48.

⁶⁵ Clark Wissler, Costumes of the Plains Indians. Anthropological Papers of the North American Museum of Natural History. (New York, 1975): 67.

Clothing is a basic cultural expression that is closely tied to one's identity, and thus slow to change.⁶⁶ The attitudes and actions of Algonquian women can be explained in terms of their efforts to maintain their control over cloth and clothing production in the unpredictable subsistence conditions of the subarctic. Women derived power from their role as providers of food, shelter and clothing, as nurturers and sustainers of culture and the social order. They maximized their own personal economic well-being, emotional security, and social prestige through their traditional skills. Their lukewarm reception of European cloth in the eighteenth century indicates that women's ability to dress themselves and their families in hide was an important symbol of personal power they desired to maintain.

⁶⁶ Paul Thistle's evaluation of cultural change among Indians distinguishes between core institutions such as child-rearing, primary group relations, and social status. New technologies and self-expression, including change in dress, constitute "minor changes outside the core culture." This view finds little substantiation in the data presented here. Moreover, it is unlikely that such a dichotomy existed in native societies. The trading captain's social status (a core institution) was both a function and a result of his clothing, for example. See Paul Thistle, Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1986): 34-36.

4. "Magical Productions": Cloth and Religious Experience

Native accounts of the first Indian-white contacts are often detailed narratives elaborating mythological themes in which dreams and myths interweave with everyday life and "real" past history. Any historical enquiry which seeks to include all perspectives on the European invasion of North America must attend to the views embedded in native oral accounts. Their value lies precisely in their distinctness from European written and fact-specific documents. Their value to historians, as Jennifer Brown notes, lies in "views of the past that are qualitatively different, being as rich in their thematic content and percipience about relationships as the European documents are in dates and facts."¹

The views of the past explored in this chapter may best be posed as questions: What did Algonquian peoples think about their discovery of Europeans on ships laden with textiles? What were the indigenous cultural and religious factors which shaped those perceptions? How did European cloth and accoutrements come to be incorporated into the native ceremonial complex? Two Algonquian divinatory practices, the Shaking Tent and the Ojibwa Midewiwin

¹ Jennifer S. H. Brown, "Northern Algonquians from Lake Superior and Hudson Bay to Manitoba in the Historic Period", Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience. R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986): 226.

ceremonies offer particularly rich mythic images of the past and will be treated in turn.

One of the main objectives of the the Shaking Tent rite ("conjuring", in European terms) was to obtain information about future, present, and past events.² With the help of the pawaganak (spirit helpers), a skilled conjuror could "see" people and events shrouded in space and time.³

The rite was performed when someone who wished to consult the inhabitants of the spirit world on an urgent matter commissioned a performance. First, a circular conjuring lodge, usually just large enough to admit one man was constructed by setting a number of poles in the ground and tying them together at the top end. They were covered with canvas, birchbark or blankets, and fastened around the middle with a strap. At dusk, an audience, typically of about thirty or forty people, began to gather around the lodge. When the conjuror arrived, he slipped into the lodge, which began violently to shake with what appeared to be supernatural means. Presently, the distinctive voices of the various pawaganak emanated from the tent.

² Jennifer S. H. Brown and Robert Brightman, "The Orders of the Dreamed": George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988): 147.

³ John M. Cooper, "The Shaking Tent Rite Among Plains And Forest Algonquians," Primitive Man, vol. XVII, nos. 1 and 2 (1944): 81.

Stories of notable past conjuring ceremonies encapsulate a number of origin theories about cloth. One memorable session took place at Fort Hope on the Severn River in the mid-1700s. The ceremony began in the usual way with the medicine man conjuring various powerful "visitors from heaven" but when they were all assembled in his lodge, a spectacular visual and tactile drama unfolded:

All of a sudden a wind was heard to blow from the heavens and into the top of the wigwam, and from the holes on the sides [of the lodge] came a refreshing breeze. In mid-air a rustle of people was heard but none were seen...and from inside the wigwam people, men and women, were heard talking. From the side of the opening on the wigwam appeared the finest silk in colours of red and blue and white. These the Ojibway believed were the dresses of the visitors. The material came from the sides of the wigwam because the wind was blowing from heaven into the open top..."

The audience was particularly impressed by the colours and textures of the strangers' exotic costumes:

"For everyone then wore buckskin clothing and no silk or satin was known to the Indians. Afterwards, when the Hudson's Bay Company came to us they brought with them the material we had previously seen and touched, that had blown out of the great medicine lodge."⁴

In a second story, similarly detailed, a group of adventurous Ojibwa travelling from Lake Superior down the St. Lawrence River discovered cloth when they happened upon an abandoned French campground littered with bits of calico and woolens. These they gleefully fastened round their heads

⁴ Norval Morriseau, Legends of My People The Great Ojibway, Selwyn Dewdney, ed. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965): 104-5.

"as if they were magical productions." At length they encountered the Frenchmen, who greeted them warmly and gave them additional gifts of cloth. When the travellers returned home, the cloth provoked much admiration and, very likely, speculation about its manufacture. It was divided into "a thousand little pieces" among all the people. The fragments were then attached to poles and sent from one community to another, until they had passed "from hand to hand round the whole lake."⁵

A number of myths from other Algonquian peoples have a slightly different emphasis: the association of Europeans with mythic beings and concepts. The first ships were thought to be "floating islands" laden with mysterious and magical things. Atlantic coast Indians saw the ships' masts as trees, and the sails as white clouds. "Tall trees" on ships also figure in Micmac traditions.⁶ In Cree mythology, a conjuror envisioned the masts of the first ships of the white man as a spruce tree, with the sails animating the image into a "tall spruce white person".⁷ A young woman had a dream of a floating island inhabited by

⁵ Johann Georg Kohl, Kitchi-Gami: Life Among the Lake Superior Ojibway, translated by Lascelles Wraxall (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1985): 246-7.

⁶ George R. Hamell, "Trading in Metaphors: The Magic of Beads", Proceedings of the 1982 Glass Trade Bead Conference (New York: Rochester Museum & Science Centre, 1983): 19, 23.

⁷ Colin Scott, "Ideology of Reciprocity Between the James Bay Cree and the Whiteman State", Outwitting the State, Peter Skalnik, ed. (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1989): 88.

men, among them a man dressed in rabbit-skin garments, which were later revealed to be the white cloth robes of a priest.⁸

A number of sky beings like Sun, and the sacred shell Megis came from the east. The Sun was summoned to the conjuring lodge on one occasion; people caught glimpses of dazzling light through the cracks in the tent coverings. He wore bright clothing, and handsome garters decorated with swansdown powdered with vermilion.⁹ At other times he was dressed "like a Gentleman" in distinctly European garb: "a short coat, waistcoat, short breeches, stockings, boots, a hat and a beautiful feather stuck on it."¹⁰ Another important mythic personage, the woman who married a beaver and then returned to her human relatives bringing with her instructions on respectful hunting of beavers, was, in one description, also handsomely arrayed in traditional and European clothing. She wore a beaded cloak, moccasins, but her skirt was made of "mystic cloth".¹¹

A third set of stories feature the exploits of Nanabozho, the Ojibwa name for the Algonquian culture hero who was credited with bringing European goods and technology to the the Anishinabeg ("the people"). In at least one

⁸ Hamell, 19.

⁹ Brown and Brightman, 38.

¹⁰ Ibid., 50.

¹¹ Overholt and Callicott, 75.

legend, Nanabozho the quintessential Algonquian culture hero appeared as a quasi-European dressed "in all military splendour," complete with sword and flagstaff.¹² He appeared frequently as a trickster but also as wise teacher imparting knowledge of many arts and inventions, such as the rites of the Midewiwin Society, and the sacred medicine bags. The Society was said to originate in the east, on the shore of a "large lake", the site of Nanabozho's home. At times, he engaged in a cosmic struggle with his traditional enemies, the underwater spirits.

Morisseau's and Kohl's accounts, although separated by a century, both relate the Ojibwa's discovery of European textiles, especially red, white and blue cloth. The second tale offers added interest because it gives a rare glimpse of what happened to trade cloth within a native community. The Lake Superior Ojibwa evidently recognized its spiritual potential from the beginning.

The second group of myths amplifies the interrelationship of Algonquian cosmological concepts and European ships and their strange cargo. They reveal that what the Indian people saw was based on preconception shaped and coloured by myth, as well as by observation. The stories of Nanabozhu reveal that Algonquian spirit beings were active presences at these first encounters. A further point to consider is the element of strife and conflict

¹² Kohl, 388.

represented by the battle between Nanabozho and the underwater beings.

The interconnecting thread in all these mythic histories is the wonder occasioned by the appearance of cloth, whether in the form of fine red, white, and blue silk, white robes, gentlemanly dress, military uniforms, or attached to poles. An analysis of several other recurring themes provides additional clues into the metaphysical significance of cloth.

The "East" was important for historical as well as conceptual reasons and had both positive and negative connotations. The Ojibwa people, according to both Euro-Canadian and native interpretations, had historic origins in the east on the shores of a large body of water.¹³ The East Wind, Wahpun, brought "many foreign wares from abroad," the European food, tools and raiment the Indians thought essential "to support life".¹⁴ East was spiritually significant as the home of the Midewiwin Society: the principal entrance of the midewigan (the medicine lodge), and its white poles were oriented toward the east. Megis, the sacred source of the midewiwin's power, and the being who

¹³ Densmore believes the "ocean" to refer to Lake Superior, but at least one narrative claims that the Ojibwa originated on the Atlantic Coast. Ignatia Broker, Night-Flying Woman: An Ojibway Narrative. St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1983): x.

¹⁴ Brown, "James Settee and his Cree Tradition: An Indian Camp at the Mouth of the Nelson River Hudsons Bay", Papers of the Eighth Algonquian Conference, William Cowan, ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1977): 46.

resurrected people from the dead and death-like trances, came from the east.¹⁵ One myth paints a vivid picture of Megis hovering above the water, the rays of the sun reflecting off its radiant white surface. Like Sun, he gave light and life to the Anishinabeg.¹⁶

The tenor of several of the myths, and the themes of whiteness; white men, white sails and white clouds on floating islands bearing gifts, suggest that these first encounters were positive ones for the Indians. However, a loon who was also white, injected an ominous note. A medicine man of the Lake Nipigon Ojibwa dreamed that such a being appeared on the Nipigon River and predicted that white men would eventually outnumber the Anishinabeg.¹⁷ In one conjuring ceremony at Lac La Ronge in 1823, the spirit visitors all reiterated the same woeful dirge: "Your lands are distressed...sickness, sickness."¹⁸ Pagak, the dreaded skeletal harbinger of death, was said by some Ojibwa to originate somewhere "in the east."¹⁹ One of the most feared beings was Windigo, a cannibal monster who fed on human

¹⁵ Sister Bernard Coleman, Ellen Frogner and Estelle Eich, Ojibwa Myths and Legends (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, Inc., 1962): 121.

¹⁶ Coleman et al, 121.

¹⁷ Morriveau, 102.

¹⁸ Brown and Brightman, 105.

¹⁹ Sister M. Bernard, "Religion and Magic Among Cass Lake Ojibwa", pp. 52-55 in Primitive Man vol. 2, nos. 3 and 4 (July-October, 1929): 54.

flesh and was associated with a host of social and spiritual evils. One Cree tradition insisted that Windigo had "crossed the Atlantic" from Europe.²⁰

The initial enthusiastic response to the discovery of white men and their material culture can also be explained in terms of Ojibwa cosmology. The world was conceptualized as essentially tripartite, composed of earth, water and sky realms and their human and other-than-human inhabitants. The sky was populated by spirits such as daylight, whiteness, and sun, beings who connote well-being and harmony.²¹

The colours of ritual paraphernalia and costume add yet another layer of symbolic meaning. The sky was of course associated with the colour blue and the sky degrees of the Midewiwin. Blue was interchangeable with white in most mythic and ritual contexts, as daylight and whiteness were sky attributes.²² Twentieth century Ojibwa regard red as their "traditional" colour²³ perhaps because of its

²⁰ Brown, " James Settee", 46.

²¹ Admiration for whiteness was evident in the high esteem with which Algonquians regarded white animals. Unusual white or silvery beings such as white moose, white bear or silver fox were seen as especially auspicious and powerful spirit beings. (Hoffman, 264; Landes 202; Overholt and Callicott, 141; Chamberlain, 196.)

²² Hamell, 7.

²³ Fred K. Blessing, The Ojibway Indians Observed: Papers of Fred K. Blessing Jr., On the Ojibway Indians from The Minnesota Archaeologist (St. Paul: Minnesota Archaeological Society): 251.

associations with native copper and ochre, and with the earth degrees of the Midewiwin.

The relation of ochre to blood is obvious. The Ojibwa called ochre sacred medicine sand, which was formed of the blood of the beaver, a supernatural being with high spiritual value.²⁴ When vermilion became available at the Hudson's Bay Company posts in the seventeenth century, it was readily perceived as analogous to ochre and incorporated into sacred ritual.²⁵ The redness of ochre had magic properties, especially for emotive purposes such as love charms. It was rubbed into skin, objects and clothing or mixed with grease for face and body paint. A Cree oral account tells of a man who became invincible to his enemies because his wife had marked his entire body with red paint.²⁶ Bow decorations were painted with ochre. To ensure further successful hunts, one or more bars of vermilion were put on the underside of the skin on an animal when it was tanned.²⁷ In an Ojibwa legend, arrows dipped in menstrual blood were powerful enough to kill spirit beings.²⁸

²⁴ Morriseau, 19.

²⁵ W. J. Hoffman, "The Midewiwin or 'Grand Medicine Society' of the Ojibwa", Seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1891): 220.

²⁶ Toby Morantz, "Oral and Recorded History in James Bay", Papers of the Fifteenth Algonquian Conference, William Cowan ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1984): 178.

²⁸ Overholt and Callicott, 159.

The power inherent in garters is related to this belief. In many societies, garters were considered an essentially female article of dress, but Hoffman notes that Ojibwa males and females alike considered garters, lavishly beaded and decorated with yarn strands tied around the leg in a "bow knot", a "necessary item of dress".²⁹ We are given a tantalizing hint as to their meaning in an early nineteenth century narrative from Lac la Ronge. A Cree conjuror achieved the difficult feat of stealing an enemy's soul. He placed it in a box tied with a woman's garter, the most efficacious magic available to him for preventing the soul's escape. George Nelson, the Nor'wester who recorded the tale, was told the reason why garters were such potent medicine, but since it was evidently of a sexual nature, modestly refrained from writing it down for posterity.³⁰

I can only speculate about Nelson's enigmatic reference. One answer may lie in the symbolism of the knot, universally regarded as an extremely potent force for good or evil,³¹ as are women themselves, especially during their menstrual periods.³² Knots could kill or cure, and possessed

²⁹ Hoffman, 298.

³⁰ Brown and Brightman, 64.

³¹ James George Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York: Macmillan, 1922): 281.

³² The emphasis on secluding menstruating women in many native societies was related to spiritual power. At her menarche, an Ojibwa woman possessed great power for good or for evil. Among Athapaskans, menstruating were believed to be imbued with enormous power, and among the Cree, it was

the power to bind and imprison the soul and hamper its return to its owner. Confinement by knotted female garters, as Nelson noted, meant death to the captured soul and the person from whom it was stolen. Only an untying of the knot could effect its return to its owner.³³

Sky beings like Sun and his close relative Wind were among the mightiest of spirit powers. Wind was an intermediary, a messenger between earth and sky beings. Tobacco offerings in the form of smoke ascending from earth to sky were helped along by Wind. The Ojibwa traditionally offered the first rice to ripen in autumn to Gitche Manitou by throwing it to Wind. People who heard his murmurings in trees and could decipher their meaning had access to a source of spiritual power.³⁴

Pieces of cloth on poles are conceptually related to Sky spirits like Wind, East and Sun. The Algonquian universe was based on cosmological concepts that included constructing and maintaining relatedness with such beings.

Poles were a medium whereby spirits who inhabited the Sky

regarded as an auspicious time to seek visions. (Broker, 95; Judy Thompson, 140; Mandelbaum, 145.)

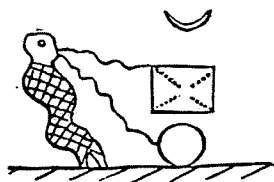
³³ Frazer, 281. A more forthright interpretation of negative female power by Levi-Strauss draws on the "vagina dentata" theme he discovered in myths throughout North and South America. In these stories, women are "the very image of vaginal greediness or retention; they devour their partner's sex during coitus, or hold them prisoner between their thighs." Claude Levi-Strauss, The Jealous Potter, translated by Benedicte Chorier (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 181-82.

³⁴ Broker, 118, 116, 125.

region interacted with Earth and thus flags may be seen as a metaphor for the relationship between sky dwellers and earthbound beings, between the spirit world and humans.

Reference to the vision fast may help illustrate this point. A person seeking a dream vision positioned himself between earth and sky, on a tree scaffold, where he was accessible to the dream visitors inhabiting all the strata of the cosmos.³⁵ A flag occupied a similarly auspicious position.

The German traveller and ethnographer J. G. Kohl lived among the Lake Superior Ojibwa in the 1850s and acquired some instruction in religious matters through the study of mide scrolls. One such scroll depicted a vertically aligned crescent, rectangle, and circle radiating power to a human being:



Although Kohl was told that the crescent represented the sun, the rectangle a piece of cloth and the circle the earth, such sacred esoteric knowledge was guarded by initiates who did not readily volunteer full explanations, and so the meaning of the configuration was not disclosed.

³⁵ Brown and Brightman, 141.

Kohl confessed himself mystified as to the reason "why this piece of cloth hangs between the sun and the earth."³⁶

If the "piece of cloth" is taken as a representation of a flag, an explanation for the meaning which eluded Kohl may be suggested. The hint of a cross resembling a St. Andrew's, emphasizes the rectangle's likeness to a familiar eighteenth century sight on some Hudson's Bay Company posts. The image on a medicine stick belonging to a Leech Lake Ojibwa medicine man requires no speculation: it is clearly an American flag on top of a house.³⁷

Trees were of course the original poles. In a legend of Nanabozho and the Deluge, the culture hero fled to a high mountain to escape drowning. As the waters continued to rise he saved himself by causing the pine tree to double its original height four times.³⁸ With the introduction of cloth, trees and tree poles became conspicuous repositories of offerings to spirits, as travelers like Henry Kelsey noted: The Indians "take ye best things they have" to hang on poles.³⁹ Oldmixon referred to "some little Bauble" the Indians hung on trees, a term which generally denoted

³⁶ Kohl 295-96.

³⁷ Hoffman 289. Flags featured in twentieth century ceremonies. Hallowell recorded details of a dance for the spirits of the dead in which a flagpole and Union Jack formed a focal point. Hallowell, Culture and Experience, 165. See also Blessing, 167.

³⁸ Chamberlain, 212.

³⁹ Arthur G. Doughty and Chester Martin, The Kelsey Papers (Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1929): 21.

European goods like ribbons or beads.⁴⁰ Father Marquette, arriving at Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1673 was pleased to see what he hopefully believed to be a Christian symbol: "a great Cross set up in the middle of the village, adorn'd with several White Skins, Red Girdles, Bows and Arrows which that good People had offer'd to the Great Manitou".⁴¹

The concurrence of poles and cloth continued to be important in religious observation in the present century. Among the Ojibwa who moved west into the plains and adopted a plains culture, poles decorated with elaborate cloth draperies were incorporated into the Sun Dance. "Little pouches of red cloth" fastened to long poles served as magic charms.⁴² Animal parts like bear's noses and cotton streamers were hung from poles in gratitude for a successful bear hunt.⁴³ An Ojibwa woman hung her dress from a tree, a ritual she was instructed by her pawagan to enact once a year.⁴⁴ Streamers of cloth tied to trees were powerful enough to prevent devastation by lightning and tornados. In a variation on the theme, squares of red cloth placed on wigwam roofs were considered powerful thunderstorm

⁴⁰ Tyrrell, 382.

⁴¹ Hoffman 161.

⁴² Blessing, 173.

⁴³ R. W. Dunning, Social and Economic Change Among the Northern Ojibwa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959): 82.

⁴⁴ Densmore, 54.

medicine.⁴⁵ Tying cloth to trees was apparently an ancient custom of Ojibwa of the Lake of the Woods and Rainy Lake areas.⁴⁶ Among Plains Cree, the most common material offerings to the spirit powers were pieces of trade cloth, fastened to a tree.⁴⁷

On one notable occasion, a flag apparently became a "dreamed one", a spirit guide, for the great Ojibwa general, Chief Shinguakongse, who distinguished himself in the war of 1812. He had a vision in which a road leading from heaven to his bed was lined with fluttering pennants. This dream became reality in European terms when his war heroism earned him the gift of a British flag to hang on a pole in front of his house.⁴⁸

Flags were assimilated into Algonquian funeral customs from the Great Lakes to western Hudson Bay. Kohl's description of an Ojibwa grave describes "a lofty pole" with a "broad, long cloth, like a flag and rather larger than the usual grave flags, as a sign that a chief was interred there."⁴⁹ Isham noted that Cree grave sites were distinguished by a painted "cross", on which were suspended

⁴⁵ Blessing, 173.

⁴⁶ John M. Cooper, Notes on the Ethnology of the Otchipwe of Lake of the Woods and Rainy Lake (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1936): 12.

⁴⁷ Mandelbaum, 228.

⁴⁸ Kohl, 376-383.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 373.

offerings of guns, chisels, and cloth.⁵⁰ A pole with a strip of cloth was erected over the graves of plains Ojibwa.⁵¹ The Saulteaux Indians (Ojibwa who settled in northwestern Ontario and the Lake Winnipeg area) buried their "most celebrated chiefs" on "high scaffolds, with flags flying...from a high pole"⁵²

Native funerary rites which incorporated European flags, cloth, and clothing clearly reflected group beliefs about the spiritual nature of these objects. Algonquians believed that the deceased must be ritually prepared for the arduous journey to the afterworld with power objects, the best and finest goods in his possession. The Cree believed that quality clothing demonstrated respect for those beings one would meet on the way to the world beyond.⁵³ The need to invest the dead with all the best means possible motivated the Ojibwa to bury the dead in their most ornate clothing and to place symbols of their status in the grave., Such elaborate preparations helped incorporate the deceased

⁵⁰ Rich and Johnson, James Isham's Observations, 94.

⁵¹ Mandelbaum, 296.

⁵² Peter Grant, "The Saulteaux Indians", in Les Bourgeois de la Compagnie du Nord-Ouest, Louis R. Masson, ed. (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1960): 365.

⁵³ Janice E. Graham "Knowing the Cycle: Cognitive Control and Cree Death", Papers of the Nineteenth Algonquian Conference, William Cowan, ed. (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1988): 85.

into the world of spirits.⁵⁴ Failure to follow proper procedure in dressing a corpse was followed by swift reprisals that could haunt a family for generations.⁵⁵

There is grim irony in the fact that widespread diseases could be transmitted by used European clothing and blankets, although it is difficult to know with certainty whether Indians in the early years of the fur trade associated the devastation of European epidemics with their clothing.⁵⁶ Before the arrival of European cloth, Algonquians traditionally dressed the deceased in fur garments and wrapped them in sheets of birchbark before burial in the ground.⁵⁷

In the aftermath of the destructive smallpox epidemic of 1781, Hudson's Bay company men travelled inland with "duffel coats" to give the Indians to bury their dead. They removed furs from the corpses and replaced them with cloth shrouds, with what an eminent historian described as

⁵⁴ See Van Gennep, p. 146 for a general discussion on the importance of funeral rites which incorporate the deceased into the afterworld.

⁵⁵ In one incident recorded in Berens River in the 1930s a Saulteaux chief brought sickness on his family when he failed to observe proper procedure. He was dressing a corpse for burial but pulled the belt too tightly. His son consequently suffered stomach pain which no ordinary medicines could cure. Hallowell, Culture and Experience 165.

⁵⁶ According to an early twentieth century belief, told to Landes by an Ontario Ojibwa, "People were never sick in those days. They did not get sick until they commenced wearing White clothes..." Landes Ojibwa Woman, 125.

⁵⁷ Tyrrell, 231.

"macabre devotion" to their trade.⁵⁸ Subsequent historians perpetuated the assumption that company servants in search of furs desecrated Indian graves. But the motives of the HBC men may not have been fuelled solely by avarice and self-interest. Given native assimilation of European burial rites, an alternative explanation becomes equally plausible.

When Governor Myatt died at Albany Fort in 1730, English custom dictated that he be buried "with all the Decency" that could be mustered, including burial in a duffel shroud.⁵⁹ Documentary evidence suggests that far from being coerced, Indians observing the funeral rites of important English officers voluntarily adopted the use of cloth shrouds for their own dead.

At the death of Questach, the Cree captain of the goose hunters at Albany in 1784, Indians and English attended a European-style funeral conducted with much "solemnity" and "ceremony", and the deceased was honoured with "the colour half mast high."⁶⁰ In 1744, at Moose Factory, a Cree woman asked that her husband who had drowned be buried "in the English manner."⁶¹ In 1747, Albany Fort men buried the remains of an influential Cree woman known as "the Queen"

⁵⁸ Rich, The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, vol 2: 82.

⁵⁹ Davies and Johnson, Letters from Hudson Bay, 152.

⁶⁰ Albany Fort journal, cited in Lewis O.Saum, The Fur Trader and the Indian (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1965): 44.

⁶¹ Rogers, "The Queen", 33.

with a mixture of European and native artifacts in a European-style pine coffin. She received a quasi-military funeral, at the request of her family: "We Buryed ye Queen...after the English fashon we put her into a Gun Chift Covered it with a flag and 4 English Carried her upon there Shoulders & 4 Indian women held up ye Pall..."⁶² The Indians attending the burial of an Ojibwa chief at Lac la Pluie in 1795 were "very much pleased" with the ceremony: The Hudson's Bay Company factor John McKay had "hung a flag at the Chief['s] grave in honour to his memory, which pleased the Indians very much. they all imediately assembled at the grave in a very solemn manner to celebrate the flag..."⁶³

The linguistic associations between cloth, spirit, and power in Algonquian usage provides an additional clue for the significance of cloth in religious matters. Terms for cloth, according to a number of past and present observers and ethnographers, were prefixed by the word "manido", as in "manidowegin", which has been glossed as "spirit cloth" by various anthropologists.⁶⁴ The term manito was commonly equated with the Supreme Being or the Christian deity, but had many other connotations. It was applied to any

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lac la Pluie Journal 1795-96, HBCA B.105/a/3: 4d-5.

⁶⁴ The same word appears in the Cree and Naskapi glossaries compiled by various observers, from Oldmixon in the early eighteenth century to Densmore in the twentieth. (Tyrrell, 396; Isham, 39; Umfreville, 203.; James McKenzie, "The King's Posts and Journal of a Canoe Jaunt Through the King's Domains, 1808", in Masson, 433; Speck, 28; Densmore, 12.)

phenomenon which transcended the run of everyday experience.⁶⁵ The Ojibwa mides and conjurors who represented the pawaganak as they presided at a Midewiwn or Shaking Tent ceremony, addressed each other as "manito".⁶⁶ For the Ojibwa, manito was a relation between several kinds of persons, his or her environment, as well as material objects such as cloth.⁶⁷

Events such as the first arrivals of ships and cloth were also imbued with spiritual power. The Algonquian natives of the Atlantic coast called the first Europeans "clothmakers",⁶⁸ a term which suggests that the ability to produce cloth was of particular interest and value. During a Cree conjuring ceremony, a spirit boasted of his "god-like" ability to turn stone into iron.⁶⁹ A Cree medicine man claimed in the eighteenth century to be able to replicate rum, tobacco or cloth.⁷⁰ He did not provide details as to how this feat was to be accomplished but it probably involved the transformation of a native substance like hide

⁶⁵ Mandelbaum, 159.

⁶⁶ Landes, Ojibwa Religion and the Midewiwin, 95.

⁶⁷ Mary B. Black, "Ojibwa Power Belief System", The Anthropology of Power: Ethnographic Studies from Asia, Oceania and the New World, Raymond D. Fogelson and Richard N. Adams, eds. (New York: Academic Press, 1977): 147.

⁶⁸ James B. Axtell, The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981): 254.

⁶⁹ Brown, "James Settee", 40.

⁷⁰ Umfreville, 194.

into its European counterpart. In Algonquian myths, such transformative power and changes in bodily form or appearance is a characteristic way in which power is demonstrated.⁷¹

An analysis of the Midewiwin reveals that its practitioners derived their power partly from their association with cloth. The Midewiwin was an Ojibwa spiritual and healing complex whose priests (called mides) were mainly concerned about the spiritual and physical well-being of the people. There are several levels of achievement, or degrees, of the Midewiwin, each with its own medicine bags and pouches. Mides own birchbark scrolls inscribed with the migration history and sacred lore of the Ojibwa. These objects as well as the ceremony of initiation of new members incorporated cloth in one form or another.

Midewiwin ceremonies attracted large numbers of Ojibwa participants. They were held in spring "when all animals, and men, and spirits receive renewed activity, and the whole of nature is in a state of fermentation", as Kohl wrote with Romantic ardour, his prose reflecting the excitement of anticipating a Lake Superior Midewiwin ceremony he witnessed in the 1850s.⁷² Such large gatherings were occasions for which elaborately decorated clothing were much in demand. New lightweight summer clothing, unlike utilitarian winter

⁷¹ Overholt and Callicott, 142.

⁷² Kohl, 374-5.

wear, tended to be highly decorated, as befitted ceremonial costume.

When they migrated westward, settling around Lake Winnipeg in the late 1700s, the Ojibwa brought with them their ceremonies, acquiring a reputation as the "religionists of the North." The Lake Winnipeg area became known as an important spiritual centre in the eighteenth century. Several HBC servants were struck by the lavishly decorated garments displayed by the Ojibwa on religious occasions.

Approximately sixteen Ojibwa families gathered at Osnaburgh House in 1794 on one occasion. The gatherings here were smaller than on the Great Lakes, but no less elaborate if costume is any indication:

They were all finely dressed as they ware about a cungering affair called Matewe [Midewiwin], and never did I see a parcel of Indians so well drest as they ware. their Cloaths was finely tost off with Gartering and ribbons, and the most of the Womens Clothd in cilico ruffles and ribbons...⁷³

The Ojibwa, perhaps more than other Algonquians, took particular pride in their appearance on ceremonial occasions, as Kohl notes:

"The chiefs...were in their grandest holiday state, adorned with all their eagle feathers, medals, bear's-claw necklaces, and other insignia derived from European and native; with their faces painted bright red and other glaring colours and wrapped in their long white blankets on which the signs of their totems were sewn with blue thread."⁷⁴

⁷³ Osnaburgh House Journal 1793-94, HBCA, B.155/a/9a: 41.

⁷⁴ Kohl, 381.

They competed with one another "in the attempt to appear in the most costly and gaudy dress attainable," and disparaged people like the Dakota for wearing only a breechcloth, moccasins and bracelets when they performed similar medicine ceremonies. Carelessness in matters of dress was tantamount to "sacrilege" and a "digression from the ancient usages."⁷⁵

Unfortunately, Hoffman does not elaborate on this intriguing statement. What were the "ancient usages" of dress in the religious rituals of the Ojibwa? Certainly the use of body decoration in sacred rites was of ancient lineage. Necklaces and bracelets made of shells, claws, bone, wood and seeds predating beads and trade silver were excavated from rock structures thought to be Midewiwn sites on the north shore of Lake Superior.⁷⁶ Native shell decorations were particularly esteemed for their sacred qualities. Decoration was not merely ornamental but had a specific ritualized purpose.⁷⁷ Objects which symbolized

⁷⁵ Hoffman, 298.

⁷⁶ David Arthurs, "The Lake Superior Rock Structures: An Ethnohistoric Interpretation", unpublished paper, 1977: 24.

⁷⁷ Hearne's journal gives a rare eighteenth century example of the power of ornamentation. Chipewyan warriors returned to camp in a state of ritual impurity, and in need of powerful medicine to counterract the evil effects of having killed a group of Inuit. The women immediately set to making them decorated garments. (Hearne, 133; See also Judy Thompson, 138).

important spiritual aspects of life were "highly decorated".⁷⁸

One of the most lavishly decorated items of the mide's ceremonial costume was his "dancing bag", or bandolier. Its historical prototype is thought to be the plain pouches worn by British soldiers in the eighteenth century, but both their function and appearance were transformed when the Ojibwa adopted them.⁷⁹ They were covered with a mixture of European and native materials: cloth, bird skin, feathers, leather thongs metal tinklers, and dyed quillwork. Although Indians wore them as did Europeans "secured by a band of beaded cloth crossing the opposite shoulder",⁸⁰ they did not function as containers. A simple beaded square suggestive of a bandolier bag was often worn instead.⁸¹ Similarly, "dream panels", squares of cloth embroidered with spirit helpers, were worn around the neck by Minnesota Ojibwa.⁸² Plains Cree wore bear paws sewn onto squares of scarlet flannel as neck charms.⁸³

Kohl had a sense of the significance of ornament when he observed women painting designs (in this case, the

⁷⁸ Kohl, 144.

⁷⁹ Carrie A. Lyford, Ojibwa Crafts (Stevens Point, Wisconsin: R. Schneider, Publishers, 1982): 129.

⁸⁰ Hoffman, 207.

⁸¹ Lyford, 129.

⁸² Blessing, 172.

⁸³ Mandelbaum. 171.

European alphabet) on their husbands' cloaks and hunting bags. He felt "certain" that the designs were "something more than mere ornament, and meant to be ominous and magical".⁸⁴ Ornamentation was a means whereby humans addressed the spirit world, and attracted the grace of the pawaganak. Good relations with spirits were critical to survival and much time and energy was invested in the preparation of clothing.⁸⁵ Rare eighteenth-century evidence for the importance of ornamentation is found in an incident related by David Thompson in the 1790s. While pursuing his trading activities on the plains he was approached by group of Cree women who told him they wanted "Beads and Ribbons". Thompson replied in effect "show me first your wares", that is, marten skins for trade. Whereupon the women, who apparently had no furs at hand, joined hands and through a ritual dance, appealed to the "Manito of the Martens" to grant their request for beads and ribbons.⁸⁶

The noted Ojibwa conjuror Yellow Legs, who was active in the late 1700s west of Lake Winnipeg, demonstrated the spiritual power inherent in European clothing. A shaking

⁸⁴ Kohl, 144.

⁸⁵ Hearne's 1770 encounter with a young Dogrib (Athapaskan) woman who had escaped her Cree captors and survived alone in the bush for several months may be understood in this context. He was astonished at her healthy appearance and cheerful demeanour, but what really took him aback was the fact that she had under such harrowing conditions expended much effort on ornamenting her clothing. (Hearne, 134).

⁸⁶ David Thompson, 81.

tent rite he performed centred around his new black broadcloth coat. By placing the coat inside the lodge, constructed very solidly of no less than forty poles, he caused the structure to shake, while he himself remained outside. Furthermore, the coat had power great enough to summon the pawaganak.⁸⁷ A contemporary Ojibwa legend relates the exploits of a female conjuror who performed a ceremony with six tents: In the first two, she placed her shoes, in the second two her mitts, her medicine bag in the fifth while she entered the sixth tent. All the tents began to shake with equal vigour.⁸⁸

The mide's most prized possession was his medicine bag, and some of the finest decoration was reserved for them. Most of my information about medicine bags is derived from late nineteenth and early twentieth century collections, with one notable eighteenth century exception. Andrew Graham left a description of "god-bags" that dovetails with more recent writings. Eighteenth-century bags were wrapped in cloth, and ornamented with "paint, beads or brass-tags". Their contents included "medicines...beaver-teeth, bears-claws, eagles-talons, the beautiful red foreheads of woodpeckers, and many other kinds of feathers" which were "held in veneration" and used only for ritual purposes.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Hallowell, Conjuring in Sauteaux Society, 81.

⁸⁸ Morriseau, 75.

⁸⁹ Williams, Andrew Graham's Observations, 164.

In pre-contact times the inner wrappings consisted of the most delicate skins available, such as those of fawn embryos.⁹⁰ Cloth was substituted when it became available. A contemporary medicine bag might contain only one item, but it was inevitably encased in layers of cloth.⁹¹ The close physical association within the bundle of cloth and ritual objects points to the former's great power.

A more extensive explanation by Fine Day, a Cree chief of the early twentieth century, makes clear this concept. He described an elaborate ritual in which cloth was offered the manito of the medicine bag. A piece of cloth must be pointed in the four cardinal directions before being placed in a bag. Every time it was unwrapped, a new cloth, and no other substitute, must be offered. When the anthropologist David Mandelbaum acquired a bag, the chief taught him the proper etiquette demanded of the occasion. When giving cloth to the bundle, he explained, one must

hold up the cloth and say to Manitou: "I believe in this Indian Way that the Manitou taught. I am going to wrap the cloth in the Bundle." Then you hold the cloth a little lower down and say: "Greatest of the Bears, I am going to give this cloth." Tell him all about what you are going to do. Then hold it toward where the South Saskatchewan and Red Deer River come together-- where Big Bear dreamt and was given the Bundle...Then you point the cloth to the ground, four times, clockwise...The four times are just like the four legs of the Bear.

⁹⁰ Lyford, 97.

⁹¹ Ahenakew, 173.

This ritual was enacted every time a bundle was opened: "All the bundles are like that. You have to put a new cloth in every time you untie them".⁹²

To conclude, this chapter has examined the transformation of European cloth into sacralized object through Algonquian ritual. Its findings are based largely on archival and anthropological writings, balanced by native mythic history. The myths presented here have in common the theme of cloth as a source of spiritual power, from its origins in the east, to its historic incorporation in the Algonquian ritual complex in the form of clothing, flags and decorative goods. Cloth was congruent with native cosmology, and ornamental finery from the Hudson's Bay Company posts was not indicative merely of the Indian's love of "baubles", but adopted into the Algonquian belief system where it became a significant means to access spiritual power.

⁹² Fine Day, 60.

Conclusion

Cloth remained interwoven with native peoples' sacred rituals, memories and myths. A modern Alberta Cree medicine man recently conducted a ritual which attests to the continuity and strength of eighteenth century practices and beliefs about cloth:

An elaborate altar lay on buffalo skins in the middle of the immense, open-beamed living-room. The altar consisted of flags of different colours stuck in a tub of sand, cloth prints of various colours, several pipes, tobacco, food offerings, rattles and eagle wings. The entire altar was enclosed by a string to which had been tied tiny pouches of tobacco several inches apart. Before the ceremony, individuals went to the kitchen to present the shaman with prints, tobacco, and gifts, and to ask about something for which they were seeking a specific answer."²

Questioned about the meaning and function of the pieces of cloth, the medicine man replied: "When you give a gift of a print cloth you are representing yourself to the spirit world."³

The primary aim of this thesis has been to study the impact of European cloth, clothing and decorative goods on Algonquian peoples. I examined cloth as an agent for shaping power relations between Indian traders and the Hudson's Bay Company, its influence on women's productive role in both native and European settings, and

² David Young, Grant Ingram and Lisa Swartz. Cry of the Eagle: Encounters with a Cree Healer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989): 27.

³ Ibid., 102.

in the form of flags, decoration, and ceremonial dress, its sacralization within the Algonquian ritual complex.

Fur trade scholarship has largely ascribed the Indians' desire for European cloth to its technological superiority over hide. Another reason decorative goods were so important, it was thought, was due to native susceptibility to the lure of foreign "baubles".

Such over-simplified theories were examined critically in this thesis. For one thing, European cloth functioned on many levels, both pragmatic and symbolic. Cloth was a tool Indians manipulated to enhance their prestige and social status. Indian traders defined and shaped power relations which showed that they were sophisticated bargainers who could not be fobbed off with cheap trinkets. The cloth they demanded was of the highest quality as befitted decoration and fine clothing; symbols that connected humans to the spirit world.

Almost all the information on cloth in native societies is indirect, and the paucity of sources seemed at times a formidable obstacle. Anyone who has researched women's history is familiar with the missing references in indexes, the lacunae in the standard texts. Cloth with its feminine associations falls into an equally invisible category.

My method was to gather snippets and scraps of information about cloth and to try to stitch them together into an argument strong enough to withstand the

rigours of historical criticism. Fortunately, intellectual tools from anthropological, ethnographic and art historical studies lent themselves to the task. Oral history reinforced the documentary material by providing connections between data spanning the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as adding texture and colour.

The ethnohistorical method employed was partially an attempt to take up the challenge recently extended by several historians: to integrate oral and documentary history in ways that are, in Toby Morantz's words, "honest and thorough".⁴ The discovery of how well the two kinds of history complemented each other (for the most part) was an unexpected bonus.

Although united by many commonalities and frequent contacts, there is diversity and cultural variation among Northern Algonquian groups, and regional variation in the same groups, such as the Ojibwa of Minnesota, the Great Lakes and Lake Winnipeg. This factor further complicated the task of organizing and developing general attitudes and motives in a neat chronological progression.

I have limited my period of study to the eighteenth century, but my findings raise questions applicable to a wider range of historical and contemporary issues.

⁴ Toby Morantz, "Oral and Recorded History in James Bay", Papers of the Fifteenth Algonquian Conference, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1984): 171.

Current intercultural conflicts have long historic roots, some reaching back to eighteenth century trading ceremonies. In those days, the Hudson's Bay Company's gifts of coats, flags and medals were symbols of mutual obligations. The Canadian government, however, had only the vaguest understanding of these arrangements when it assumed responsibility for native people in 1876. From the natives' perspective, there was no reason to think that the terms of the agreement had changed when they transferred their expectations of generosity from the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada, especially since the time-honoured symbols--flags medals and uniforms--remained a component of "treaty days" festivities. We can only imagine the response of the Cree chief (at La Ronge in 1891) to the Indian agent's brusque remark that his medal entailed a duty and obligation to restrain his people from coming to beg from the white man.⁵

My research has uncovered only a fragment of the richness and complexity of this field of inquiry, and many aspects of the historical significance of cloth await further exploration. Limits of time and space prevented the development of a topic of much potential value: the influence of cloth on native artistic production. Textiles such as "painted calico" and

⁵ Cited in Jean Friesen, "Magnificent Gifts': The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of the Northwest 1869-76", Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, series 5, vol. 1 (1986): 49.

"embossed serge" as inspiration for metis floral art seems obvious to me. As I argued in Chapter 3, women retained old techniques and materials for utilitarian clothing and household goods, but did value the aesthetic and spiritual potential of goods like gartering and ribbon. The prevalence of ribbon bordering in many magnificent museum-held cloth artifacts might also be explored in a number of ways.

Perhaps the most important point to be made, from a scholarly perspective, is that a long ignored aspect of material culture can be unfolded like a dusty tapestry to reveal unsuspected riches, if one asks new questions of old sources and forges connections between disciplines.

Table 1. Amounts of needles and awls traded, 1689-1800.

	<u>Awls</u>	<u>Needles</u>
1689-90	1,504	80
1696-97	1,218	107
1715-16	1,192	1,032
1720-21	2,238	400
1725-26	584	828
1730-31	0	877
1735-36	1,252	1,149
1740-41	888	660
1745-46	352	276
1750-51	0	0
1755-56	0	0
1760-61	440	412
1765-66	424	176
1770-71	440	376
1775-76	992	78
1780-81	0	56
1785-86	56	385
1790-91	660	1,170
1795-96	0	6,583
1800-01	1,252	4,318

Source: York Factory Account Books B.239/d/2 to B.239/d/123.

Table 2. Goods received for netting snowshoes, 1720-1780.

<u>1720-21</u>	<u>1730-31</u>	<u>1740-41</u>	<u>1750-51</u>
Cloth	Tobacco	Ammunition	Brandy
Hatchets	Files	Brandy	Ammunition
Ice Chisles	Hatchets	Knives	Tobacco
Ammunition	Brandy	Cloth	
Tobacco	Combs	Beads	
		Vermilion	
		Tobacco	
 <u>1760-61</u>	 <u>1770-71</u>	 <u>1780-81</u>	
Ammunition	Tobacco	Tobacco	
Brandy	Brandy	Brandy	
		Knives	

Source: York Factory Account Books B.239/d/11 to B.239/d/71.

Table 3. Goods given to leading Indians, 1745-46.

Cloth (3 kinds)	Binding	Blankets
Worsted Lace	Laced Hats	Stockings
Orris Lace	Feathers	Medals
Gartering	Worsted Sashes	Awls

Source: York Factory Account Book B.239/d/36: 10d.

Glossary

BAIZE, BAYS

A coarse, long napped woolen fabric made in Britain, of a brownish-red or bay colour. Clothing bays was used chiefly for monks' and nuns' habits, and soldiers' uniforms. The London committee on 24 May 1705 ordered "6 pieces" from Mr. Edward Ebbitt, at a cost of 60 shillings (A.1/27:18).

BEAVER

In the clothing trade, the soft light-brown fur of the animal.

BROADCLOTH

In the woolen and worsted trade, a high quality fabric made in staple colors with a compact weave, and a lustrous, attractive finish. The "best seller" in the Indian trade.

BUNTING

Soft, flimsy cloth made of cotton or worsted yarn. The name derives from the German "bunt" (colourful). All-worsted bunting is used in making flags, although shalloon seemed to be the fabric of choice for the Indian trade. "Buntings" were part of the consignment for Albany Fort in 1730 (B.3/d/38:49d).

CALICO

A generic term which includes chintz and muslin in prints, plain and dyed. Designs are often geometric in shape. "Painted calico shirts" were popular with the Indians. Thirty were traded at York factory in 1693.(B.239/d/5: 4d). The name derives from a Hindu word meaning spotted and thus it is likely that the "speckled shirts" mentioned in the Albany account books were chintz.(See for example B.3/d/38:9d).

CORDED CLOTH

Plain woven cloth which shows stripes made by thick cord ends. Indian captains desired blue corded cloth for their coats at Albany Fort in 1729 (B.31d/38: 11d).

DUCK

A rugged, heavy plain-weave cloth. "Hollands Duck" is mentioned in the Albany account book of 1729 (B.3/d/38: 24d).

DRAP

The French equivalent for the English word 'cloth' and applied to woolen fabrics like broadcloth.

DREADNAUGHT, FEARNAUGHT

A coarse thick woolen with a shaggy nap. "Fearnaught" trousers were available in the York Factory mens' stores in 1796 (B.239/d/14d).

FLANNEL

A cotton cloth, originating in Wales, and napped on one or both sides. The Company offered flannel was offered throughout the eighteenth century but did not attain the popularity of broadcloth.

FUSTIAN

A generic term for a group of heavy-weight cotton or linen fabrics dyed olive and other dark colors. Working class frock coats were usually made of fustian. Fustian drawers did not appeal to the Indians at York (B.239/d/5:8).

GALLOON

Narrow lace, embroidery or braid. Metallic threads interwoven made it popular for trimming military uniforms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A shipment of women's sleeves to York in 1693 were trimmed with galloon (B.239/d/5:61d). Since it was commonly used on servants' livery hats, the "Lyvory Lace" mentioned in the York account book of 1693 is probably galloon (B.239/d/5).

GARTERS, GARTERING

Lengths of ribbon or silk, or worsted cloth tied round, above or below the knee. Indians used gartering to decorate clothing and a variety of ceremonial objects.

HERBA LONGEES

The garment or material used in India for loincloths, commonly patterned with blue, red and white stripes and checks. Twenty yards of "Herba Longes" were shipped to York Factory in 1693 (B.239/d/5:4d).

KERSEY

A cheap, coarse woolen cloth, in demand among the poorer classes of Europe. Kersey waistcoats are mentioned in the York account book of 1688-89, and 169 "kersey woove" blankets in 1693-94 (B.239/d/1: 14; B.239/d/5:7).

ORRIS

Gold or silver lace or braid used abundantly to ornament eighteenth-century clothing. It is similar to galloon. Mid-eighteenth century silk orris came in varying widths with lozenge patterns. A shipment of 132 yards of "Copper Lace", probably orris or galloon, was sent to York in 1693 (B.239/d/5:4d). In 1760-61, Andrew Graham expended 52 yards of orris, in addition to 24 yards of worsted lace, and 54 yards of worsted binding and gartering "in Ornamenting Calimuts" (B.239/d/51: 14d).

OSNABURG

A coarse, unbleached linen or hempen cloth of dingy appearance, used to make workshirts and sacking. It had little appeal for the Indians and "Ossenbrig shirts" dissappear from the books shortly. Only one such shirt is mentioned in the York Factory account book of 1693-94 (B.239/d/5:8).

OSTRICH FEATHERS

Dyed feathers of the bird of the same name, commonly used for hat band trimmings. There was a brisk trade in red and blue ostrich feathers at York during the eighteenth century.

SERGE

A popular worsted cloth sold at York. "Embossed serge" with stylized floral patterns became popular at the turn of the century. In 1800, 237 yards were traded.

SHALLOON

A lightweight worsted cloth used as lining for coats, and Hudson's Bay Company flags. (See for example B.177/a/1:10d).

SILK

A strong, lustrous and costly fibre, traded at Hudson's Bay Company posts as handkerchiefs.

SOUSAE

A cloth of silk, or mixed cotton and silk, in checks and small stripes, imported from India. It was much in demand in England at the turn of the eighteenth century. Out of 213 "Shosee" handkerchiefs sent to York in 1796, none were traded, and a mere fourteen given as presents, perhaps because sousaes came most often in black and white, and Indians favoured red and blue.

TICKLENBURG

A coarse, rough cloth made of hemp or linen, named after the German town where it was once made. A shipment of "Tecklenburg" was sent to York in 1796.

VERMILION

Mercury sulphide, produced in China and shipped to Hudson's Bay from England in 2-ounce packages. The pigment was rubbed into skin, wood, bone hide or mixed with grease for face and body paint.

VITRY

A lightweight durable canvas made in Vitre, France. Eight pieces of "Victory canvas" were sent to York in the late seventeenth century, probably for sacking or tent covers.

WADMALL

A coarse, bulky woollen used for rough clothing and lining horse-collars. The eight "Wadmill mittens", "1 blue Ossenbrig shirt", "fustian drawers", and "drab cloth" the committee sent in 1693 did not sell (B.239/d/5:8).

WITNEY BLANKET

A wool blankets made in Witney, England; the forerunner of the famous point blankets.

WORSTED YARN

Worsted fabric is tightly woven, with a smooth hard surface. Gartering and stockings were made of worsteds.

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