

A Cultural Framework for Cree Self-Government:

Retracing Our Steps Back

By

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

In Partial Fulfillment for the degree of

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Jennie Wastesicoot

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree**

Of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

In 1994, the Chiefs of Manitoba, through the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), set out to create a path to self-government for the First Nation people in Manitoba. A ten-year agreement was signed with the Government of Canada, committing the Chiefs to come forward with a plan that would define their self-government model. The agreement is referred to as the Framework Agreement Initiative (FAI). The FAI involves sixty-two First Nations communities scattered throughout Manitoba. These communities are comprised of five distinct Aboriginal Nations: the Cree, Dakota, Dene, Oji-Cree and Ojibway. When the FAI agreement was signed it was understood that the First Nations in Manitoba would define their self-government model based out of their history, culture and institutions. Outcomes would not be imposed.

How much traditional knowledge has been kept intact through the years of colonization and assimilation will have a significant impact towards restructuring their traditional governance systems because Aboriginal people have not governed themselves for more than 100 years. The FAI initiative was a huge undertaking requiring the AMC to develop a strategic process to ensure they were meeting the needs of Manitoba First Nations and ensuring their issues were being addressed.

This thesis explores the concept of self-government and what this means to the Cree Elders in northern Manitoba. Four Cree Elders were interviewed; two male and two female. This thesis captures and documents their oral history and takes the research findings to restoring the traditional governing system of the Cree Nation. The research findings identifies the necessary components that are essential towards building a foundation for self-government that is based on the traditional culture of the northern Cree Nation.

Chapter One, the introduction, provides a synopsis of the Manitoba First Nations, organizational structure and their relationships to one another. It briefly describes the challenges First Nations face in planning for self-government and how Aboriginal people were portrayed in the past; the lack of written historical documentation that exists and how scholars are working today with Universities to produce and validate Aboriginal knowledge. Finally, it provides some of the author's life history and the experiences had with Aboriginal politics. Chapter Two, is the justification for the study and it describes the limitations and parameters to this research; It identifies the research questions explored. Chapter Three, outlines the method of gathering data, the approach to the research study and the process utilized for data analysis.

The literature review is described in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Four begins by documenting the history of the Cree Nation; It provides a description of the governing system that existed including the role of Elders, children, women, Chiefs, leadership, law, spiritual beliefs, equalitarian structure and treaties and discusses the contributing factors that played a role in dismantling the traditional governing systems. Chapter Five focuses on the current initiative undertaken by Manitoba First Nations and what the northern Cree are doing to bring back their traditional governing system. Chapter Six, looks at the research findings and describes the major themes that emerged and how each theme relates to notions of self-government as understood by the Cree Elders. A discussion occurs in Chapter Seven, it describes the challenges confronting the Cree Nation. It identifies what the Cree Nation must begin to focus on and finally, it concludes by describing the cultural framework of the Cree Nation

Acknowledgements

First, I want to dedicate this thesis to my late father, Riley Easter, who encouraged me to pursue an education and teaching me Aboriginal politics and to learn both western and traditional ways. I also want to dedicate this thesis in memory of the two Elders I interviewed who passed on to the spirit world, while I was writing this thesis, Late Sandy Beardy from Pimichikamak Cree Nation and Late Lillian Ross from Opaskweyak Cree Nation. Their words of wisdom continued to encourage me while I was writing. Secondly, I want to acknowledge the two Elders Wellington Spence and Jean Baurassa who entrusted me with their traditional knowledge. Your words of wisdom meant a lot and I thank you for your faith in me to write what is important for the purpose of this thesis.

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis is the result of my personal quest to learn about Aboriginal self-government, an issue that has been prominent on the political agenda of Aboriginal peoples and the Government of Canada for several decades. Aboriginal self-government is a complex theory, issue and ideology that fundamentally encompasses many variables and components. Trying to define what the concept means and how it can be implemented is a challenge because self-government is controversial both within the Aboriginal community and within society at large. Currently, there exist huge ideological and philosophical differences and disagreements between indigenous peoples, the Government of Canada and Canadian society as a whole with respect to its definition, application and fiduciary exercise within the current constitutional order and existing political system.

In 1994, the Chiefs of Manitoba, through the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs (AMC), set out to create a path to self-government for the First Nation people in Manitoba. Former AMC Grand Chief Phil Fontaine and The Honourable Ron Irwin, former Canadian Government Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, signed an agreement referred to as the Framework Agreement Initiative (FAI), to begin a process to dismantle the former Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), now Indian and Northern Affairs of Canada (INAC). The dismantling process was viewed as a way for Aboriginal communities to regain their independence and to restore jurisdiction over their own affairs. The First Nations set out a process to meet their vision:

[t]he fundamental basis of the Framework Agreement Initiative joint process between Manitoba First Nations and Canada is to achieve long term security and well-being politically, economically and socially for the First Nations in Manitoba (AMC, 2000, p.21).

The FAI process aimed to recognize and to restore First Nations governance in Manitoba. Three fundamental principles were built into the FAI process. The first principle was a commitment to ensure First Nations of Manitoba were fully informed, were consulted, and provided their consent for any plan to devolve any authority to them. Secondly, the project was a joint process between the AMC and Canada; and third, it was recognized that the FAI was a long-term initiative and would be operating in a complex political environment (AMC 2000).

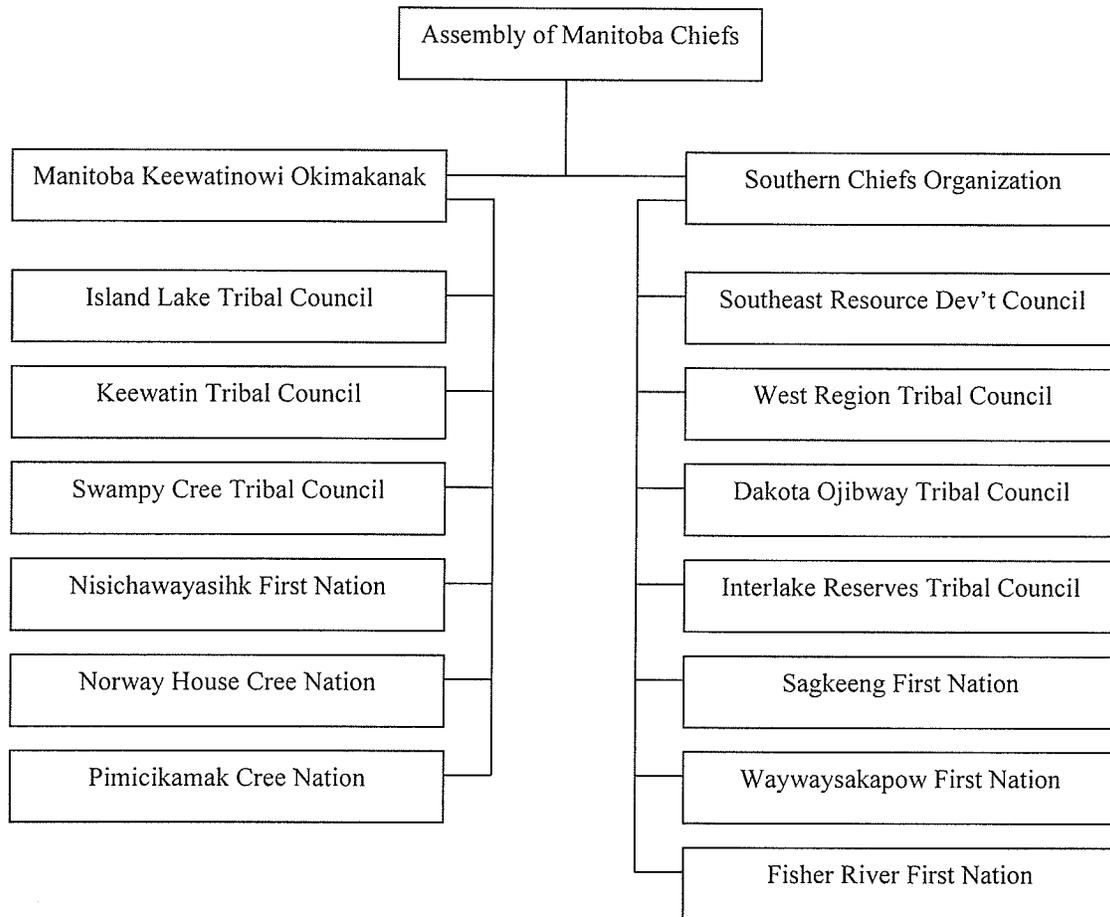
The FAI process involves sixty-two First Nations communities scattered throughout Manitoba. These communities are comprised of five distinct Aboriginal Nations: the Cree, Dakota, Dene, Oji-Cree and Ojibway. The Oji-Cree, St. Theresa Point, Red Sucker Lake, Wasagamach and Garden Hill consider themselves a Nation and are members of the AMC. AMC is a province wide political organization representing two territorial organizations called the Southern Chiefs Organization (SCO) and Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO). These organizations deal with political issues and each represents tribal councils and also includes independent First Nation communities who are not represented by any Tribal Council (Refer to figure1). AMC, SCO, and MKO are mandated by their constitutions to maintain, strengthen, enhance, lobby, promote, protect, preserve and defend the interests and rights of the Aboriginal groups they represent.

The Tribal Councils are service delivery organizations and are mandated by their constitutions to deliver programs such as health, social services and education. They were established to serve and assist the communities in community and economic development. The Independent First Nation communities are not affiliated with a tribal council and only have direct linkages to the territorial organization within their region. All First Nations groups have a direct linkage to the AMC with the exception of the Valley River First Nation, which is independent (Refer the figure 2).

The five Aboriginal Nations are diverse in their cultures and languages. They speak their own languages identified by mainstream society as Cree, Ojibway, Dene, Dakota, and Oji-Cree. In their own languages they refer to themselves as Ininew (Cree), Anishinew (Oji-Cree), Dene, Dakota, Anishinaabe (Ojibway). Their linguistic differences helps to define who they are as Aboriginal Nations. Their traditional culture, values and belief systems have been passed on to them by their ancestors; and the teachings they learn are passed on from generation to generation, shaping their ways of life as a people.

When the AMC began looking at dismantling the DIAND through the FAI process, it was agreed that the organization would not impose any outcomes that did not come from the people. It was understood that all "outcomes must grow out of consensus of the people of the First Nations and out of their history, culture and institutions. Outcomes could not be imposed" (AMC, Framework Agreement, MOU, 1994.p.5). The FAI initiative was a huge undertaking and it required the AMC to develop a strategic process to ensure they were meeting the needs of First Nations and that their issues were being addressed.

Figure 1



The Valley River First Nation is not affiliated with any of the above.

Figure 2.

Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs	
Southern Chiefs Organization	Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak
<p>Dakota Ojibway Tribal Council Birdtail Soix Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation Dakota Plains Longs Plains Roseau River Sandy Bay Sioux Valley Dakota Nation Swan Lake</p> <p>Interlake Reserves Tribal Council Dauphin River Lake Manitoba Lake St. Martin Little Saskatchewan Pequis Pinaymootang First Nation</p> <p>Southeast Resource Development Council Berens River Bloodvein Broken Head Ojibway Nation Buffalo Point First Nation Hallow Water Little Black River Little Grand Rapids Pauingassi First Nation Popular River First Nation</p> <p>West Region Tribal Council Ebb and Flow Gamblers Keeseekoowenin O-chi-chak-ko-sipi First Nation Pine Creek Rolling River Skownan First Nation</p> <p>Independent First Nations Sagkeeng First Nation Waywayseekapow First Nation Fisher River First Nation</p>	<p>Keewatin Tribal Council Barrens Land First Nation North Lands First Nation Sayisi Dene First Nation Shamattawa First Nation Fox Lake First Nation Bunibonibee Cree Nation God's Lake First Nation Manito Sipi Cree Nation Tataskweyak Cree Nation York Factory First Nation War Lake First Nation</p> <p>Swampy Cree Tribal Council Chemawawin First Nation Wuski Sipihek Cree Nation Sapotaweyak Cree Nation Mosakahiken First Nation Mathias Colomb First Nation Grand Rapids First Nation Marcel Colomb First Nation Opaskwayak Cree Nation</p> <p>Island Lake Tribal Council Red Sucker Lake First Nation St. Theresa Point First Nation Garden Hill First Nation Wasagamach First Nation</p> <p>Independent First Nations Pimicikamak Cree Nation Nisichawaysihk First Nation Norway House Cree Nation</p>

The Valley River First Nation is not affiliated with any of the above.

To meet the needs of northern First Nations the AMC established a northern office in Thompson, Manitoba. The FAI northern office is administered by the MKO, which represents three distinct Aboriginal Nations. These include Ininew (Cree), Anishinew (Oji-Cree) and Dene. The northern FAI office was set up to assist and to complement the FAI operations while ensuring the northern perspective was addressed in the FAI process (MKO, 1999).

The First Nations of Manitoba signed a ten-year agreement with the Government of Canada. This agreement commits them to come forward with a plan that would define their self-government model. This process is the first of its kind in Canada and it is not without its challenges. Defining a self-government model based on the history, culture and institutions of First Nations means reflecting back to a time before colonization. The challenge is that Aboriginal people have not governed themselves for more than 100 years and now must plan how to restore their self-governing systems with two generations of people missing in the generational flow of information. A northern Chief with whom I worked made an interesting comment when we were discussing the current self-government process: "there is a big gap in our history, two generations of missing information that we need to fill, if we do not know our culture how can we be expected to come forward with our traditional views if we do not know our own culture". This gap can be traced back to the 1800s when the British adopted a policy in 1815 to begin civilizing Indians (Miller:1991). Subsequently, the Indian Act was passed by Parliament and was implemented by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs in such a way as to restrict and control the lives of Aboriginal peoples. This included efforts to destroy their governing systems an attempt to put an end to their cultural heritage.

When the Elders look at their communities today, they no longer see a place where everyone has a role.

Traditions have been eroded, and the values that once bounded society together have been lost or abandoned. There is no harmony; the circle has been broken. Instead they see alcoholism, substance abuse, violence within families, unemployment, welfare, economic instability, and suicide. (RCAP.V4, 1996, p.136)

The Indian Act “has its roots in 1876, and is still in force today, governing the lives of Indian people,....has undermined the practice of self government of all First Nations, and has caused great grief and injustice”(Mercredi & Turpel:1993:3). The Indian Act enforced rules and regulations causing interruption in family life where children were separated from their families as early as five years old. The removal of children was done intentionally so that the children could attend residential schools. As a result of the separation, “parents were taught that they could not adequately care financially and emotionally for their children”(Red Horse:1982:177). Moreover, the Indian Act did not allow Aboriginal people to practice their own traditional culture disrupting the passing of traditional knowledge and traditional teachings (Ray:1996, Boldt:1993, Miller:1991). Instead of learning their own traditional values of sharing, developing mutual trust, responsibility and caring for self and others, First Nation children were learning how to survive in a residential school system that punished them for speaking their own language. As a result, the young people in many First Nations communities have become alienated from their own communities because they can no longer communicate in their own language and they lack traditional cultural understanding. Alfred (1999) stated young people who are the future of our nations are becoming alienated from their communities because no one is listening to their concerns:

Not finding meaning or relevance in traditional obligations, they are forming a new culture with

values and norms suited to their existence as alienated people; because they do not have a stake in preserving either society, destruction and self-destruction follow (p.129).

I often hear Elders talk about the changes that occurred in their communities. These changes include loss of traditional culture and practices as a result of contact with Europeans. However, despite these changes, many of the Elders have kept our traditional culture alive within the confines of their own minds. As the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) found:

Aboriginal cultures were vibrant and distinctive not only in the beginning but remain so today. Though bruised and distorted as a result of the colonial experience, inevitably changed by time and new circumstances, even in danger of extinction in some important dimensions such as language, nevertheless a fundamentally different worldview continues to exist and struggles for expression whenever Aboriginal people come together. (Vol.1, p.612).

The ban against practicing their traditional culture was enforced by the department up until the 1950s. Since the ban lifted, Aboriginal people have only been re-learning their culture over the past fifty-three years. How much traditional knowledge has been preserved after years of colonization and assimilation will determine the potential for traditional governance systems to provide a modern basis for self-government.

I anticipated that there would be challenges in writing this thesis because very little is known about the governance of Aboriginal people prior to the arrival of the Europeans. The limited written historical documentation concerning Aboriginal peoples mainly portrays them as savages, with no formal structures or political systems governing their societies. The Report of the Royal Commission

on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) documented the view of Aboriginal peoples during the period of 1609, when a Puritan preacher named Gray from New England included the following passage in his sermon:

Some affirm, and its likely to be true, that these savages have no particular property in any part or parcel of that country, but only a general residency there, as wild beasts in the forests; for they range and wander up and down the country with no law or government, being led by only by their own lusts and sensuality... (Robert Gray, "A Good Speed to Virginia", quoted in RCAP:V1:1996:43).

Most records written by earlier explorers, missionaries and observers of Aboriginal people resemble this passage, characterizing Aboriginal people as "savage" or "primitive". As discovered by Sherry Farrell Racette (2001) in her study of the *Jesuit Relations* that occurred with Aboriginal groups, Aboriginal people were seen as a disgusting, degenerate and degraded society that needed to be civilized or confined. This perception of Aboriginal peoples as backward and uncivilized has been the one that has informed most Canadians. More recent scholars have offered more positive images of Aboriginal peoples.

Changing written text is not the focus of this thesis, but it is worth mentioning the lack of accurate written text that is available on the governance systems of Aboriginal peoples. As Mercredi and Turpel have stated:

First Nations peoples history and spirituality are not written down in the sense of a book like-the bible- they are said to be written on the heart and passed along through story-telling, repetition and oratory (Mercredi, Turpel:1993:p:10).

One contemporary text that recently became available served a valuable resource as it captured the oral traditional and cultural knowledge of various Aboriginal groups across Canada. This source is the Report of the Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). This text provides the broad general background on the traditional governance of Aboriginal peoples. More importantly, this text confirms the validity of oral traditions and teachings of Aboriginal peoples as valuable research resources. As found by Battiste and Henderson (2000), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples formulated a set of guidelines for its research:

These guidelines emphasized that Aboriginal peoples have distinctive perspectives and understandings, which are derived from their knowledge, culture, and history, and which are embodied in Aboriginal languages. Those researching Aboriginal experiences must respect these perspective and understandings....The oral traditions and teachings of Aboriginal peoples must be viewed by researchers as valuable research resources, along with documentary and other sources (Battiste and Henderson:2000:136).

Scholars today are working with universities through Native studies departments to produce and validate Aboriginal knowledge:

Native studies can be characterized as a partnership between Aboriginal peoples and non-aboriginal peoples, for the purpose of producing and validating accurate knowledge about Aboriginal peoples (Kulchyski, McCaskill and Newhouse:1999:xii).

This thesis will challenge the way Aboriginal peoples' oral history has been treated. Hopefully, it will encourage those that have an interest in Aboriginal people to respect Aboriginal peoples' own history as valid oral history passed down through generations and recognize this as a valid interpretation of the past and an alternative to the records made by explorers, traders and missionaries.

Writing this thesis is a part of an evolving process that will require the

support and understanding of the Canadian government and society as a whole. Such support must allow Aboriginal Nations to restructure their governing systems on a foundation that reflects their traditional culture. It must recognize that Aboriginal Nations have only been re-learning their traditional culture over the past fifty years and imposing deadlines on their efforts to define their own governing principles is not fair. This thesis does not necessarily address the legal and political concerns that are presently confronting Aboriginal leaders and the governments of Canada. Rather, it identifies the philosophical components that are essential towards building a foundation for self-government based on the traditional culture of the aboriginal peoples. It is anticipated that this foundation will serve as a model for future evolving structures.

Nimeskunow (My Path)

When I began learning my culture, one of the first things I learned is that we are each provided a path to walk on while living on earth. The Creator lays out this path. The grandfathers and grandmothers that have passed on to the spirit world are the ones that guide us along while we continue to walk our path on earth. Our guides and teachers are many. My first teachers were my parents who taught me at a very early age who I was. What I learned from my parents shaped my behaviour, attitude and understanding on how to carry myself while walking my path. I learned to be aware of certain behaviors that I needed to ensure that I was walking in a good way. These behaviors taught me not to stare at other people especially those that had a disability. I was taught

that if I stared I was being rude and also I was to have good thoughts; otherwise if I had bad thoughts about someone else it might come back to me and affect the children I would have later. I was taught to help others who needed help without asking for anything back in return. Should another person try to harm me with words I was not to react in anger but to look at that person in a kind way. I was to give things back that I found that belonged to others and I could not take without asking first. I was taught to pray and I did so every night before I went to bed. I learned to be thankful for all good things I had in life and to be grateful for being alive.

I learned traditional knowledge from my parents as they often sought traditional healing and I learned that this was the way people helped each other out long before western medicines came into our lives. I learned both my maternal and paternal grandparents practiced traditional healing. I remember talking to my grandmother about how one can become a healer. I recall her telling me "to learn the medicines, a person would have to spend a lot of time with the healer, walking with them and learning the different traditional medicines". From my parents, I learned traditional people had dreamers whom we call O-pa-wa-ka-na and they were the spirit helpers that helped the traditional person in their work as healers. I remember my father telling me that my great-grandmother had her own O-pa-wa-ka-na and that they were with her at all times. I remember visiting my great-grandmother trying to see her O-pa-wa-ka-na. I envisioned them to be very small and whenever I visited her I looked everywhere including under her bed in the hope of finding her O-pa-wa-

ka-na. This was a great mystery in my life as I never found her O-pa-wa-ka-na.

I learned very early in life to respect our traditional knowledge, as showing any kind of disrespect would bring harm to our family. I never understood what harm it would bring, all I knew was that I had to respect it. All this I learned from my parents: love, generosity, kindness, sharing, humility, honesty and spirituality. These were my teachings that became an important part of my life that remain with me to this day.

My life began in a small community called Chemawawin where I lived until we had to relocate in 1962 to Easterville, Manitoba. My Grandfather was the Chief of the community when the relocation took place and he held this position for a short time in the new community. Eventually, my father became a Band Councillor and much of the conversation with adults who visited our home was about band politics. I am the third oldest out of a family of twelve and I recently lost my father and a brother. I will always remember my father and what he taught me about politics. As a child I remember my father talking about what we needed to know about politics. He would make us sit with him to watch the news and when governmental debates were on national television he would encourage us to watch and listen. He would tell us that this is where decisions were being made about our lives.

My interest in Aboriginal politics started early and my first experience began in 1985 when I worked for a Crisis Centre to address family violence in Aboriginal communities. My job was to visit Aboriginal communities and to convince them that family violence was not acceptable and that responsible

individuals had a choice to do something about it. This experience exposed me to the political dynamics within communities, including the power struggles that often occurred between the Chief and Council and community members. In one community, I was asked by the Chief and Council to leave because I was disrupting community life. Word got out in the community that I had been asked to leave and a group of women and elders urged me to stay, assuring me that the situation would be fine because they were the ones that elected Chief and Council. From that experience I quickly learned how politics worked in an Aboriginal community and I learned that if you want to work with a community and expect to get support or make change, you have to find that support from community members who have an influence in their community. Every trip after that, after meeting with Chief and Council, I immediately requested to meet the most respected community members, very often these members were Elders.

Through my work and research I came to understand that we have four types of Elders in First Nation communities: Christian Elders, bush/country Elders, traditional Elders and contemporary Elders. Christian Elders are those that have a strong religious belief in the Bible and are very involved with the church. Bush/Country Elders are those Elders that live off the land; hunting, fishing and trapping. Traditional Elders are elders who have a strong connection to their traditional culture and they practice their culture, perform traditional healing ceremonies, conduct sweat ceremonies and fasting ceremonies and are pipe carriers. Contemporary Elders are those that have adapted into mainstream society and are aware of and accept both the western and

traditional ways. The Elder or group of Elders who had the most influence in the community guided the social, political and spiritual beliefs of the community. Reflecting on my own upbringing, I would categorize my father as a contemporary Elder who taught me to learn both western and traditional ways.

I recall another experience I had in 1990. I worked on a project that involved developing a community strategy focused on reviving Aboriginal traditional culture to promote community healing. I met an Elder to discuss how traditional culture and reviving our culture could promote community healing. As soon as I started talking about Aboriginal traditional culture, the Elder interrupted me. He excused himself, went into his bedroom and returned a few minutes later with a bible in his hand. He then said to me "this is my way" and "this is what I believe". I sat with him for a while and listened to him while he shared a verse from the Bible. From this experience I realized that there may be other Elders out there who do not believe in Aboriginal culture and I wondered how many of these Elders today are influencing the decisions that are being made today in respect to planning for self government.

One of the tasks I had with my job was to determine if there was a need to establish a youth treatment centre to help deal with a problem that was afflicting many of the communities in the north. I had my own biases about establishing a treatment centre. To me this was another institution that reminded me of a residential school. It was a western concept in dealing with a problem and I did not want to be seen as pushing a concept that may not work for the First Nations. Because of my own biases, I decided that I would seek advice from an

Elder before I began talking to the communities about a treatment centre. The Elder shared a story with me, about people who had problems with alcohol and how some of these people cannot help themselves but need a place to go where they can get the support they need. The Elder pointed to a treatment centre that had been set up in his community to help his people. I recall him telling me that "some people need that and some do not and this is all I can say to you". When I left the Elder, I knew what I had to do and I also knew that I could not let my biases get in the way.

The lessons I learned from these experiences were my teachings and they will stay with me forever. They have shaped my way of thinking and how I do things when working on issues that will affect Aboriginal people now and in the future. When I first decided to study self-government, I decided to seek advice from an Elder before I proceeded with my research. The Elder who gave me advice I will call "Nookoom", meaning grandmother in my language. Nookoom is Ojibway and she asked to remain anonymous. Nookoom explained:

The Anishinabe each have our own traditions and customs, like the Cree have their own teaching and the Ojibway have their own. I cannot teach you, you have to go and learn from your own people. When we talk about self-government, some of us had a kinship system and some had the clan system in place. These you will learn from your own people. I cannot tell you how the Cree governed themselves; only the Cree can tell you (Nookoom:1999).

She added that if I was going to write about self-government that I write it "like it is" and she stated:

We are Anishinabe, we belong to the land, we do not belong out there with the big offices and the high rises. The problem with self government is that the

Leaders want that big money, that's all they look at, they do not care about the people, they want to drive those nice fancy cars and have nice offices. If you are going to write about self-government, tell it like it is. We need to bring out everything that is happening, tell the truth, be honest. What you are doing is a good thing (Nookoom: 1999)

A few months later, at a ceremony, I met a male Elder and told him what Nookoom had said about my work on self-government. The response from the male Elder surprised me: "Be careful how you tell it, I would not slap them with the truth, you have to be careful how you say it". For a long time after my experience with the two Elders, their words bothered me, especially the words from the male Elder. Everyday I thought about how I was going to write about First Nations self-government. In the end, I decided I would follow the advice from Nookoom and write about self-government the way it is and how it is being pursued today. Writing about it this way means that I must tell the truth and tell it like it is. Being honest will either be welcomed or rejected. This is a chance that I have decided to take, because this is my future, my children's, my grandchildren's and those who are not yet born.

Chapter Two

Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of this research study is to explore the concept of Aboriginal self-government and what this means to Aboriginal Elders of northern Manitoba. This research study will capture and document the oral history of the northern Cree Elders and will take the research findings to restoring the traditional governing system of the Cree Nation.

Reasons for this Study

My reasons for this study are numerous, but most importantly it is to lend assistance and support to the First Nations in Manitoba. The task of Manitoba First Nations have embarked on is challenging, particularly when trying to bring in the perspectives of all First Nations groups in Manitoba in an attempt to define a self-government model that will reflect their traditional cultures. By bringing in the traditional knowledge, and understanding how the Cree governing system operated in the past, I anticipate that this research will provide the First Nations in Manitoba with ideas to serve as a foundation for self-government. Another reason is to create an understanding with the non-Aboriginal population of the impact of colonization and assimilation on the traditional governing systems of Aboriginal people. Finally, it is hoped that this thesis will provide insights into how First Nations must work together in order to succeed in their quest for self-government.

Parameters

This thesis involves research on Aboriginal governing practices. The timeframe is unspecified because this thesis is based on the blood memory, since time immemorial, shared by the Elders today. Due to the cultural diversity

that exists amongst the three Aboriginal groups in northern Manitoba, my thesis will focus primarily on the Cree Aboriginal group. This study will involve documenting the views of Cree Elders with respect to developing a self-government model based on First Nations cultural beliefs and values. In many of our First Nations communities, Elders are considered to be teachers and advisors with great knowledge and wisdom. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), summed up the role Elders held in First Nation communities:

Elders have special gifts. They are considered exceptionally wise in the ways of their culture and the teachings of the Great Spirit. They are recognized for their wisdom, their stability, and their ability to know what is appropriate in a particular situation. The community looks to them for guidance and sound judgement. They are caring and are known to share the fruits of their labours and experience with others in the community. (RCAP, V4. 1996, p.110).

As my study group is primarily from the northern Manitoba Cree First Nation communities, my research will be restricted to their geographical location.

Limitations and delimitations

I anticipated that there would be some limitations when I began writing my thesis. One of the limitations was the topic I am writing about is a political issue. Since First Nation leaders tend to rely on lawyers on issues that are political in nature, my perspectives and recommendations may not be taken seriously because I am not a lawyer or elected political leader. The other limitation is that many First Nations in northern Manitoba do not have an understanding of their own traditional culture and they tend to shy away from their own cultural teachings, values and beliefs systems due to the influence of Christianity

Since many Aboriginal people in northern Manitoba are strongly

connected to Christian beliefs, they may not support the concept of revising a governing system based on traditional culture. As a result, any reference that I make with regard to developing a self- government model based on traditional culture may be rejected due to the fear that exists in the First Nations communities respecting traditional culture. However, being an Aboriginal person, who speaks the Cree language fluently, born and raised in a First Nation community, I hope that I will be able to discuss this fear and be able to bring understanding of how this fear has affected past and present generations.

Finally, I must mention another limitation. I was not able to review all the documentation produced through the Framework Agreement Initiative because I did not have access to these documents. These documents were kept at the office of the AMC. I did not have access to these documents as they were considered work in progress. The only documentation I was able to access was the information shared at the AMC Chiefs assemblies. The information was shared to keep the Chiefs updated on the work in progress. The only other documentation I was able to review were those that were provided at the northern Chiefs Assemblies and information shared from the northern office.

Ethics Approval

Prior to proceeding with this research, a research ethics application was submitted to the University of Manitoba for approval. My research application received the approval it needed to carry on with my study.

Key Questions to be explored:

The key questions that explored in this thesis were the following.

What is your understanding of self-government and what is your vision/definition?

What do you believe are some of the principles of self-government?

What are some of the problems preventing First Nations from working together?

How do you see First Nations working together?

Chapter Three

Research Method

The research methods that I have chosen for this thesis are based upon three approaches: cultural analysis, historiography, and oral history. I selected each of these methods as they served the purpose for my research study as explained in the following section.

Cultural Analysis

Since this research is about restructuring First Nation governing systems to reflect a traditional cultural foundation, it is only appropriate that I use a research method that is culturally relevant to Aboriginal people. I began my research by first seeking to understand the meaning of culture based on the worldview of Aboriginal people in general. I found that Aboriginal people from different cultural backgrounds such as the Cree and Ojibway have a single common worldview depicted in different ceremonies and practices. Their common worldview teaches ethics and rules of behaviour. According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the commissioners heard statements from various Aboriginal groups across the country that spoke about their culture and values that are reflected in their whole way of life as First Nations people.

The Commissioners understood that First Nations culture included:

Aboriginal languages, relationships with the land, spirituality, and the ethics of or rules of behaviour by which Aboriginal peoples maintained order on their families, clans, communities, nations and confederacies (RCAP:V1:1996:616)

Researchers such as Edgerton and Langness 1994, who have done anthropological research on cultures, have defined culture:

Culture refers to a peoples way of life....everywhere that people live on earth, they follow customary ways of behaving - of eating, hunting, expressing affection, raising children....culture is expressed in these patterns of behaviour; the patterns reflect the codes or rules that guide how people behave....these patterns and the codes behind them give human existence its regularity, purpose, and meaning. (Edgerton & Langness:1994:1)

Anthropologists who have studied Aboriginal culture have made attempts to describe the customs of Aboriginal people but have failed miserably, as explained by Leroy Little Bear (2000).

They have done a decent job in describing the customs themselves, but they have failed miserably in finding and interpreting the meanings behind the customs (Leroy Little Bear (2000:81).

Aboriginal scholars today are rejecting the western notion of culture because of this failure and are seeking ways to bring methodologies that will explore their own ways of life accurately and to bring understanding while respecting other peoples' way of life (Battiste and Henderson 2000).

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to use the Aboriginal worldview of culture as a way of life of a people that is spiritual in a sense that all life has a spirit and is connected to the land that is sacred as provided by the Creator. James Youngblood Henderson (2000) explains:

The Aboriginal worldview asserts that all life is sacred and that all life forms are connected. Humans are neither above nor below others in the circle of life. Everything that exists in the circle is one unity, of one heart (James Youngblood Henderson (2000:259).

As a way of life, Aboriginal people grew up learning their culture early on in their childhood. This was passed on through story telling as explained by Johnston, 1999:

For our people what the children and youth of one generation learned of the past and of the knowledge of the tribe came through story. By custom and tradition our tribal storytellers told certain stories...these winter night gatherings were more than storytelling socials; they were meetings in which tradition, heritage, custom and culture, were passed on to the youth (45).

I had my own understanding of culture as I was brought up hearing traditional stories from my father. Together with my knowledge and the literature review on culture, I was ready to go out and start talking to people about my research topic. Since this thesis is focused on restoring a First Nations governance system that will reflect a traditional cultural foundation, I was interested in learning how much the First Nations knew about their own culture. Understanding and knowing their own culture is crucial to achieving aboriginal self-government. As Warry, 1998, states: "the ability of First Nations to achieve self-government is related to ...[the] understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal culture" (Warry, 1998:20).

I conducted informal discussions with Chiefs about my research and tried to arrange meetings with them, only to find that they were too busy. Every time I approached a Chief and suggested a meeting to discuss my research their response was always the same. "Call me" or "I am going to be busy all next week but call me and I'll check my schedule". At one point, I scheduled an interview with a former leader who cancelled out in the last minute. I finally decided that I would just attend meetings, conferences and assemblies where discussions were being held about self-government. I found this approach to be very helpful. Because it was informal, I was able to formulate an understanding of how much the leaders knew their own culture. Attending these meetings also allowed me to observe how the leadership was functioning under its current political regime and

if their regime reflected any traditional culture.

I spent time talking with youth, women, men and Elders who would listen to me. I spoke in my language with those who were able to speak the language. I asked them what they thought about self-government and more importantly, what their understanding was of culture. My conversation with them was very informal and casual and I did not take any notes to allow them to share their thoughts with me openly. Spending time with the people was an important part of my research. This showed that I was genuinely interested in what people had to say. I also wanted to ensure that I was bringing in their knowledge to form a cultural foundation for self-government. Grigas (1993), who did her research study on the medicine wheel, describes the work she used by Nicholas Deleary 1990, who studied the Midiwiwin. Delearys' approach is that a person must practice, participate and live the culture (p:49). This theory is that when a person lives the culture a perspective will arise from the core principles of Aboriginal knowledge.

Being Aboriginal and having lived the culture, I was able to relate to the people I spent time with. By listening to them I was able to reflect on my own upbringing and to recognize the core principles of Aboriginal knowledge. This knowledge includes the caring and sharing people have towards each other and the connection to spirituality. As one person shared "when we look at things we have to look at everything spiritually" or "I was taught to be caring and sharing" or "be kind never say anything unkind". These are the core principles of Aboriginal knowledge.

I also attended traditional gatherings such as fasting ceremonies, shake tent ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies and pipe ceremonies. These helped me stay focused on my research and seek healing, guidance and support in my work. Throughout my research I prayed, asking for guidance and praying

that direction will come to me to know where I needed to go with my research. The answers I received often came to me through dreams. The grandfathers and grandmothers invaded my dreams, telling me things that I needed to know, what I needed to write and where I needed to go. My dreams often frightened me when I did not understand them. Whenever I needed I shared my dreams and I wrote them down so that they became a part of this research. When Grigas (1993) did her research she described how she began her research with a vision to guide her in her studies. She saw renewal as an essential component in her research and often went off fasting to seek answers to questions and to give her strength throughout her work.

Simpson (1999) is another researcher who attended different ceremonies for purposes of healing. These helped her to cleanse, to seek knowledge, to give insights into the future, and to make decisions about her research (40). The more important reason for her attending the ceremonies was to also learn from the traditional people about how the ceremonies are being applied today by individuals in respect to living their lives according to their traditional culture. Grigas explains when she attended the ceremonies they served to bring self-awareness. Ultimately it leads to self-responsibility defined by Grigas, as requiring me "to remain true to the teachings of the wheel" (Grigas. 1994:51). Similarly, Simpson wrote that the Anishinaabe knowledge she gained gave her a responsibility to use the teachings in her life work (Simpson:1999:48). By attending and participating in ceremonies, I was constantly reminded to never forget who I was, where I came from and why I was doing this research. This alone motivated me to keep on writing and I never felt alone because I knew that I was being guided in my work.

Oral History

All Aboriginal people consider the Elders as keepers of traditional knowledge. They are the ones that pass on the oral history to the young ones:

To such listening groups, Old men would speak with earnest eloquence, warning the dangers that beset the youth, exhorting them to be kind and friendly with members of the tribe, to show justice tempered with mercy in all their relationships. They would speak as fathers of the race, having tasted all that was of Indian life, its bitter and its good; they would speak with authority, for they knew all that they needed to know; and they used this privilege wisely, knowing their responsibility and the need that they filled in Indian life (Ahenakew:1973:25).

Elders can either be men or women, they are considered the keepers of wisdom and it is their responsibility to pass their knowledge on to the future generations. Sharon Venne explains her research on the Cree Elders:

When the Elders come together, the stories begin to flow. One Elder alone has many stories, but when a number of Elders are placed in the same room, the stories multiply. One Elder may know part of a story and another will know the rest of the story. Together the Elders tell the history of the nation (174).

The Elders pass on their knowledge through oral history and whatever knowledge they share is what has been passed on to them by their grandfathers or grandmothers. They understand the old ways and it is through the story telling that they pass on the history of the people as noted by Sharon Venne:

It is through telling stories that the histories of the peoples, as well as important political, legal, and social values are transmitted (174).

Researchers such as Nickels (1997) observed how oral history contributed in passing down traditional knowledge on traditional moose skin preparations. Applying Aboriginal knowledge in his research gave Nickels an opportunity to

“observe numerous skin preparations” (p:48). The teachings on skin preparations [were] passed on by Elders who provided information on tanning techniques and historical considerations (Ibid:50). Other scholars such as Hart (1995) recognize the value of traditional knowledge. Hart (1995) uses the work of Legat (1991), to validate the value of traditional knowledge and she states: “[t]his traditional knowledge is information and experience passed down orally through generations, and contains valuable environmental and social information necessary for survival and cultural maintenance” (p:71).

Obtaining Cree Elder’s traditional knowledge was vital to this research. They served as the primary source for capturing the traditional knowledge that was needed for this thesis. The Elders that were chosen for this study were referred to me from my connections with the people I knew in the communities.

Historiography

My research would not have been complete without looking at the history of the study group. Therefore, the thesis used historiography as one of its research methods. Using historical methodology assisted me to learn as much background as possible of the northern First Nations. Historians, such as Ray (1998) and Brown & Vibrant (1996), have used historiography in their research on Aboriginal people. In Ray’s research on *“Indians in the Fur Trade”* (1998), he used the Hudson’s Bay Company Records as a source for information about the Aboriginal People in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

[T]he Hudson’s Bay Company record proved to be ideally suited for my purposes. The voluminous post journals, correspondence books, and the district reports abound information about population movements, demographic trends, and the nature of local Aboriginal economies (Ray, 1998: xiv).

To fully understand the history, the culture of the northern First Nations and how they governed themselves prior to their treaty signing, it is important to review past documents that have been written about Aboriginal peoples. Therefore, my research approach drew selectively upon the available historical literature. Given that the literature on Aboriginal peoples is voluminous and constantly growing, it was not possible for this study to be comprehensive in its coverage of potentially relevant sources.

Approach to the Research Study:

The main parts of this research are qualitative, involving informal interviews, spending time with people sharing and exchanging information. My approach to this study began as soon as I received approval from my Advisory Committee on November 2000. I initially planned to travel into six First Nation communities to do my interviews. However, due to their geographical locations I was only able to travel into five communities and due to unforeseen circumstances, I was only able to interview four Elders. Two were male and two were female Elders. Prior to travelling into the communities, I made initial contact with each Elder by phoning to arrange a suitable time when we could meet. Once we confirmed a date, I made arrangements to travel to their communities to meet with them. My visits occurred over a four-week period and due to the distance, I was required to stay overnight. While there I had the opportunity to spend time with other members of the community.

I brought with me gifts that I presented to each Elder because it is customary to present a gift when seeking their knowledge. The gifts included tobacco, chewing tobacco and fruit baskets. I also offered a monetary gift to one Elder to cover expenses associated to this research. I presented these gifts to show my gratitude and to acknowledge the Elders for sharing their wisdom with

me. I interviewed the Elders at their homes where they were comfortable, with the exception of one who came to my home to do the interview. The Elders were presented with a consent form and I explained the purpose of the interview. I spoke to them using the Cree language and I spoke in my language right from my first contact with them to the end of our interview. I asked the Elders to sign the consent form allowing me to interview them. I used a tape recorder to capture the Elders' stories. Three interviews lasted approximately one hour with one lasting an hour and a half.

I wanted the Elders to have a clear understanding of the purpose of my research. I began by first explaining the current self-government process and the plans to establish governing systems based on a cultural foundation. I then advised the Elders that I was interviewing Elders because I wanted to capture their traditional knowledge and I wanted to document the Cree perspective. I also advised them that I wanted to know what their vision was and what their understanding was of self-government. I presented the key questions that I wanted to explore for this research. I advised the Elders they did not have to answer all the questions. They could answer the questions as best as they could and they could withdraw from the study at any time. I wanted the Elders to be comfortable during the interviews and I raised each question when it was appropriate. The questions were presented as an invitation and opportunity for Elders to share what they thought was appropriate to this research.

Once the interviews were completed I spent the next four weeks transcribing the tapes from Cree to English. The process of transcribing the tapes from Cree to English was not an easy process as the Elders did not all speak the same dialect. They used words that were from the old language. If I did not understand a certain word I would call the Elder back and ask them to explain what it meant. If I was not clear about how I was transcribing a word, I

relied on my community contacts. They acted as a sounding board as they listened to me translate a certain word from Cree to English, to ensure that I was not losing the real meaning of the word.

Data Analysis

My analysis of the data was based on Aboriginal knowledge. This method is learning by observation using concepts of listening, sharing, and feeling. Simpson (1999) explained the Anishinaabe methods she adopted were concept methods of inquiry, research partners, learning-by-doing, ceremony, dreaming, story telling, and self-reflection. She viewed herself as a “learner” or “student” and her teachers were the community experts and Elders. Learning by doing, Simpson went on hunting trips, fishing trips, checked traps, travelled canoe routes, visited sacred sites, participated in sweat lodge ceremonies and shaking tent ceremonies, and observed healing and sentencing circles. She shared her dreams and visions. She listened to story telling of the ways oral tradition was transferred and she listened to both sacred and traditional stories.

Aboriginal peoples learn about themselves and their environment through experiences; detailed observations over long periods of time, passed through generations by the Oral traditions; experimentation and active investigation. Much Aboriginal knowledge however, is derived from the spirit world (Simpson:1999:23).

While listening to the Elders stories, I analyzed the data word by word to have a clear understanding of what was meant by the words of the Elders and the meaning behind what they were saying. Cruikshank (1999), in her research with Yukon Elders, found that the Elders’ “own childhood instructions came either from observation and from oral instruction” (p.103). She found that by listening to

the Elders tell their stories each story was told to explain other larger issues. If she could not understand what they were saying, then the whole meaning behind their story would disappear. I listened to the data and read what I transcribed. Using both the tape and transcription I analyzed the data to bring out the ideas from the Elders. I mapped out the main themes on paper and I grouped each theme and identified similarities to form categories. I worked with the data and absorbed it by thinking about it and taking it with me everywhere I went. I made observations wherever Aboriginal people gathered, always reflecting on my data to affirm what the elders were telling me.

Through sharing, I raised my own consciousness about the data and I shared what I learned from it whenever the opportunity arose. Battiste and Henderson (2000) explain that there is more to Aboriginal knowledge than the repetition:

In each generation, individuals make observations, compare their experiences with what they have been told by their teachers, conduct experiments to test the reliability of their knowledge, and exchange their findings with others. Everything that pertains to traditions, including cosmology and oral literature, is continually being revised at the individual and community level (45).

Battiste and Henderson suggest that Indigenous knowledge systems “are more self-consciously empirical than those of Western scientific thought” (Battiste and Henderson,2000:45). Sharing the data allowed me to test my knowledge and understanding of what the Elders had told me.

I allowed myself to feel what the Elders shared with me by reflecting on my own upbringing. Through feeling, my emotions surfaced and I shared my feelings whenever I felt it was appropriate to share them. I participated in sweat lodge ceremonies and shaking tent ceremonies and sharing circles where I

shared my personal feelings about my findings. Through feeling came a spiritual understanding of what the Elders shared with me. Using Aboriginal knowledge as a method to analyze the data ensured that I was bringing out the traditional and spiritual knowledge of the Elders. It is their voices that are reflected in this thesis and not mine alone.

Chapter Four

Literature Review

The literature review has been divided into two chapters because of the amount of information needed in this section of the thesis. Chapter Four begins by documenting the history of the Cree Nation. It provides a description of the governing system that existed among the Cree First Nation including the role of Elders, children, women, Chiefs, leadership, law, spiritual beliefs, equalitarian structure and treaties and discusses the contributing factors that played a role in dismantling the traditional governing systems. Chapter Five focuses on the current initiative undertaken by Manitoba First Nations and what the northern Cree First Nations are doing to bring back their traditional governing systems.

Historical Overview

The Cree First Nation represented a large group that consists of the Plains Cree, Swampy Cree, Woodland Cree, Eastern-Cree, Stonie Cree, French-Cree and Oji-Cree. The Cree Nation groups covered a large territory that stretched from Western Canada to Eastern Canada into the northern United States. "Cree Bands lived as far north as Fort Vermillion....as far as south of the United States of North Dakota and Montana" (Fineday:1973:1). Lytwyn (2002), in his archival research of the Lowland Cree of the Hudson Bay lowlands, located along the coast of the Hudson Bay, described the Lowland Cree by their traditional name, Muskegowuck. Using the work of Williams (1969) who reviewed Andrew Graham's records on his observation on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91, Lytwyn explained the Muskegowuck belonged to a larger group referred to as the Keishkatchewan Nation or Cree Nation. Andrew Graham provided a list of the tribes who belonged to the Keishkatchewan Nation using their traditional names. This list included such names as Washeo Sipi (Severn River), Penesichewan

(Hayes River), Mantua-Sepee (Lower Churchill River) and Pimmechikemow (Cross Lake) (p.13).

The Cree First Nation of northern Manitoba is comprised of the Swampy Cree and Oji-Cree. Their traditional lifestyle consisted living off the land, hunting, fishing and trapping. Like other Aboriginal groups, the Cree Nation travelled in small bands travelling in “migratory bands the size which depended upon the season and local resources” (Ray:1998:35).

Waldram, Herring and Young (1997), describe the typical size of a band:

The primary social unit of, the ‘band’, was relatively small, often consisting of only fifty to one hundred people. When resources were plentiful, a number of these bands might temporarily join together into a larger entity, the ‘regional band’, however, during times of hardship, the band may break up into its constituent parts, nuclear and extended families. Hence, each family existed within a delicate balance, containing all the essential skills to exist, at least for short periods of time(p:9).

As governing Nations, the Cree First Nation groups “would gather together at least twice a year, in the fall and the spring, to hold religious festivals, arrange marriages, and convene national council meetings where treaty-making and other tribal issues would be discussed” (McFarlane:1996:142). This was a time when people came together as one unit.

The northern Manitoba Cree Nation call themselves Ininiwak as a group or, “Innnew” when referring to oneself. Because of the different dialects that exist within the Cree Nation each group have their own pronunciation. As a case in point, Dion (1996), pronounces it Nehiyawok, and he believes that the Cree name was given by the French. While scholar Pettipas (1994), referred to the Cree as “Nehiyawak or the “exact-speaking”, people...” (p.44). The word Cree

came from the word Christian. When missionaries were discussing Christian Indians they would refer to them as “Chris Indians” which eventually became Crees (*Ibid.*1).

Scholars such as Dion, (1996), Ahenakew (1973), Ray and Freeman (1978), describe the Cree Nation peoples as gentle, generous people, who were very loyal and peaceful. “ [T]he people were exhorted to be kind and to live in peace with one another, for tribal loyalty was essential...” (Ahenakew:1973:24). As Dion recalls, “the Crees lived at peace with one another. No case of mass violence has ever been recorded in our oral history” (Dion:1996:7). “The Indians came from a society that stressed the need for mutual aid and generosity” (Ray and Freeman:1978:58). The Cree were known to be generous people, they did not place high value on wealth and whatever material goods were accumulated, it was common practice to share these with other members in the group.

The sharing of wealth through general reciprocity brought benefits to members because the more possessions a person had raised their status in the community. Generosity was one of the qualities a chosen leader had to have. “There was no selfishness, [i]t is an Indian custom to share with others. That has always been so; the strong take care of the poor; there is usually enough for all” (Ahenakew:1973:33). Gift giving and celebrations were common practices among the Cree Nation and so it was common to organize a give away. “The gift giving ceremony was initially primarily a socio-political institution designed to cement alliances and reaffirm friendships” (Ray:1998:67). In a tribe it served to maintain group cohesion and support to the Chiefs.

According to Milloy (1988), the Cree “were engaged in a set of well-structured, intertribal relations which were designed to ensure their security, to assist them in meeting the challenges of plains existence and to facilitate the acquisition of the good things of their world” (p: xiv). The Cree Nation maintained

exceptional organizational skills with which they carried into their daily lives, using these skills for their survival. Each person had a responsibility to the tribe and this responsibility included caring for the children who are the future generation. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recorded statements from presenters that reflect this responsibility. One Presenter stated:

We believe that the Creator has entrusted us with the sacred responsibility to raise our families....for we realize healthy families are the foundation of strong and healthy communities. The future of our communities lies with our children, who need to be nurtured within their families and communities (Charles Morris. RCAP:1996:V3:p.11).

The Commissioners observations were made in general terms and not specific to the Cree Nation. However, the Cree Nation view on children is that they are the future.

The Cree Nation functioned under a kinship system where the head of the family was responsible for ensuring that each family member was living up to their responsibility. Each family member in turn was responsible in ensuring the family was cared for as explained by RCAP (1999):

In many Aboriginal societies, the family or extended family was the major self-governing unit. It was responsible for regulating internal social and economic activities, and it provided for the needs of the individuals and the security of the family members. (RCAP:1999,V2:p.129).

As a young child, I remember my grandfather calling my father and uncles to come together to have a family meeting. These meetings occurred around the late 1960s, I often wondered what these meeting were for and why they did not involve my mother and aunts. Years later I learned that these meetings were called by my grandfather to discuss family responsibilities and to ensure that my

father and uncles were living up to their responsibilities as providers and protectors of their families. This is not an indication of a patriarchal society. This was simply a family member taking time to remind each other of their obligations in a rapidly changing environment.

This was not a male dominated society as I found women relatives coming together at different times. Their meetings were more informal as they came together on different occasions. One meeting I remember occurred between my mother, grandmother and aunts when they came together to barter their arts and crafts to tourists. These tourists travelled by ship that occasionally came to Grand Rapids, Manitoba. During these meetings, I remember my grandmother talking to my mother and aunts about family matters.

Carpenter (1999) explained the responsibility people had towards raising children:

[E]verybody helped with the child rearing, even the man helped deliver the babies. Everybody had a role to help in childrearing....they never saw a child to be mistreated or for a child to be unhappy. The people took extreme care in bringing up a child ...[o]nce a person can take of themselves, there is always someone there like their parents, grandparents, and other Elders to show them to live. When people use this way, it was good and life went well for everyone. People never stopped caring for the young people... This way the childrearing was very good. Everyone had to look after their children right. It was a peaceful and happy life. Everyone helped each other out and if someone got into trouble, they talk it out (p:229).

In the Cree Nation children were considered gifts from the creator and were raised with positive nurturing that came with respect, love and caring. Children were taught at an early age to become responsible adults and it was the Elders who were responsible for passing on the knowledge to the young people. The Elders served many functions in Cree society and their skills varied. One of

the main functions of the Elders was that of historian, advisor and counsellor to young people. Sharon Venne (1997), in her research on the Plains Cree defined the functions of the Elders as storytellers who told their stories to children early on in their childhood. The Elders watch the children and look for good listeners and it is these children who are taught the ways of the past. "The Elders with their age and wisdom have the time and patience to teach. Each Elder keeps the stories like a sacred trust to be handed down to the next generation" (p.176). The legends and stories shared by the Elders were more than just stories as they provided theological instructions as explained by Friesen (1996) "[a] tribes origin belief or story was central to the entire religious system of most traditional tribes....legend telling comprised the activity of theological instructions at its most significant level"(p.46).

Carpenter (1999) explained a role an Elder had in a hunting party. The Elder served as the leader and "he would make plans on how to hunt [and] the group would listen to this leader" (p:231). The Elders served other leadership roles with the Chief. As a council, the Elders were recognized for their skills as great hunters, for their generosity and oratory abilities and were provided the responsibility to look after the summer and winter camps. As found by Ray, Miller, Tough (2000) "when several bands gathered during summer, the oldest and most respected winter chief assumed the paramount position and acted as a spokesperson for the combined group (p.91).

Women also played a role serving an important function in the Cree society, they played many important roles in the kinship system. They were involved in decision making during trade exchange and were responsible for teaching survival skills (Tough, 1996). In the Cree Nation, the women were considered a special person and very important. "The Creator gave her a special gift, to give life"(Carpenter, 1999:223). The respect women held in the Cree

Nation extended to all matters in the community and any decision that needed to be made required their input. Fine Day (1973) who was a Chief of his people in 1911, provided an example of how women were involved in decision making:

The Hudson Bay traders.....when they needed Dogs they would come to the Indian camps. A man had to ask his wife for permission to sell a Dog (Fineday,1973:p.6).

Tough (1996), in his research on the history of the fur trade economy in northern Manitoba, documents the vital role women held during the fur trade era and this role was setting the demand for trade goods (p.19). Lytwyn (2000) researched the observations made by Andrew Graham of women during the fur trade era. The observation was women gained prestige through sole property ownership over small furs that they bartered for themselves (107). The woman's role was well respected. As found in the oral history of the Cree Nation, the grandmothers played a central role in selecting a leader. It was through their guidance that a leader was selected for the community. The leaders that were chosen were watched carefully and this was done to ensure that they possessed all the necessary skills required of a leader.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), confirmed the role women held in their societies prior to European contact. As the Commissioners travelled across the Country hearing testimonies from Aboriginal women they heard the same message:

Women had important roles in the social, economic and political life of their community. They were the wisdom-keepers. They selected chiefs. They taught their children about the nature and qualities of a leader. They were responsible for resolving internal disputes and healing their communities. (Vol.4,p.79).

The female elder's responsibility extended toward ensuring a leader chosen to lead was living by the standards according to their cultural beliefs and

practices. If a leader was found not living according to the standards, he lost all the respect he had with his members and was eventually replaced. Choosing a leader was a community decision and it was not based on competition but rather by the qualities a person held. Sharon Venne (1997) provides an example of one man who wanted to be a chief but he was considered to be mean:

In that community's selection process, the supporters of a person go and stand behind their choice. In this particular case, no one stood behind the man, not even his wife. This is one example of the process used to select the best person to be the leader (p.178).

Mandelbaum (1979), explained that the role of chief was not necessarily inherited. If a chief's son was considered incompetent he could not serve his role as a leader. The next person with high standing would be acknowledged as the chief. In this case, a person with high standing who possessed the qualities of a skilled hunter, for having kindness, and was not selfish and giving freely of his possessions to needy people would be considered as the next chief. "The Chief was more a recognized leader or headman than he was an official" (p.106). The Chief's main political role as a leader was to maintain peace and harmony in his community. The Chief remained a leader for as long as he was able to maintain the respect of his community members. As long as he maintained positive behaviour that was acceptable, it was not difficult to maintain support from his members.

Traditional Leadership

The Cree Nation's political institution was very different from that of the European colonial structure. It was not based on a ruling class system where the leader had the ultimate power and authority to make all the decisions. The Chief

or headman was obligated to listen to his members because the Cree governing system was based on the will of the people. He could not make unilateral decisions by himself:

As in other egalitarian societies, leadership was not defined in terms of authority, for a headman did not have the power to coerce followers into complying with his decisions.....Ultimately, the ability of a leader to provide for the physical and spiritual well-being of followers determined the strength of his political power (Pettipas,1994:p.46).

Everyone was treated with respect and no one was treated differently in leadership. Everyone was involved in decision-making. As Carpenter explained (1999):

The leaders were the men and the women. When the people gathered together, there was no one leader. When it happened that certain skills were needed, different people would take over. Everyone was equal and treated one another with respect, and all were humble with each other. Humility was important and the leader was humble towards his people. That was the only way leadership worked. If he was not humble it would not work for him to be leader. For those men and women, it was important to be humble to each other and they took turns being the leader (Carpenter:1999:231).

The leaders served many functions in a community. They were selected based on certain skills that were required. These skills were either as a war chief, camp leader, or a hunting chief. Each person that was appointed as a leader outranked the other. As Mandelbaum 1979, explains, "one of them would be recognized as outranking the others because of seniority in age or more importantly, because of outstanding superiority" (p.108). Since the leader was expected to maintain harmony in his community he was expected as a "successful Chiefto master the art of building consensus not only among his

immediate followers, but also within the community as a whole” (McFarlane:1996:118).

Mastering the art of building consensus was useful to ensure band cohesiveness and for reaching band decisions (Milloy:1988:75). With the sharing of power amongst the community members ensured that the Chief did not bear the burden alone in maintaining harmony and cohesiveness. “[T]he chief’s power was more formally diluted by the separate centres of power that controlled policing, war-making, hunting strategies, and religious observance” (McFarlane:1996:119). When important decisions needed to be made, the Chief had callers who were the official announcers. One caller was the “oca-kit-ostamakew”, held by an elderly man who was honoured with this role. His responsibility was to call for Council meetings. The crier had the responsibility of carrying out the chief’s orders and other matters that were of public interest, for example calling out the occasions of gift-giving (Mandelbaum:1979:109).

Another position was held by an Elder and was referred to as “otepwestamakew”. This role was to call on members who have been invited to the Chief’s tipi (ibid:p.109). Other positions were held as required. When an important matter needed to be discussed a Council meeting was called. When a decision was reached by consensus the Chief’s caller who was the official announcer was responsible to inform the community members of the decision reached. (Milloy:1988:78). Other positions were held that served as Oskapewisak, and these were identified as the helpers. Their role was to help everyone in carrying out their functions (Mandelbaum,1979).

Law

To maintain law and order, the Cree Nations observed their traditional practices and rituals to maintain social order and political functions. The social

order and political functions were developed by the people and were obeyed and respected by the people. As found by Pettipas 1994, "conflicts between families were resolved through established customary laws. The process of conflict resolution generally involved an obligatory mutual exchange of propitiatory gifts"(p.46). Similar to the Ojibway Clan system the Cree Nation political system was structured around forming societies. These societies were called Warrior (Okihitsitawak) Society, Prairie Chicken, Buffalo Society, Rattlers Society and Women's Society each serving an important function in the Tribe. The societies were established to maintain law and order in the community and these "laws [were] made by the people and obeyed by the people" (Ahenakew1973:147). "There were two strong laws that were fundamental to the well-being and safety of the band" (*Ibid.*146). The first of the laws was that no one could separate from the tribe and the other was that no one could start a hunt until all hunters were ready.

According to Mandelbaum(1979), in the Warrior Society, the members would come together and would choose a Warrior Chief whose "authority was confined to those activities performed by the Warriors as a group. He held dances and directed policing operations" (p:113). Any differences were resolved by bringing the parties together and often the Chief would get involved because:

It was incumbent upon the Chief to maintain order and peace in his camp.... gift giving was the socially accepted method of mollifying an aggrieved person and this way, the Chief eased troublesome situations (Mandelbaum:1979:106).

Members of the Warrior Society were those who had influence in the tribe and who had also proven their bravery and courage. "They were both feared and

respected, their authority seldom being questioned” (Ahenakew:1973:147).). I recall an Elder who shared a role that he had in his community. This role was to discipline those who were thought to be misbehaving. He referred to himself as “O-pa-ka-ma-wa-so”. This gave him the authority to correct the behaviour of those that were misbehaving. To carry out his responsibility he carried a stick and children would hide when they saw him coming. While he never actually used the stick he was feared and this fear alone enforced positive behaviour in the community.

Carpenter (1999) shares an experience he had with an Elder who used willows to scare children and in describing his experience, “they had willows sent in so the Elders can feel powerful but not with the intent to hit the children just so that they will understand or listen” (p.221). It was the responsibility of both the Chief and the Warrior Society “to keep peace and order in camp, to step between quarrelling men, to use force, persuasion, gifts, and the influence of the Sacred pipestem in restoring harmony” (ibid:124). The sacred pipestem was used to keep peace among tribal members and was used to make peace with enemies and other tribes. The pipestem bundle was referred to as oskitci and was “three or four feet long, elaborately decorated with quills, beads, furs, and feathers” (Mandelbaum 1979,p.172).

I have come to know the pipestem (oskitci) as the talking stick. I was recently provided with one as a gift from my sister who told me to use it when speaking to the leadership. She reminded me to remind the leadership of the significance of the talking stick and what it was used for. The significance of the oskitci was explained by Fine Day who described it as the most sacred object kept by the Cree Nation. It was said that “ [w]hen a man has a Sacred Pipe Bundle it is as though he has Manitou with him all the time” (Fine Day, 1973:p.18). Manitou is a Cree word for Creator.

As found by Mandelbaum (1979), the oskitci was a sacred bundle that was used to settle disputes and to bring harmony to the tribe. The tribal members knew the significance of the oskitci and everyone respected it when it was present. The person who was the keeper of the oskitci was obligated to be fearless, kind and show big-heartedness as well, he was required to demonstrate self-control and to be an example to other tribal members (p.172).

Fine Day (1973) explains that to be a keeper of a pipestem it was a great responsibility and very often because of the responsibility that came with being a pipestem keeper, many preferred not to take on the responsibility. To be a pipestem keeper the owner "had to have a good heart and [must] never be mad" (p.18). Ray, Miller and Tough (2000), explain that the pipestem was a powerful symbol that was commonly used by the Cree Nations. When the pipestem was used it signified telling the truth during diplomatic negotiations (p.92).

The laws of the Cree Nations were passed on orally and it was the Elders who were the teachers. They taught ethics that encouraged positive behaviour. As taught by their Elders, the Cree Nation were encouraged to maintain social order through self discipline and moral responsibility to the families and to the tribe. The spiritual belief of the Cree Nation is that everything on earth had a spirit and therefore all creation must be treated with respect. As explained by the Commissioners for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

[spirituality]it is a way of life in which people acknowledge that every element of the material world is in some sense infused with spirit, and all human behaviour is affected by, and in turn has an effect in, non-material, spiritual realm. (RCAP:V1:1996:617).

The Cree Nation people understood they were a part of Creation and as a part of creation, they were taught to treat everyone and everything with respect.

This was the law. Showing any kind of disrespect brought consequences to the individual or members of a family. The Cree referred to this as O-ji-na when a spirit was offended. Responsibility was enforced by fear of repercussions that might be brought to the family and tribe should an individual offend the spirits. Ross (1992) explains this concept in his study:

traditional ethics were to a significant degree designed to avoid antagonizing those spirits. After all, they controlled not only the weather but also the fish and game, plants and even the actions of other men. To a large extent, life was lived at the mercy of those elements, which meant that it was lived at the mercy of the spirits which controlled them....(Ross:1992:55).

Thus, "the traditional belief system holds that it is the spirit world which ordains one's fate" (Ross:1992:p:62). The Cree Nation people sought to live their life in harmony and balance. This was an obligation to each member of the Cree Nation to maintain social order. This was a heavy burden to carry, as they did not want to offend the spirits. The belief that a spirit is embedded in all creation is very much real and a part of the lives of all Aboriginal peoples. As a case in point, Rupert Ross (1992), studying the Ojibway culture, found:

[t]o many Native people, the spiritual plane is not simply, a sphere of activity or belief which is separable from the pragmatics of everyday life; instead, it seems to be the context from within which most aspects of life are seen, defined and given significance. (Ross 1992: p:55).

According to Ross, many Aboriginal people found the spirits to be both powerful and real:

They required constant attention. Ignoring their presence was an invitation to disaster at their hands.

Given the constant preoccupation, the design of ethics governing behaviour between people had to incorporate ethics governing how the spirits were treated as well. (*ibid.* p:56).

The concept of suffering consequences when one is not living in balance and in harmony with all creation is understood by the Cree Nation to be part of the natural law. This law is not man made but is part of creation. James Youngblood Henderson (2000), explains:

Most Aboriginal Laws do not have a conception of rights as being something towering above the natural and the social worlds that surround them. Aboriginal law, religion, childrearing, and art all express an ecological unity that is seen as inseparable. This solidarity creates an implicate mechanism by which ecological order presupposes and evokes order in the soul.....Aboriginal people perceive their local ecology, contained it in language, and interpret it to generate Aboriginal legal order. What is defined as law is about living with the forces of the ecosystem, which is understood as a sacred realm. The Algonquian concept of dignity thus becomes a model of proper conduct toward nature and humans, which is transmitted as part of the experience of learning to participate in the great flux (p.271).

Natural law can be best understood as forcing individuals to be respectful, to be kind, caring, loving and having humility and compassion for all living things. When one fails to live by these ethics they offend the spirits and are punished or their family members will suffer the consequences for as long as the spirits remain offended. Milloy (1988), stressed that "it should not be assumedthat individual freedom was boundless. The rule of law (or the rule of custom) is everywhere evident in the structure of coup ranking, in the standardized conduct expected by the warrior society and.... in the Cree religious systems (p:79). Patterson (1972), explained coup ranking as an element of honour that a person gained prestige through acts of bravery (p93). The Warrior Societies were more

for peacekeeping than warfare. They served in keeping peace so that no harm would come to their families.

Spirituality was the way of life taught to individuals early on in childhood; and by the time children became young adults, they knew their moral obligations and what their responsibilities were to ensure their survival as a people.

Spiritual Beliefs

The Cree Nation lived their lives to the fullest. Their belief in the Creator was so strong that the “[p]eople had no worries nor had to think about what will happen to them in the future. The Native people relied and believed in the Creator, that’s what gave them strength”(Carpenter:1999:221). As spiritual people the Cree Nation peoples lived their lives in balance and in harmony with the land:

The Indian had all of Nature, to which he was closely linked; everything was real, throbbing with true life. Nature taught him laws, and in the form of dreams the chosen ones learned how to go about organizing a particular dance or sect (Dion:1996:54).

Various ceremonies were conducted to acknowledge the Creator for providing the Cree Nation people with all the good things in life for their survival. Mandelbaum (1979), describes the ceremonies the Cree Nation performed. These ceremonies were to acknowledge and to show appreciation to the spirits and the Creator for all goods things in life. Ceremonies were held in conjunction with birth, death, marriage, naming, celebrating good life and good health, gift exchange, praying for the welfare of the people and also acknowledging the gifts the Creator gave to the Cree Nation that provided their subsistence. The ceremonies and rituals involved praying, singing, fasting and dancing (p:140).

One event I remember in my community was when a young hunter killed

his first moose. The family would prepare a feast and invite members of the community to come and celebrate. This was a way of acknowledging the first kill of the hunter and also acknowledging the Creator for the successful hunt. There were other feasts that involved acknowledging the birth of a child. These feasts are no longer held in my community as a result of outside influences disrupting our way of life.

Another ceremony that was common was the naming ceremony. It was usually held not long after the birth of a child. People would be invited to come together to partake in a feast and pipe ceremony. "The old man [would light] the pipe and then pray out loud to manito (sic) and to the power who had inspired the name to be bestowed" (Mandelbaum:1979:140). During this ceremony, the spirit guardian from whom the name had come from would be called upon to protect the child during his upbringing. It is believed by the Cree Nation that once a child had received a spiritual name, the child is blessed and would be looked after by the guardian spirits.

Smoking a pipe was a common ritual practiced by the Cree People. The pipe was considered a sacred object because of its connectedness to the Creator. The Cree Nations put the Creator first before they did anything. They believed the Creator put them on this earth and that the Creator will look after them. "That is the way the people lived and worked in the past. It shows today that Creator is looking after the Native people" (Carpenter:1999:225).

Along with pipe ceremonies, the Cree Nations held various dances. Dion (1979) identified these dances as the thirst dance or the sun dance, prairie chicken society dance, buffalo dance, chicken dance, moving camp, horse dance, Witigo dance, wapiti society dance, bear dance, medicine dance, ghost dance, give away dance, and calumet dance. All of these dances served various purposes. As an example, the prairie chicken dance was associated with the

responsibility to the camp. It was a men's dance that involved "brave honest men for they were responsible for keeping the large camp well organized" (Dion:1979:42). Another dance that was held was the calumet dance which was carried out to "create co-operation and a close friendship among the leaders of the various bands" (Ibid:53). The dance involved smoking a pipe:

The pipe was used at important functions such as in peace talks with other tribes. It was also employed as a last resort to dissuade some warriors from carrying out a contemplated rash act such as killing (Dion:1996:52).

The Cree Nation held their ceremonies and dances throughout the different times of the year. This often required them to plan well in advance. A person who pledged to organize a ceremony or a dance was often required to make a commitment to fast or to go off on a vision quest. The religious ceremonies and dances that were organized were not solely to benefit an individual but were often organized for the benefit of the whole tribe. Pettipas (1994) explains:

Giveaway ceremonies functioned to re-affirm pre-existing kinship ties and to establish networks among households and between diverse communities. This practice optimized availability of natural resources, goods, and labour over considerable distances. In addition, the giveaways promoted the cooperation pooling of labour and goods on the part of related households. This cooperation not only increased the headman's ability to distribute goods and better care for his followers, but it also brought prestige to his household (p.56).

The Cree Nations carried their traditional practices into their trading relations with the Hudson Bay Company as found by Ray, Miller and Tough (2000):

First Nations managed to incorporate their traditions into their trading relations with the HBC. Through gift

exchanges and participation in the rite of the calumet they annually renewed their partnerships with the company and granted it right to share their territory for trading purposes. This arrangement was in keeping with the kinds of accords that groups such as the Cree routinely reached with neighbouring First Nations (p.93).

Smoking a sacred pipe was used extensively during the fur trade era when the First Nations became involved with the European fur trade. A gift giving ceremony was always followed after a trade because it served to cement political alliances. Later on in the fur trade, the Hudson's Bay Company "was drawn into the existing native political alliances network and these networks served to channel trade' "(Ray and Freeman1978:60).

Business was always conducted by first smoking the pipe. According to Ray and Freeman (1978), before any trade occurred:

ceremony had to be performed with all of the Indians in attendance. The Indians....smoke[d] the calument (or pipe of peace and friendship) and make a present of furs to the factor, the object of the ceremony was to renew the 'league of friendship,' inspect the trade goods, and view the measures (p:57).

Smoking a pipe signified calling upon the supernatural powers and "[t]he concept underlying pipe offerings to supernaturals was that the spirit powers thus smoked in company with men. Having done this, they were bound to listen to the requests and, if at all possible, to accede to them" (Mandelbaum:1979:228). The smoking of the peace pipe was followed by a gift giving ceremony to acknowledge the spirits for looking after the people.

The dances and ceremonies of the Cree Nation were an integral part of their governing systems. They were held for personal well being and to seek guidance for the good of the tribe. Carpenter (1999) explains the shaking tent ceremony was used for seeing the future (p.238). The Cree are reviving these

ceremonies today.

Egalitarian Structure

The Cree political structure was based on an egalitarian system as found by scholars Ray and Freeman (1978), Brown (1996), and Ross (1992). Everyone was involved in the bands' business for the good of the community. As Ross (1992) explains, "men and women hunted, trapped, fished, harvested and prepared medicines to feed clothe, shelter and keep themselves in good health.... no man or other was inferior to any other" (Ross:1992:xi). Essentially, men and women were equal , "every person was worth something, not only to himself, but the entire community" (ibid:xii). This view is shared by the Cree as found by Victor P. Lytwyn who studied Andrew Grahams records on the northern Cree. According to Lytwyn (2002), Graham found "beaver hunting was a group effort, with several families, including women, children and the elderly, usually participated together" (Lytwyn:2002:107).

Traditional people helped in restoring balance in a community as explained by RCAP 1996:

Setting the problem right was a concern of the whole community, and ceremonialists, medicine persons or shamans were the agents called upon to diagnose the problem and restore balance on behalf of the community" (RCAP V1.p.629).

Societies all took part in the decision making as each head of each society was given an opportunity to express their opinion on a matter concerning band business. As Lytwyn (2002), found in his research of the swampy Cree:

They did not rule with force or dictate the lives of other followers in the same manner as did the European Monarchs. Rather, the authority of....leaders derived from life skills, experience, and wisdom. Leadership was consultative rather than dictatorial. Group

members were able to make independent decisions, but usually followed the advice of their leaders(p.20)

As McFarlane (1996) stated, "consensus politics was not merely a shared value but an integral part of the Native political system" (p:118). Ray and Freeman (1978) describe band leadership as being fluid with little authority. The Chief depended on the consent of his followers (p:15). Ray (1974) described the band leaders as having limited authority (p:137). Mandelbaum (1979) described the Council as an informal affair. When decisions needed to be made by the Chief he had his callers call all leading men in the community to come to a council meeting. Once everyone had gathered, the issue for discussion was presented and each person was given an opportunity to speak. "The youngest spoke first, those of higher rank last. Every man told why he held a particular opinion" (p:109). The decision made by the chief was always reached through consensus and subsequently announced to the people.

The European traders observed very closely how the Cree conducted business in the fur trade. Since decisions were made based on the egalitarian system, the process of trade would take anywhere from three days to a week and was always followed by hosting "gift-exchange ceremonies [which] always preceded barter exchange" (Ray and Freeman:1978;p.55). As Ray and Freeman (1978) described the fur trade, the Cree trade leaders had no authority. However, certain authority was granted to individuals to lead the trade. These individuals were chosen for their skills to negotiate the best trade on behalf of the tribe (p:62).

To demonstrate how the Cree carried out political negotiations in the fur trade economy, Ray and Freeman (1978) analysed the complex trading ceremony that was performed by the Cree when they negotiated a fur trade (Refer to figure 3). According to Ray and Freeman (1978), the trade involved

four phases that began with initial discussion with tribe members who would discuss and strategize amongst themselves the terms for trade. Once this phase was completed the next step involved making the initial contact with the trade factor. The trade factor was an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The Cree chose a leader from their group to serve as their trading captain who was sent forward to make the initial contact with the trade factor. The trade factor was provided with one or two gifts and this phase involved discussing the economic conditions of the trade (Ray and Freeman:1978:p:75). According to Ray and Freeman (1978), when they reviewed the Hudson's Bay documents, they found records that showed Indian trading parties often ranged from 60 to 200 men. In analysing the events that occurred, it is likely that each trading party included a leader from the respective societies of the Cree First Nations. As it was observed by the HBC Trade Factors, the groups would meet amongst themselves to discuss and strategize their approach to trade (p:55).

Once the terms for the trade had been reached the trade would then move on to a third phase where the exchange of trade would actually occur. During this phase, individual Cree people that were delegated by their community to represent their community would begin the process of trading. While the terms had been agreed to in advance this did not stop the Hudson Bay trader from trying to re-negotiate the terms of the trade to the individual Cree representative. The individual Cree representatives however were not easily swayed to change the terms of the trade since it was typical to have consensus as a group. As a result the trade remained the same throughout. The Cree displayed excellent negotiation strategies and they were tough negotiators who were not easily influenced to change the terms of the trade.

Figure 3 illustrates that the Cree had a system in place with which they conducted their business. As shown in phase 1 (refer to figure 3) the Cree

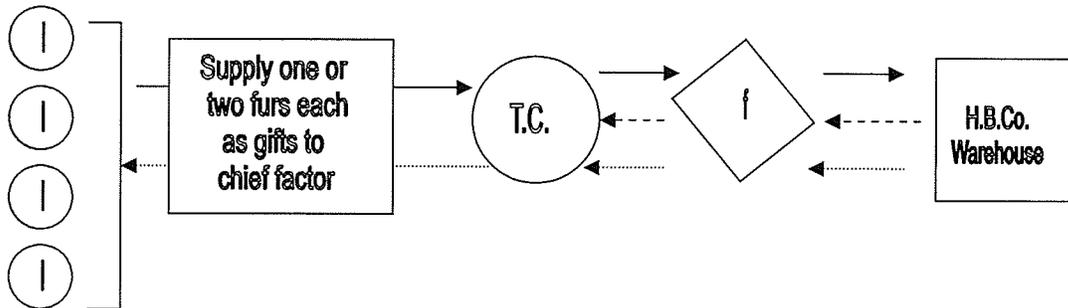
gathered amongst themselves prior to meeting with the Hudson Bay Factor. Their system demonstrated that they followed protocol before making a commitment to trade. The commitment made to each other was held strongly since they could not be persuaded to change the terms of trade.

As governing nations the Cree dominated the activities of the fur trade within their territory. They held this monopoly up until the fur trade began to show signs of decline. The decline came as a result of more competitors moving in and dominating the fur trade. As competitors moved in there was an increase in trapping and an increasing involvement of white settlers in the fur trade industry (Tough:1996).

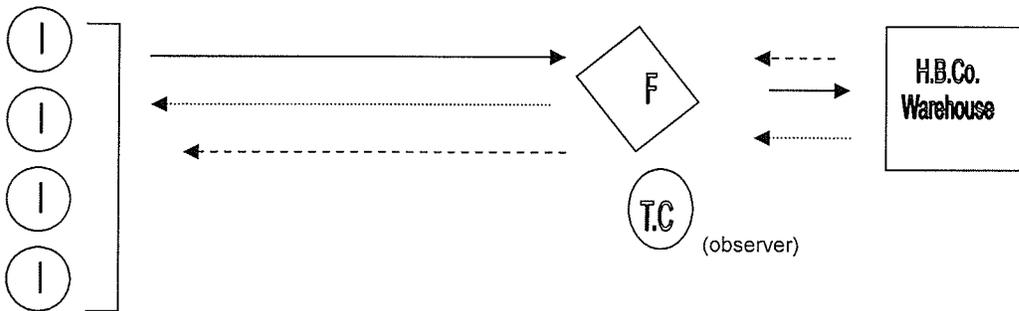
As a result of the fur trade decline, the Cree lifestyle slowly began to change and by 1870, a shift began to take place that required social change and new adjustments for the Cree people. This required the Europeans and the Cree groups to adapt to "new patterns of activity and interaction"(Ray: 1998, p.217). The Cree could no longer depend on the fur trade for their subsistence. "Their cherished freedom, independence and their very survival depended entirely upon the continued availability of the wild range cattle" (Sluman and Goodwill:1982:9).

Figure 3: Phases of Trading Ceremony

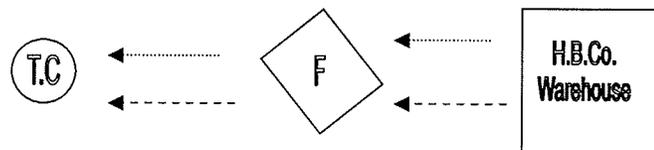
Phase 1: Pre-Trade gift exchange



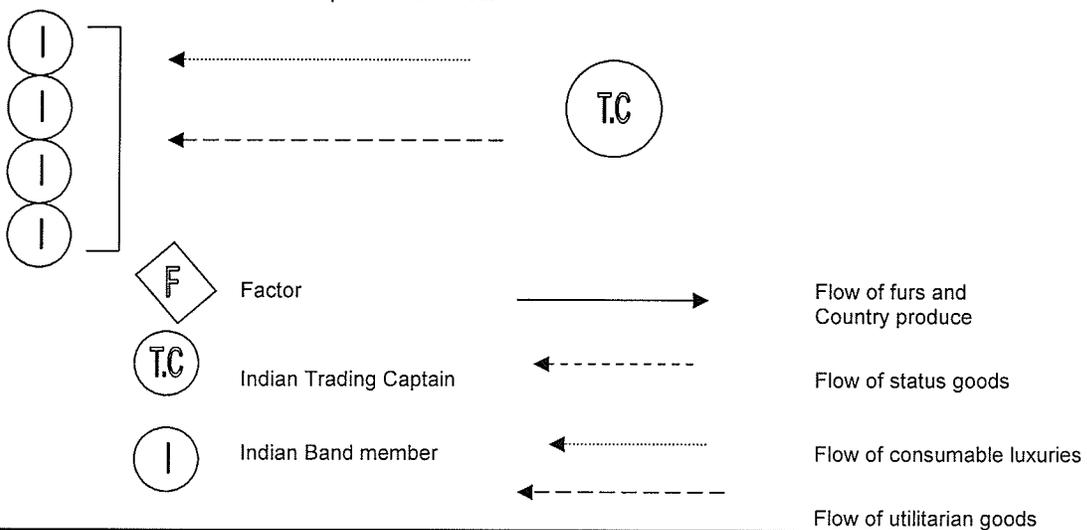
Phase 2: Barter Trade



Phase 3: Gift to trading Captain after Trade



Phase 4: Redistribution of Gifts after Departure from Post



Note: Structure reproduced: Ray and Freeman:1978:p.74

As a result of what was to come and to avoid starvation, the Cree groups began negotiating treaties and:

out of economic necessity... the Indians agreed to settle on reserves with the promise that the government would look after their welfare and help them make yet another adjustment to changing economic conditions" (Ray, 1998.p.228).

Negotiating treaties was a practice that was common to the Cree people, as they often negotiated treaties with neighbouring tribes. The treaties were either to establish peace treaties, to govern the use of territorial lands and resources or simply to establish alliances. As found by the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People:

Aboriginal nations formed alliances and confederacies that continued into the contact period, with treaties serving to establish and solidify the terms of the relationship. Protocols between nations were maintained conscientiously to ensure that friendly and peaceful relationships prevailed (RCAP.V1:p.120)

Thus, the treaties negotiated by the Cree were treaties negotiated between two governing nations, the Cree and the Government of Canada. The treaties were negotiated for the well-being and survival of a people who could no longer rely on living off the land. The treaties negotiated were not for land surrenders as the Cree understood the land was a part of Mother Earth and that no one person or group owned the land. The Cree saw themselves as more of caretakers of the land to be shared for all survival.

Treaty Negotiations

As more settlers were coming in and claiming settlement on Aboriginal land there was fear of potential hostilities between the Aboriginal people and

settlers over land disputes. As a result of this fear, it became urgent for the British Crown to take action and ensure there would be no hostilities. To protect its own interest and the interest of Aboriginal people, the British Crown issued a public declaration. This declaration was developed on the basis of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. An excerpt from the Royal Proclamation of 1763 stated in part:

And where it is just and reasonable, and essential to Our Interests and the Security of our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians, with whom We are connected, and who live under Our Protection should not be molested or disturbed..... (RCAP, 1996.V1.P.116).

The recognition that Aboriginal Nations were autonomous political nations was confirmed under the Royal Proclamation of 1763. As explained by Isaac (1995):

aboriginal People had their own forms of government, social organizations, and economies. It is on this premise - that Aboriginal peoples have used and occupied these lands- the doctrine of Aboriginal Title....has developed. ... the first and most significant instrument recognizing the nature and scope of Aboriginal Title is the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (p:1).

At the time of the Royal Proclamation it was understood that Indians would be under protection from white settlements. Being under Royal Protection also "meant that domestic legal arrangements were of the concern of the Indians themselves, but foreign policy regarding the British and other colonial powers was under British Control" (Smith: 1975,p.xv). Shortly after 1763, the colonial administration directed instructions to Governor Murray to provide a listing of all nations and tribes that were to come under protection of the British Crown. The instructions included providing details on how the tribes were living their lives and it included the rules and constitutions governing them (Smith: 1975). As it was

common, any policies that were directed in dealing with Indian affairs these policies likely applied to all Aboriginal Nations.

The Royal Proclamation eventually laid the framework for negotiating treaties with all Aboriginal Nations. The first treaty that was negotiated was during pre-confederation before Canada. During this period, strategic considerations and military tactics were used to bring the Aboriginal Nations to treaty. The treaty making during this period was motivated by territorial control of Aboriginal Lands that ended around 1862. Two significant set of treaties were signed. These were known as the Robinson/Huron Treaty and the Robinson/Superior Treaty and they were referred to as the Robinson Treaties (Frideres,1998, Boldt,1993, Ray, Miller and Tough,2000). The Robinson Superior Treaty “specifies that subsurface resources will be sold for the benefit of the band as a whole and is only by order of the superintendent-General of Indian Affairs” (Smith 1975.p.xxvi). Subsequently, these treaties came to shape the treaties of post-confederation (Boldt 1993). The post-confederation treaties were negotiated after Canada came into existence. These treaties are referred to as the numbered treaties that included treaties 1 to 11. The treaties in Manitoba include Treaty 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and Treaty 10. They were signed between 1871 and 1910 (Ray, Miller and Tough, 2000). The Cree Nation treaties include Treaty 1, Treaty 4, and Treaty 5, Treaty 6 and Treaty 10 (Refer to figure 4). The largest is Treaty 5 covering most of northern Manitoba and “parts of the Interlake, the lower Saskatchewan River, and the Canadian Shield country around Lake Winnipeg” (Tough, 1996:p.80)

The post-confederation treaties were motivated by an economic scheme for the settlers. The Aboriginal Nations were driven by their need for survival and well-being. The treaties negotiated under Treaty 5 negotiations were complex as they were not simply for control of land for habitation purposes. As found by

Tough (1996), the treaties were driven by economic schemes as “[f]rom the beginning, government officials knew that various forms of wealth could be obtained from Indian lands”(p.81). Thus, treaties were negotiated for purposes of exploitation of resources such as timber, minerals and commercial benefits such as fishing, water navigation rights and railroad development.

Figure 4.

Date Signed	First Nation	Treaty Number
August, 1871	Peguis First Nation	Treaty 1
September 1874	Sapotaweyak Cree Nation Wuskwi Siphk Cree Nation	Treaty 4
September 1875	Norway House Cree Nation Pimicikamak Cree Nation Grand Rapids First Nation	Treaty 5
September 1876	Opaskwayak Cree Nation Mosakahiken First Nation Chemahawin First Nation Fisher River Cree Nation	
	Mathias Colomb First Nation Marcel Colomb First Nation	Treaty 6
	Barrens Land First Nations (Brochet)	Treaty 10

Treaty 5 negotiations took place over several decades. These began in 1875, with adhesions being added until 1910. As a case in point, the adhesions to Treaty 5 did not occur until thirty years later simply because the land in the north was not required for settlement, nor was it viable for agricultural purposes.

There was no need to sign treaty with the Cree in northern Manitoba despite their request for treaty. Treaty only occurred when it became apparent that land was required for railroad development and other economic reasons. As explained by Tough (1996), “the intent to build a railroad to Hudson Bay had become more realistic...this provided the main rationale for the extension of Treaty-Five”(p.105).

The northern Cree Nation who are signatories to Treaty 5 include Tataskweyak Cree Nation(Split Lake), Nisichawaysihk Cree Nation (Nelson House), Bunibonibee Cree Nation (Oxford House), Gods Lake First Nation(Gods Lake Narrows), Manto Sipi Cree Nation (God’s River), St.Theresa Point First Nation, Wasagamack First Nation, Garden Hill First Nation, Red Sucker Lake First Nation, York Factory First Nation, Fox Lake First Nation, and Shamattawa First Nation (Refer to figure 5).

Figure 5.

Adhesions to Treaty 5	
Tataskweyak Cree Nation(Split Lake)	Nisichawaysihk Cree Nation (Nelson House)
Bunibonibee Cree Nation (Oxford House)	York Factory First Nation
Manto Sipi Cree Nation (God’s River)	Gods Lake First Nation (Gods Lake Narrows)
Fox Lake First Nation	St.Theresa Point First Nation
Shamattawa First Nation	Wasagamack First Nation
War Lake First Nation	Garden Hill First Nation
	Red Sucker Lake First Nation

At the time of treaty discussions with the northern Cree, there was much discussion by the Federal government and the Department of Indian Affairs on

how to deal with the northern Cree. Options were considered that included setting up a new treaty or adding the northern Cree to an existing treaty such as Treaty 5 or Treaty 10. A new treaty meant new government commitments and an adhesion meant paying back any annuities lost as a result of earlier treaties. Adding them to Treaty 10 meant a large annuity and a lesser annuity for Treaty 5. However, "it appears that the department planned to avoid paying large arrears by offering only small gratuity, and at the last moment it decided to use an adhesion to Treaty Five for all bands" (Tough, 1996:p. 106). Although the northern Cree tried to negotiate a new treaty, their concerns were not heard. Instead, their treaty was dictated, and in the end they received the cheapest treaty government could provide.

When treaty negotiations first began, they were "staged carefully with bands, flags, dress uniforms, pomp, ceremony, and high-flown oratory.... [the Cree] could relate to it in terms of their own culture where mutual aid and concern for one another were necessities for survival of the group" (Sluman and Goodwill:1982:5). The treaty negotiations made promises that the Cree people would be cared for and that they would be able to continue living their lives as they have always done (Tough:1996). The message received from the Indian Commissioners was that the great mother the Queen would care for the Indians and that Indian Nations could continue to live their lives as they had always done. Promises could not be different as it would not be fair to other tribes who agreed to treaty. Pettipas (1994), explains how a treaty was understood by the Plains Cree:

It was also understood that the Cree could select their lands freely and they could settle onto their reserves with minimal interference in their lives. Undoubtedly, of equal importance to the Cree were government promises that their cultural autonomy was not a point of

negotiation. For them, the treaties were guarantees that they could continue to live in their territories according to their customary ways and that they could receive assistance in establishing an alternate economic base (p.68).

Since the Cree people were spiritual people, they believed that they were negotiating their treaties in good faith. Dion (1979), describes the basis on which the Cree negotiated their treaties:

We Cree took everything in good faith. We honestly believed that this was truly a new era, that the great Manito, the Father of All, had decreed that this white man would henceforth be ours to lean on (p:77).

Furthermore, the treaties negotiated were understood to be negotiated between nations and were based on friendship. “[G]ifts such as flags and medals enhanced the illusion that [the treaties] were pacts of friendship and the mutual assistance between nations” (McMillon:1995:319). However, shortly after the first signing of the treaties, significant changes began to take place that disrupted not only the traditional lifestyle of the Cree people but also destroyed their egalitarian structure. “The reserves became burdened with new laws and regulations”(Dion:1993:79).

Among the changes, the status of the leader changed and it “shifted from traditional informal leadership to an elected chief and councilors [sic]”(McMillan 1995:120). No longer were leaders selected based on accomplishments or skills as great hunters and providers. Leaders were chosen based on an election system and the “Chief no longer held supreme command; he was expected by the Indian agent to set an example for his followers, and to adhere to the dictates imposed on all treaty Indians” (Dion:1993:79). Anyone who was found not following the dictates of the Indian Commissioner was considered dissident and unruly and was therefore subject to incarceration (Pettipas, 1994). “The

“civilization” and “assimilation” of Indians into the dominant society through paternalistic social programs and legislation were the long-term objectives supported by the Canadian government” (Pettipas, 1994:p.41).

Dismantling Cree Governance

By 1830, an Indian policy had already been created that led to schemes to dismantle the Aboriginal nations. A plan was set out “to begin the process of dismantling Aboriginal nations and integrating their populations into the burgeoning settler society around them” (RCAP: V1:1996:138). The plan to “civilize” Aboriginal groups became the most important mission for the European settlers. Their approach to civilization led to the displacement of Aboriginal groups:

Aboriginal peoples were displaced physically- they were denied access to their traditional territories and in many cases actually forced to move to new locations selected for them by colonial authorities. They were displaced socially and culturally, subject to intensive missionary activity and establishments of schools - which undermined their ability to pass on traditional values to their children, imposed male-oriented Victorian values, and attacked traditional activities such as significant dances and other ceremonies.... they were displaced politically, forced by colonial laws to abandon or at least disguise traditional governing structures and processes in favour of colonial style government (RCAP, 1996.V1:139).

A legislative framework was established to deal with Indian affairs. By 1876, an Indian Act had been created and a department known as the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs was established to implement the policies of the Indian Act. The superintendent for the department was given all the authority to deal with all Aboriginal affairs. The powers held by the

superintendent allowed the department to do almost anything they wanted and they were able to dictate the policies as they saw fit. By 1885, dissident leaders had been disposed of and their followers were forced to settle on reserves. "[T]he reserves now became places of confinement, where government programs of transformation and legislative regulations would be unilaterally enforced" (Pettipas:1994,p.72).

The Indian Act provided the legal basis by which policies prevented Aboriginal peoples from practicing their traditional cultures and healing practices. Other policies led to the removal of children from their home environment for educational purposes. Removing children from their home environment was not only for the purpose of education but it was a way to remove them from the influences of their parents. The Department of Indian Affairs recognized in order to succeed in assimilating the Cree, they would do it through the removal of their children. The children were placed in residential schools where they received western education operated by the churches and the government. The children learned western values and customs and began ignoring their own values and traditional customs. This process led to forcing the Aboriginal peoples to abandon their traditional culture and customs.

The success in converting Aboriginal people was accomplished through the support of missionaries who were very influential in converting Aboriginal people to Christianity. I recall a story my mother-in-law once shared with me about missionary work in the York Factory area. She remembers as a child seeing missionaries working in her community. Families were segregated where the women were taken to one part of the community, the men to another location and the children to another location where they learned and sang hymns all day long. Those who did not participate were punished by not getting their food ration. This approach further led to the abandonment of their traditional customs,

values and practices.

The result of the efforts put forth by the Department of Indian Affairs to assimilate and Christianize the Cree Nation destroyed a kinship system that once kept the family foundation strong. As an example, "where disputes would have been settled internally between families, the headman were now instructed to intervene and they were personally responsible for the maintenance of law and order" (Pettipas:1994, p.72). This was the beginning of the creation of male dominated Aboriginal families. The department continued to select certain male figures in the Aboriginal communities to explain and defend departmental policies. As explained by Pettipas,1994:

The elected chief and council were considered, in effect, to be employee's of the Department and were expected to work closely with the Indian administration (p.72)

The people as a collective were no longer involved in any decision making as decisions were being made on their behalf. In the absence of their traditional practices, values and customs, there was no longer harmony in the community. Elders who were once valued and respected for their knowledge and wisdom were no longer respected:

The elders were viewed by the Department and, eventually, by many of their own people, as "unprogressive". Their power and authority were constantly challenged and at times ridiculed by the Department's employees, mission teachers, and even the more acculturated graduates from the Indian schools who were taught to reject their own cultural values and ways (Pettipas, 1994.p.73).

From the time the Indian Act was implemented, it undermined the Cree Nation traditional governance by disrupting it and replacing it with a new political system. As explained by RCAP (1996):

This new system required that chiefs and councillors be

elected for three-year terms, with election terms and conditions to be determined by the superintendent general as he saw fit. Elected Chiefs could be disposed by federal authorities for "dishonesty, intemperance or immorality." None of the terms was defined, and the application of these criteria for dismissal was left to the discretion of the Indian Affairs officials upon receiving a report from the local Indian agent (V1:p. 275).

Elections were being carried out every two to four years and regardless of the community population, there was only one chief elected and for every one hundred band members' only one councillor was elected. Under the Indian Act, the Chief and Council, receive their power and authority from the Federal Government.

Over the years, the Indian Act slowly changed, giving Aboriginal peoples more involvement in band elections and also to allow Aboriginal peoples the freedom to practice their traditional culture. This change introduced band custom elections and many Aboriginal communities have since adopted band custom elections. The idea behind band custom was that Aboriginal peoples would incorporate their own traditional custom of electing chief and council. As Boldt 1993, explains:

The 1951 Indian Act gives bands the option of following a 'customary regime' instead of the 'Indian Act regime' of band council selection. Under the 'customary' option, bands are permitted to some discretion in leadership selection procedures (p.121)

While the band custom gave Aboriginal communities discretionary powers, the power and authority for matters such as law making, judicial matters and administration continued to remain within the jurisdiction of the federal government. As an example, some communities who operate under band custom and pass a community by-law, risk having that by-law being over turned by the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs. As well, certain activities can be

carried out on behalf of the Aboriginal communities. These activities can include the creation and implementation of policies to deal with Aboriginal matters.

A good example is the Governance Act, a bill recently introduced to the House of Commons to make amendments to the Indian Act. These amendments will make changes respecting leadership selection, administration and accountability of Indian Bands. Aboriginal people did not have any say in regards to the proposed amendments. As a case in point, I recently attended an information session to learn more about the Governance Act. Aboriginal people who attended the meeting raised a number of concerns and enquired if their concerns would be reflected in the Governance Act before being implemented. The response by the government representatives was that no changes would be made to the Governance Act. Their only responsibility was to conduct information sessions to the Aboriginal population to help them understand what the Governance Act would do for them. What I understood that day was that the Indian Act regime is still very much in control over the daily lives of Aboriginal people. The Minister for Indian and Northern Affairs continues, to affect the way Aboriginal peoples govern themselves. The Indian Act undermined the traditional governing system of the Cree Nation and continues to influence all Aboriginal matters such as political structures, land, resources and economic development which remain in affect today.

Today, Aboriginal peoples have been searching for ways to recover and restore their traditional governance systems through Aboriginal self-government. Discussions have been ongoing with Canada to establish a new relationship that will bring solutions to the lives of Aboriginal peoples and to restore Aboriginal political systems based on Aboriginal values and traditional customs. The next section discusses how this process is developing within Manitoba with specific reference being made to the northern Cree.

Chapter Five

The Manitoba Framework Agreement Initiative- A Brief Overview

In 1994, the First Nations in Manitoba took steps towards planning for self-government and this process was to occur within the next ten years. As discussed in Chapter One, the Framework Agreement Initiative (FAI) was initiated to begin dismantling the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. The First Nations of Manitoba viewed the FAI as transferring the federal responsibility to First Nations control. The plan of First Nations is to restore their First Nations governments to their jurisdiction consistent with the inherent right to self-government. First Nations assert that their right to govern themselves as derived from the Creator and that this right was never relinquished. Thus, when the FAI agreement was signed it was on this premise that the First Nations of Manitoba proceeded to move forward with the FAI. To accomplish their task, a work plan was laid out to meet three primary objectives:

To dismantle the existing departmental structures of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development; To develop and recognize First Nation governments in Manitoba legally empowered to exercise the authorities required to meet the needs of the peoples of the First Nations and; To restore to First Nations governments the jurisdictions (including those of the other federal departments) (A.M.C, 1994, p. 2).

To meet its objectives, the FAI hired community coordinators to assist in implementation. Several committees were also established to guide and provide advice to the process. These committees were the Chiefs' Committee on Dismantling, Political Overview Committee, Project Management Committee, Joint Committee on Dismantling, Technical Advisory Committee and Joint Review Committee. In total there were forty-four people involved in these

committees, each bringing certain expertise and skills to the process. Other AMC and government departmental people were invited as required (MKO: 1998).

During the first five years, the FAI concentrated on informing community members on the intent of the FAI. This involved conducting a consultation process and sharing of information on the workplan. Introductory workshops were held on governance and the constitution and an information gathering and a fact-finding process was carried out. Community profiles and an Elder's survey was conducted to determine the past, present and future government structures. FAI sought to ensure that First Nations were well informed. An information newspaper was distributed on a monthly basis and a major document, entitled "Governance Options Paper", was produced and distributed to each First Nation community. Other resource materials were distributed during the consultation phase. A weekly radio program, FAI Live, broadcasted and a sixteen-minute video was produced. Also, a video on housing conditions was produced entitled "Wrapped in Plastic" and distributed to all First Nation communities.

Working in partnership with the Government of Canada, an arrangement was made to place qualified First Nations people to work in federal government offices. This arrangement was considered as training First Nations to become knowledgeable of mainstream government systems. Ten First Nation individuals were selected throughout Manitoba and placed in government departments. These ten were referred to as the "10 best and brightest" by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Department for Indian and Northern Affairs. Their job was to learn the system and:

to assist the First Nations in learning the functions of the other government systems appropriate to First Nations governances and communicate expertise

developed towards the formulation of First Nations Governments in Manitoba as envisioned in the Agreement (AMC:2000:ix).

First Nations recognized when they began the FAI process that they would be dealing with a number of complex issues. Therefore, they anticipated there would be some controversies due to the nature of the objectives to be achieved (AMC:2000:v). To ensure FAI was carrying out its objectives, the FAI was committed to conducting a review and evaluation process when it reached its third, sixth and tenth year.

When the FAI reached its third year of operation, arrangements were made to carry out a third year review. This involved implementing a joint review committee and management team to assist with the evaluation process. Terms of reference were developed with meetings that started in December 1997 (AMC 1999). The third year review and evaluation carried into the fourth year with the final report being submitted towards the end of the fourth year. The review took place in 1998 and was conducted by MAANG Associates, a research firm led by Dr. Don McCaskill, Professor for Native Studies at Trent University. The three-year review report identified a numbers of issues and concerns leading to 35 recommendations. The issues that were identified recommended a refocus on the following.

- Enhanced role for Elders in discussion and decision-making;
- Healing and capacity building;
- DIAND's role and responsibilities to be clearly defined;
- Guaranteed long-term financial stability for the process;
- Formal negotiations be resumed;
- Communities be assessed for various consultation strategies; and
- Human resources and infrastructure impacts be monitored (AMC:2000).

The report noted the complexities of the FAI process:

ambitious Work Plans, lengthy negotiations over the funding of the FAI, the submissions of deliverables, different notions about the amount of funding required by the FAI, the FAI heavy workload, and the efforts required to keep Chiefs on side with the FAI” (McCaskill, Harvey, Williams, and Jacobs:1999:v).

Difficulties and lack of progress on the FAI process arose because “there was no common vision or shared goals of FAI” (*ibid.v*). Despite the challenges identified in the third year review, the Government of Canada and First Nations were committed to continue moving the FAI process forward. A step-by-step approach to renew the FAI was identified as one of the recommendations under the three-year review. The approach was to be considered as a blueprint with structures and activities to be undertaken; and it was anticipated that over the next three years there would be significant results showing that the First Nations were moving forward in self-government (McCaskill, Harvey, Williams, and Jacobs: 1999). The FAI proceeded to move forward with community awareness and consultation, with an overall goal of defining their government structure.

As far as the AMC was concerned the FAI was achieving accomplishments. Their accomplishments included meeting the consultation phase that involved creating awareness on the FAI process; information gathering, fact finding processes; workshops on constitutions and government structures; and consultation dealing with constitutional and structural components. The FAI community coordinators were submitting their reports as they were completing their tasks. Their reports were identified as deliverables. Their deliverables included; what their constitution should look like and its major components; revised goals and principles of First Nations governments, citizenship, fundamental rights and freedoms of First Nations governments and jurisdiction, powers of government and leadership executive functions of First

Nations governments (AMC:1999)

However, when the FAI went to negotiate their funding for its fifth year of operation with the Federal Government, the AMC was not prepared for what was to happen next. All the FAI funding ceased, when they thought that the FAI was moving along and making progress despite its challenges. The Chiefs Committee on Dismantling was left to answer the questions of what happened? What went wrong? According to MKO, they believe one of failures of the FAI was that they were spending too much time on administration and attending to meetings which impacted on their progress and in meeting their overall activities in the FAI (MKO:1999).

What had transpired to date would be a reflection on their role and capacity as leaders, because the initiative that was signed committed the Chiefs to be accountable to the process. Therefore, the responsibility was upon them to provide answers to the Federal Government on what happened. Ultimately, this would require them to bring the FAI back on track.

Reflecting Back on FAI

From the beginning, the Chiefs of Manitoba recognized that planning for self- government for the whole province was not going to be an easy task. This recognition came from trying out past initiatives. As a case in point, First Nations worked diligently for over a decade to increase control over their own education programs and services, a process they had been pursuing before the FAI came into effect. However, their negotiations on the component of self-government stalled. No further progress resulted in the education framework agreement. First Nations and the federal government could not reach an agreement. Despite stalled negotiations on the education self government framework, the Chiefs of Manitoba proceeded to move forward in planning for a province wide self-

government model, as they viewed this concept as moving them away from federal control.

The FAI is consistent with the inherent right to self-government. It is on this basis that First Nations of Manitoba have continued to move forward in planning for self-government. Indeed, planning for self-government for a whole province was the most ambitious initiative ever undertaken. The FAI set out to meet its objective by carrying out specific tasks and assignments that would lead to creating a fully functional self-government model. The idea behind a fully functioning self-government model was that First Nations would have exclusive powers to effectively serve their membership regardless of where they live. These powers were to be exercised by assuming administrative, legislative, judicial, and executive control over their own affairs. As First Nations plan to exercise their powers off the reserve boundary, the Manitoba First Nations recognized the need to define the powers they will hold and to negotiate these powers with other governments such as the Provincial government.

To create a fully functioning First Nations government, the FAI took a number of issues into consideration. These required research, review, analysis and discussion. The areas include jurisdictions, fiscal relations and governance. Under jurisdictions First Nations were to identify the scope of powers they would have in various jurisdictional areas. As well, they were to look at options for fiscal relations and means of attaining their economy, protection and management of lands, resources and management. Under governance, they were to define their concepts of governing structures and self-government

models and how it impacts on jurisdictions and conflicts with law (AMC, 2000).

Three projects were also identified in the FAI as expedited items. The areas that were considered were education, fire and emergency services and capital. These projects were selected because of the extensive work that had already been undertaken and the FAI would just build on the work that had already started. As a case in point, the education component proceeded as far as developing an education framework agreement and all that was required was to continue with the negotiations to deal with legislative and jurisdictional matters. Under capital, First Nations were to define how they were going to transfer capital management by identifying their government framework and the scope of powers they would exercise. Under fire and emergency services, First Nations were to identify how they would develop the program and deal with matters such as jurisdictional and legislative issues (AMC 1994). The idea in moving these projects forward was that the three expedited items would result in achieving practical and tangible results in a short period of time. In addition to the three expedited items, the AMC planned to target the child and family services program as an expedited item since much work had already started in this area.

First and foremost, the FAI was to be community driven and any outcomes were to be reached through consensus of the people:

outcomes must grow out of consensus of the people of the First Nations and out of their history, culture and institutions. Outcomes cannot be imposed. Moreover, consultation and communications throughout the Project must be focused (sic) on, and delivered primarily by, individual First Nations communities and tribal councils in order to ensure the widest possible support and maximum absorption of

information and decision making (AMC:1994:4)

It was recognized that individual communities would be directly affected by whatever decisions were going to be made. Thus, to ensure its success, the FAI depended on the FAI community coordinators to carry out the objectives at the community level. They were to work with their community members to mobilize them to become involved in preparing for self-government. Thus, the workplan, as laid out by the FAI, was reviewed and expanded upon according to the desires of each community coordinator. Then, before being implemented, the workplan was taken to each chief and council for their input and endorsement.

Manitoba First Nation leaders have always maintained their capability to run their own affairs as their ancestors had done in the past. They have stated over and over again at their meetings and at their assemblies that there was nothing difficult about dismantling the Manitoba Regional office of the Department of Indian Affairs. The Chiefs saw this process as simply moving in and taking over what was there. Creating awareness was not seen as a difficult task since all that was involved was letting all First Nations members know about the FAI process and ensuring their involvement. The Chiefs were very confident that the Manitoba First Nations were ready and prepared to participate fully in planning for self-government at the local level.

However, what the Chiefs had not anticipated was that some of the FAI coordinators would run into problems at the community level. These problems included the lack of community involvement that was vital to producing deliverables. Without community involvement, the FAI coordinators were left to submit whatever information they were able to access from those who attended

their community workshops. As a result, the lack of data coming in made it made it difficult for the FAI to make a full assessment of its consultation process. (AMC:1999).

Some of the FAI coordinators found themselves in the middle of an administrative tangle. Without deliverables their community would not receive its program funding from the FAI head office. It was agreed by the parties of FAI that three equal payments would be made and that the work to be completed would coincide with these payments (AMC:1994). The amount of responsibilities placed on the FAI community coordinators was tremendous. They were overburdened and overworked as they were expected to carry out a number of task assignments at the same time. While training was provided to the FAI coordinators to ensure the project's success, the training did not necessarily prove successful. The coordinators often changed frequently, causing a delay in producing deliverables. As well, many of the FAI coordinators were undereducated and were not able to comprehend all the concepts surrounding self-government (Bennet:2001). As a result, some coordinators required training in basic areas such as what was meant by government, Indian Act, treaties and various legislation processes (AMC, 1997).

The frustration over the FAI process and understanding the components began very early but these concerns were not adequately rectified. Instead, the FAI tried to accommodate the process to ensure the project was moving forward. The FAI community coordinators continued to receive various training that included topics on the constitution, citizenship, law making, judicial systems,

executive branch, jurisdictions and accountability issues. The training they received was a top down driven exercise delivered by the FAI main office. The idea behind this training was to give the community coordinators ideas to formulating their own governing structure. It was expected that the community coordinators would share the information they received from their training with community members. In turn their input and feedback would define how the community would govern itself based on the concepts that were being shared.

One of the many components of FAI was to interview the Elders to gain their feedback on the past, present and future governance. Based on the Elders' feedback, there was a strong call to build a governance system based on First Nations traditional culture and values. However, this recommendation would pose some problems to many of the First Nations communities since many did not understand their traditional culture and values. Again, the community coordinators were provided training on traditional knowledge and culture and were expected to share this information. It was anticipated that community members would use this information to develop a governance model based on the information received.

While the FAI coordinators were submitting their data to the FAI head office, management was working diligently in trying to make sense of all the data that was coming in. However, the flow of information was fragmented since the communities were working at a pace determined by their membership and the data that was being submitted was not coming at the same time. As stated by Bennet, 2001, there are approximately 10 sector groups working under the FAI

and:

[m]any of these sectors are developed in isolation and often operate with inadequate funding and staffing requirements. Funding requirements, fragmentation of sectors, and continuity in the overall progress are extremely important factors that could impede upon the success of FAI (Oakes, Riewe, Bennet and Chisholm:20001:192)

The FAI coordinators persevered in seeking to meet all of the FAI objectives, with a lot of time being spent on consultation and information gathering. Any areas that posed some difficulties were put aside to be dealt with at a later time. One of the problems that was set aside was identifying the urban First Nation members. FAI coordinators observed that their community band lists were not up to date and many First Nations were transient. Therefore, it was difficult to contact the urban First Nations members for their input.

The FAI could not meet its time-lines as they had set out and to speed up the process was impossible as the communities were moving at their own pace. The FAI could not lead the process since they committed to work in a "pace that conforms to the needs of First Nations for consultation, deliberation and decision-making" (AMC1994. p.4). Thus, when the FAI completed its three-year review, they were suddenly left with no funding to continue. Some of the FAI coordinators were laid off and immediate plans were adopted to put the FAI back on track.

A Strategy for FAI

Withdrawal of federal financial support brought a quick reaction from the Chiefs of Manitoba who, after a review of its current situation, agreed to adopt a different strategy. On April 13, 1999, the former Grand Chief of the AMC, Rod

Bushie, accompanied by Michael Lawrenchuk, former co-chair of the FAI and Chief Harvey Nepinak, former Co-Chair for Economic Development, went before the Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples in Ottawa, Canada. This meeting was to address funding concerns and to request support from the Senators to convince Canada to return to the negotiating table to proceed to the next level of the FAI process (Proceedings of the Senate Standing Committee:1999: Issue 25).

The Manitoba Chiefs in Assembly provided the Chiefs Committee for FAI the authority to make all decisions pertaining to the FAI process. The three Grand Chiefs of Manitoba were supported through a resolution to lead the negotiations with the Minister for DIAND. Grand Chief Dennis Whitebird from AMC, former Grand Chief Francis Flett from MKO and Grand Chief Margaret Swan of SCO proceeded to negotiate continued funding from the Minister for DIAND. The negotiations between the Minister for DIAND and First Nations went back and forth until the Minister finally agreed to allow the First Nations to continue with the FAI process but with new conditions attached. One of the conditions placed upon the FAI was to discontinue the consultation phase and concentrate all efforts in producing tangible results by focusing in four programs areas. The four areas are child and family services, education, governance and fiscal relations. Another condition was to ensure there were deliverables and to sign an agreement to move the FAI to a next stage. To accomplish the task, the work was split up between the three organizations. It was agreed that AMC would address fiscal relations and education, MKO would address governance

and child and family services and SCO would address natural resources.

FAI as a Workable Model

As a workable model, FAI was to encompass full legislative control and program control, complete with all the functions of a self-governing Aboriginal authority. First Nations scope of powers were to be clearly defined including how these power would be exercised to all First Nations within their defined jurisdictional powers. AMC was confident that their self- government planning would proceed smoothly. However, Bennet (2001) found while working on the southern Child and Family Services /FAI project, the CFS FAI process fell short in achieving its goal of developing a program to reflect First Nations familial values and customs and she stated:

To date, there has been little progress towards that goal but it is not for lack of trying but rather extends from the restrictions imposed upon the autonomy of First Nations agencies under the delegated model of Provincial authority. The reluctance of the provincial government to vacate the reigns over child and family matters to First Nations communities also plays a roll, which impedes upon that desire (Oakes, Riewe, Bennet and Chisholm:2001:184).

Bennet adds that while nine First Nations child and family agencies had emerged, their mandates were restricted to their geographical reserve boundaries excluding First Nations living off reserve. Although First Nations agencies had gained some autonomy over agency-specific policy development, the contentious issue of provincial jurisdiction remained (p.184)

Since Bennets' research, First Nations in Manitoba have made some progress in working towards gaining jurisdiction over the off reserve membership. The First Nations of Manitoba recently signed an agreement referred to as the

Memorandum of Understanding giving them the authority to pursue a province wide mandate to deliver child and family services to their membership. This mandate however will not relinquish Provincial responsibility. All it means is that First Nations will have an authority to provide services to all their members. First Nations will still have to follow Provincial guidelines, standards, policies and regulations.

Perhaps the FAI as a workable model was only a dream that would not come to reality as it was only moving as far as it was allowed to move. As an example, First Nations who were pursuing control over their health programs and services were ready to increase their control but were not able to advance themselves because of inadequate funding. This was due to the 'no enrichment policy' that was imposed on health transfer and because of this policy First Nations were not able to expand their health services. "The policy clearly states that there is no provision for enhancement of services and programs; that is, communities are supposed to assume control over existing services, but cannot expect additional dollars for new services" (Warry:1998:p.97).

The problem in having policy and program development controlled by the provincial and federal departments is that their objectives and criteria do not often meet the needs of First Nations own governing institutions. As well, it limits the accountability of First Nations. First Nations require full control over their program and policy framework to meet their own governing institutions. Their framework will define all their priorities and identify what is required to implement their self-government process. More importantly, First Nations with full power and authority will be able to build confidence, trust and the security needed in building sound governance.

During the AMC Special Chiefs Assembly held on March 5-9, 2001, at the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, the Chiefs at the Assembly raised criticism that the

FAI was no longer community driven and that the terms for the continuation of the FAI process was now based on meeting the government agenda controlled by the Federal Government. The former Tribal Chief J.R Yellowback of Keewatin Tribal Council, stated:

It is very obvious that the new approach or the vision is not our agenda anymore. Therefore, we are faced with paternalism from the Federal Government representatives and we will again experience problems when we try to implement our vision of self-government (AMC.2001).

It was decided by the Chiefs of Manitoba to put all future FAI activities on hold for six months to allow the management of the FAI to finalize all its deliverables. Another assembly was to be held to discuss the future of FAI. While the FAI was being re-evaluated, curiosity began to surface amongst the Aboriginal people. This curiosity is that the FAI had been nothing but a government driven exercise that tested the First Nations. Ultimately, First Nations had failed the test.

The failure of First Nations reflected lack of planning in the overall FAI process and failing to follow through with their own vision. Instead, the First Nations followed the Federal Government's vision self supported modern institution. It was obvious from the beginning that both parties of the FAI did not have a common vision. Both had different agenda's. The First Nations agenda was to dismantle the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, to implement a self- government model built on their history, culture and institutions and to restore their jurisdictional powers. On the other hand, the Federal Government's agenda was to enable First Nations to build modern institutions that are self-supporting through their own sources of revenue. Furthermore,

these modern institutions were to resemble the structures similar to the Canadian Government regime, with components defining First Nations constitution, citizenship, law making, judicial systems, executive branch, jurisdictions and accountability. All these components were introduced to the First Nations during the FAI community consultation process.

The First Nations wanted to keep the FAI process moving and in doing so, they simply tried to accommodate the Federal Government's agenda, which resulted in failing to meet their own agenda. Rather than just focusing on building a governmental structure reflective of their traditional values, they proceeded to work towards developing a governmental structure resembling the Canadian regime. First Nations were learning about modern governing institutions. In the end, the FAI process became nothing more than a hindrance. It exhausted all efforts trying to keep up with both agendas. Ultimately, the FAI had become nothing but an expensive exercise for the Federal Government, creating confusion at the First Nations community level.

To date, the First Nations have continued to try and bring the FAI back on track. The three First Nation organizations, AMC, MKO and SCO succeeded in convincing the Federal Government to allow them to proceed with the FAI and this entailed developing an Agreement in Principle (AIP) with the Government of Canada. The AIP will outline and define how First Nations will proceed with self-government. However, this is not to say that the First Nations will be moving away from the dictate of the Federal Government. For now, First Nations are moving forward on FAI; but if they are not careful, they will continue to move right

into Provincial responsibility, as in the case of the CFS FAI.

The following section of this thesis documents the views of northern First Nations Elders. It includes their understanding of self-government, their views for developing a self-government framework based on traditional cultural values, and their ideas about how this model can be applied while working in unity.

Chapter Six

Research Findings

Much of the research focused on drawing on the knowledge of the Elders who shared their understanding of self-government and what this concept means to them as it relates to restoring the traditional governing system of the Cree Nation. To capture their understanding the Elders were asked a set of questions (refer to page 18). In order to explain their understanding, data analysis was conducted using methods that involved observation, concepts of listening, sharing and feeling to capture their traditional knowledge and understanding. The Elders who were chosen for this research study are renowned for their traditional knowledge and understanding on Aboriginal governance.

Based on the interviews and data collected, there were seven key components that emerged throughout the interviews. These components were sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage. One overall unifying theme emerged as central in the lives Aboriginal peoples. This theme was spirituality and the strong role it played in the lives of Aboriginal peoples. To understand the themes each are discussed separately, to explain how these themes relate to notions of self- government as understood by the Elders.

Themes

Sharing

Sharing can be described as giving without any conditions or expectations attached to it. As Elder Sandy Beardy (2000) from the Pimicikamak Cree Nation explained, when a hunter goes hunting they never say “now replace this after”. It was common for a hunter to share what they killed adding:

When an animal was killed, there was an announcement, they call out to the people, to their

relatives to come and get some meat. There was no money given, there was only happiness that came from sharing.

Sharing was common and was a way of life and it was central in the lives of Aboriginal people. Elder Wellington Spence (2000) from the Nisichaweyasihk Cree Nation explained, sharing as a teaching that was taught to everyone at an early age and everyone lived by this teaching. It was expected that people helped each other, and that this was extended to everyone and not to just family members to ensure that no one was in need:

Sharing....we have to share everything, we have to help others out, we cannot look at anyone and watch them be poor. Even our relatives we have to help them so that they will not be poor. We have to help them when they have no food. We have to help, this is so important.

Elder Spence added that sharing was one of the components of self government as everything evolved around sharing and he explained:

That is how people lived that is how everything evolved in self-government. No one had any worries because everyone helped each other.

People went out of their way to help others. Whoever was on Council would regularly go out and visit the people. When someone was found hungry, the Council would go right away to tell others and food would be taken to the family immediately. As Elder Jean Baurassa (2000) from the Chemawawin Cree Nation explained, "no one was selfish to each other, especially meat, anyone could just go and help themselves to it, it was not sold either it was just given away".

Elder Lillian Ross (2000) from the Opaskweyak Cree Nation added:

Yes, such as anyone that killed ducks or muskrats they would call the people to come together and get their share. They share the food with one another, they gave thanks, they were grateful for being given

things to use.

Elder Spence (2000) explained his understanding of self government was that:

We use to help each other out and, today it is not like that, when we look at the future we need to look at this. We need to teach these things that were taught to us before. Everyone has to be taught the way it was done before, and to have teachings, and to have everyone to go through the teachings.

Sharing was customary. It was a way of life for many Aboriginal people that involved trading and exchanging with each other for things needed. As an example, where I live there is no sage or sweet-grass growing nearby. Every year I gather cedar and I take it south to exchange with my friends. Through the sharing of our resources we help each other out. We save each other many hours of picking. Sharing is also an opportunity for us to visit each other.

Love

My understanding of love is having deep feelings or affection towards someone or something. Love can also involve having an interest or deep care over someone or something. Elder Wellington Spence (2000), explained "we had to have love for everyone. You love your friend with the faith you had". He explained that love was usually associated with faith and through faith love was extended to everyone no matter what.

I asked a question on how First Nations could work together on self-government and how to make it work. The Elders explanation is that people must work together and while working together it must be based on love for one another. When love comes first, a person would not do anything to harm another person; instead they would do what they can to care for one another. With love there is no hurt or hatred towards another. As Elder Beardy (2000) explained:

If you have love, you would not have hurtful thoughts

towards your brother, sister or relative for the things they have accomplished....such as working together, we have to love one another, from caring, we tell each other lets do this together and lets put away what is destroying us, these hurtful thoughts, hatred and if we can do this only then can this happen.

Elder Sandy Beardy (2000) described how he loved and cared for children. He explained that children were never hurt in any way as they were most sacred in life. He added that if we hurt the children we would be punished:

I care a lot about a child, for a child is most sacred. Back then, no one ever hurt a child in any way, such as, like abortions, a child was most sacred. This is most sinful thing a person has committed as far as I am concerned....the child was looked after first because they were most sacred. In the future to come, we will be punished.....how many children have they destroyed just from abortions, it is not written anywhere where life should be taken through abortions.

Elder Jean Baurassa (2000) explained the work Chief and Council extended towards caring for the people and to show the love they had towards the people:

They walked around, they went out to go see how the people were doing. Some of them found the people sick and they would immediately go and get them water, they looked after them and they cared for them and they also announced for someone to go there and look after them. To help them out and do things for them.

People extended love towards one another through caring and since people looked after one another people did not worry about anything. Elder Ross (2000) explained that when a man was working and he took care of himself he also cared for those that were poor and she added:

I saw a lot of Ininiwak without anything, but if a man was working, and he took care of himself really good,

he also took care those that were poor, giving them things to make sure that they ate well too. Ininew was so caring back then and today it is not like that, I do not see it this way at all.

Love was not only extended to the people of the community but was also extended to the animals and the environment, as Elder Sandy Beardy (2000) explained:

The animals and our environment we looked after them, we cared for them and made them look good. From that we, Ininew, lived a good life, there was no hunger. Everything was easy as created by Manitou.

Doing things for others or simply just being there for another person showed love for one another. I remember my parents taking in four of my cousins to stay with us for a period of time when their parents were going through a difficult time. Although there were already twelve children in our family, bringing in four more did not seem to be a burden. My parents had enough love to care for the children. Growing up I was taught to love my relatives and neighbours. Caring and helping those that needed help showed this love. I learned that with love you do not expect anything in return. The greatest love that was shown to me was the love my parents had towards me because it was unconditional. No matter what I did or said they would show me the same love, and out of a family of twelve, this same love was extended to every one of my siblings. I was taught to show love to others by being respectful, and caring, and to not have hatred towards another person.

Respect

I define respect as having admiration and high opinion for another person. The admiration a person has over another person is usually shown in the way they treat that person. A person who carries the quality of respect will show it by the way they carry themselves in life. Elder Wellington Spence (2000),

explained:

The people who have respect treat everything in sacredness. It is the same with children, the animals; the plants that were provided all had to be treated with sacredness. We could not treat anything with disrespect. We have to respect everything. We could not mistreat anyone.

Elder Ross (2000), remembers everyone being treated with respect. This was shown by the way people treated one another. She states:

I do not remember anyone ever being mistreated by another, everyone helped each other out and everyone shared things with each other.

Respect was also shown to others by allowing others to express their own opinion on issues. This respect was extended to men, women, and young people. Elder Spence (2000) explained when people came together to discuss community issues. This is what happened long time ago and he stated:

Another thing that happened in self-government is that everyone was given a voice to speak. At meetings the men spoke and the women spoke. Even the young people had a say. Everyone was listened to. Their needs were heard. This is what happened long time ago.

Respect was not only extended to people but was also extended to the animals and to the earth. By showing respect to the animals, that is what self-government is about, having to look after our own environment. Extending respect to all creation was the responsibility of Aboriginal people. The Cree Nation looked after the animals and when they cared for the environment, the animals in return received a good life. Elder Beardy (2000) explained:

From respect, Ininew had a good life, there was no hunger everything was easy, creator provided everything and today, where will we survive from it has been ruined, nothing can grow, not even the

little animals can survive. Because of that self-government will not survive and will not be successful. We have to share the resources of this country, like mining, pulp, fishing, and trapping. These are things that Ininew lived off. There was no sickness. Ininew was very generous. I think too generous sometimes, and gave the Europeans everything when they arrived here to help and to share this earth and to care for this earth.

Elder Beardy (2000), concluded that Ininew must look after the environment and not allow any more pollution to occur. He added:

If the young people are able to plan their own self-government, as provided by the Creator. To stop this what I call pollution, while our earth is still alive, it is still very beautiful north of Manitoba, self-government, we can survive there are lots of clean place 2001.

As I began re-learning my culture I was taught by the Elders to respect all creation. To show this respect I was to offer tobacco and cloth to the animals and to mother earth each year when went to a fasting ceremony. Today, when I see an animal while I am travelling, I extend an offering of tobacco to show my gratitude and appreciation for being able to see the beauty of the animal.

Wisdom

Wisdom is about understanding, knowledge and having good judgment, knowing when to make decisions and when to take action. Wisdom involves patience and taking time to think things through before making decisions. Taking life experiences into consideration and having certainty on the decisions being made. Elder Ross shared that when the people came together to make decisions that would have an impact on everyone, everyone spoke:

They would speak about things, how things should work, and how we should live. The ones who spoke were not really old men but were of age. They spoke of how they wanted everything to work. They talked

about how they did not want anyone to control the way we live. We should try to live the way we use to live. This is what the people use to say and there are going to be young people and this is how they will live their lives also. That is what the people use to say (Elder Ross, 2000).

Wisdom teaches us that life is a learning experience and when one is faced with making decisions, wisdom teaches us to walk carefully and not to rush into anything. Many times in my path I forgot to take time when making decisions. I often rushed into making a decision without thinking it through very carefully. I was often disappointed because I did not achieve the outcome I had anticipated. Throughout the years of learning from many mistakes I have learned not to rush into anything, especially when it came to making a major decision. These decisions are either about changing jobs or making life changes. Sometimes making life decisions is not easy and this is when I apply wisdom to help me make the right decision. When others are involved it is important to take time and to listen to ensure that whatever decisions are made, there will be no regrets. A friend shared this with me:

Remember that teachings come in all shapes and sizes, study them and learn from your mistakes. For wisdom is ancient knowledge, wisdom is new found knowledge, wisdom is power - grasp what you can, and bring it into your heart and through your mind and into your actions.

Elder Baurasssa (2000) recalled her community being told to be careful when making decisions and to be aware of their surroundings or situation. She remembers when her community was about to be relocated as a result of hydro development. She explained the Elders gave a warning:

This is what they use to say back then, do not allow, in the future, the whiteman to control you because they will bring you hardship.

One of the changes the Elder shared was not being able to live off the land. She shared the loneliness she felt for not being able to trap and to eat country food. One other change she saw was that people were not hunting as much as they used to. Elder Baurassa believes that the people did not listen and that is why they are having so many problems.

Elder Beardy (2000) shared his views on the Manitoba self-government process and he shared his lack of confidence in the process. He referred to the process much the same way as the Indian Act was developed. He explained:

For the last hundred years, Indian Affairs has been caring for us and the neglect shown is an embarrassment and it will take longer to replace what has brought suffering to the children....I have expectations that Ininev will be given a chance to plan, not the whiteman. Not like Indian Affairs to come and say do it this way. Ininev know themselves what is needed for Indian self-government to operate, but we need more funding, if we can get enough funding Ininev will be able to do it. If you take some of these things and you use your education, put them together, you will go somewhere with your knowledge (Beardy 2000).

Elder Spence (2000) explained that life is a learned experience and it is through these experiences we learn lessons and when people do not they have a difficult time. Adding:

Those people that experience difficult time in their lives they experience this difficult time because they are not listening, they are not following the ways of the people... they are being taught a lesson and they will continue to experience this difficult time until they follow the ways.

Wisdom is a powerful teaching that teaches lessons and it provides insights on experiences gained; and when applied as part of daily life, it can serve as a guide to make wise choices in life.

Humility

Humility is about being modest and being down to earth and not placing yourself higher and above others. When a person has humility they do not allow pride to get in their way. When in need of help a person is not afraid to ask for it. A person is not arrogant or conceited and they do not brag about their accomplishments or successes. Elder Ross remembers an old man in her community who was a Chief and he was a good organizer. When he had Council meetings he was not the one that went out of the community to attend meetings; he would send one of his councillors to attend the meeting. The Chief stayed in the community. He did not dominate all the work, and instead shared his responsibilities. The Chief only went out of the community “when a council member had a difficult time and was not able to bring back what they went out to do, and this was the only time the Chief went out”(Ross, 2000).

The Chief as described by Elder Ross did not act superior to his people. He did not think of himself as being better than anyone else and he did not present himself as the only person that could do the job. He treated his people with great respect and when he held a “Council meeting he sat there listening to what the people had to say to him” (*Ibid*).

As humble people, the Cree Nation acknowledged that they are a part of creation and that all life is sacred and connected. They view Creation as equal and that includes all living things. The Aboriginal people show their humility by thinking all animals are equal and that humans are not superior. The Cree Nation showed humility by acknowledging that their teachings come from all living elements and not just from humans. The Cree Nation learned from their environment and they received teachings when they paid attention to their surroundings. Elder Beardy (2000), explained:

One day we left to go somewhere in the bush...we came across a beaver working to make its home. We looked over there and we saw a big beaver, a father beaver and little ones they were all busy working together to build their home except for one beaver. This one little beaver one was just sitting there. He was being lazy and he was not helping. All of a sudden the mother beaver notices this one is not working. We watched as she moved towards him and with her tail up she walked backwards towards him. All of a sudden she smacks her tail down spanking the lazy one. The lazy one jumped into the water and a few minutes later came back up with mud in its mouth. This beaver began working with the rest of the other beavers. We learned a lot from the beaver. We received a lot of knowledge just from watching. The mother beaver was able to straighten and push its young one to work and they worked too.

The teachings the Cree Nation people received were understood to be teachings from the Creator. The knowledge they received from watching the environment was applied into their daily lives as Elder Beardy (2000) explained:

This is exactly how the Ininew was if a child did not want to work or they did not want to listen the child was spanked. They were not hurt in anyway. Today if you are going to spank your child Awasis Agency is right there and already the child is being helped by the law and because of that children do not listen to their parents.

The Cree Nation people appreciated everything that was provided to them by Manito and they acknowledged Manito for this as Elder Beardy (2000) explained:

Ininew did not have a bible, when they stepped out from their teepee, they see the sun and remember Manito, who made the sun. When they fetched water from the lake they remember Manito. When they go out to get a tree and they see a dry tree already cut they remember Manito who made it. When they go outside at night, they see the moon and when it is a clear night they can see things. Ininew knows the Creator made everything and this is the reason why an Elder rose early before sunrise to give thanks every morning for the coming day.

Elder Baurassa (2000) added that people did not value material wealth; instead people were grateful for the things they had:

If things were thrown out we used them. People survived from hunting fishing and killing ducks and this is what people ate. People did not really have possessions.

I remember as a child we were taught to appreciate and be grateful for all the things that we had because not everyone was fortunate. I do not remember having new things and because we were a family of twelve we shared everything; if our clothes got too small we simply handed them down to our younger siblings. We did not throw anything away. Sharing was common, and we shared what we could with friends and relatives. We were taught not to be ashamed and to use what was usable. Today, a person is not always willing to share what they have; instead they will either throw it away at a local dump or have a garage sale to make a profit from the things that are no longer useful to them.

Honesty

Another important teaching the Elders shared with me was the teaching of honesty and being truthful. This meant telling the truth and speaking the truth. The teaching of honesty as explained by the Elders is that a person must always speak the truth. When you do not speak the truth you are not only hurting yourself but you are also hurting others. Elder Beardy (2000) explained:

What I am sharing with you, I am giving you the truth,
If I give you lies, I will be hurting you, I would not be
doing right, but I share with you the truth.

When a person is not told the truth they suffer the consequences and we also suffer. Elder Ross (2000) shared the problems with youth suicide that happens

in many Aboriginal communities. She believes the reason why a person commits suicide is because they are not being told the truth about life:

This is what the elders use to say to us that if we hurt ourselves in any way, we would feel it again and again and it will come back and this is what our teenagers are not hearing. Those that are lecturing the teenagers, it is like they are hiding this from them, they lecture them but they do not tell, really tell them the truth what will happen.

Elder Spence (2000) explained the way Aboriginal people lived a long time ago was all based on faith. He stated "we have to do everything in faith and we have to look at everyone in a honest form". This is how people lived and this was where self-government came from. I remember when I first decided to write about self-government and I went to Nookoom for advice. I went to her because I heard that she was traditional and she had many teachings. What Nookoom said that day stayed with me as I continued to write my thesis, she encouraged me to write about self-government and to "tell the truth and tell it like it is and to be honest". I had no doubt that the Elders who shared with me were telling the truth. They spoke about issues that were important to them. They shared what they wanted people to know about self-government.

Courage

The teaching of courage is about being brave and not being afraid. When a person has courage they are not afraid to speak out on issues that are important. As an example when Elder Beardy spoke about self-government he showed a lot of courage by speaking out on it, on how it really is. In his opinion, the current self-government process is not going to work since the process did not come from the grass roots people. He referred to the framework agreement

as the whiteman Act. As he explained:

It is just like the Indian Act, it is bringing suffering to Inineew because Inineew was not sitting there when the Indian Act was being developed. Whiteman Act that is what I call it, because it is the whitemans own act, they created it. There is nothing there that works for Inineew. Everything is being taken away that should be cared for by Inineew. It is exactly the same way this document was prepared (Elder Beardy,2000).

Elder Spence (2000) added that so much has changed that things are not the way they used to be. Inineew is not caring anymore they even hate their own culture and their way of life. He explained that this had a lot to do with the education Inineew was receiving. He stated:

There are two forms of education one is the whiteman teachings and the other is the traditional way. People treat our teachings with no respect. There is no understanding of our way of life. Instead, Inineew try to follow the whiteman teachings and not their own. Because they are not following their teachings everything is going wrong, nothing seems to be going right. It is hard to understand our way of life. Whiteman has their own language and Inineew have their own language, they both have their own way of life. Since Inineew came into contact with the whiteman that is when everything started going wrong (Spence 2000).

Speaking out and confronting issues takes a lot of courage. Most often when one starts speaking out on issues they are perceived to be going against their own people or worse, going against the leadership. To avoid any backlash most people will not say or do anything to change a situation.

One of the hardest things I had to do for myself when I began working on healing was to have courage and not be afraid to confront the people that had an impact in my life. The first people I had to confront were my parents. I remember asking my mother for permission to share the things I needed to share

to help my healing. I approached her with love and kindness to help her understand that what I was doing was not in any way intended to hurt her or other members of my family. This was the most difficult time of my life but it gave me the strength to face many other fears I developed from my childhood. This included facing my own father who had made such an impact in my life. My father understood when I finally confronted him. All he wanted from me was to help him bring our family together to heal as a family. Unfortunately, my father died before we could bring our family together.

Today, through courage, I continue to confront issues without fear and I do this only when I see something is not right or when somebody is doing something wrong. Through courage I try to help others see what they are doing to themselves and the people around them. I do this through kindness, caring and respect as I would never do anything to hurt another person because I would only be hurting myself. Elder Spence (2000) explains that people lived by the teachings a long time ago and today people do not live like that and this the reason why people have so many problems. He concluded that Ininew must re-learn the teachings they had as a way of live. The teachings are the principles of self-government. He added:

We have to understand them, make them a part of our daily lives again....we have to try and learn and practice them, these are the principles. The teachings are not here and for that we are paying for some of these teachings.

When I began re-learning the teachings one of the hardest things for me was keeping myself focused. I was told to walk the way of life; it is very difficult and a person cannot do it alone. Pride often got in my way and I often isolated myself and would not reach out to anyone to help me. I learned Manito is listening and will take care of me. Many times along the way I forgot about the teachings and

when I did, that was when I suffered the most.

Spirituality

Spirituality as defined in Aboriginal discourse is about a whole way life of a people. This life is deeply rooted in the belief that the Creator made everything for the survival of all Aboriginal people and that all life is sacred. As the Elders related their stories to me about their way of life as a people they echoed their words. These words were that Manito is always there caring for the people and continues to take care of the people today. Elder Beardy spoke about Manito. He expressed his gratitude that he had lived a good long life and he believed that Manito has been looking after him all these years. For that reason he tried to live his life in a good way as an Elder and he explained:

I believe there is a Manito and it is Manito that is looking after us. What Manito gave us is very beautiful and this is the faith I carry today in my life as an Elder (Elder Beardy 2000).

Elder Spence (2000) explained, "everything is sacred as provided to us by the Creator". Manito provided everything for the people's survival. Faith is something that everyone must live by and it is this faith that carries the people today. As I travelled into the communities, meeting with the Elders, they all spoke about spirituality; that it is connected to self-government. It was a way of life that must be brought back because that was how people lived as self governing Nations.

Elder Beardy (2000), explained:

When we talk self-government, I think about our environment, it has been destroyed and the way self-government is being discussed. Where can we go and use what Manito has provided for us to use for our survival. Those things that were given to us hundreds of years ago.....I will be very grateful if we can plan our own self-government and apply those

things that were provided to us by the Manito.

Elder Ross (2000) remembered as a child seeing her people praying all the time and the young and old prayed together. "The people were very spiritual, that every evening they would pray together and give thanks for the good things that happened". Each Elder spoke about reverence being given to Manito for all the goods things that were provided for the survival of the people. As Elder Beardy (2000) explained, "Manito provided everything and we put it to good use"; this is how Ininev survived. Adding that the people did not have any worries because they knew that they were being looked after by Manito:

We lived in a tepee and I remember waking up and I knew we were being looked after from above so that we would not have sickness, when we lived outside we did not worry where we would get our warmth from to survive, worrying was not there.

Elder Spence (2000) explained when the people gathered and "before anything was done the person who was the pipe carrier he would smoke the pipe first to acknowledge the Creator". I recall attending Chiefs Assemblies where an Elder had been invited to conduct a pipe ceremony. The ceremonies usually started early in a morning and were attended by a few people. Sometimes there would only be two or three Chiefs that would attend. As soon as a quorum of Chiefs arrived to proceed with a meeting, a drum group would prepare a grand entry and the eagle staff was brought into the meeting room. The eagle staff remained present throughout the entire Assembly. The eagle staff signified that the meeting was in progress and that the Creator would take care of the leaders as they conducted their business each day. Each morning proceeded with a pipe ceremony and when the Chiefs Assembly was over it would end with a closing prayer recited from a Bible or an Elder would share his/her own prayer. The pipe was not present during this time. After the closing prayer the eagle

staff was retired and carried out of the meeting room with a drum song. The Chiefs present at the meeting participated in retiring the eagle staff.

Today, the northern Cree Nation are re-discovering their traditional spirituality and are attending ceremonies such as fasting, sun dances, sweat lodge ceremonies, sweet grass and pipe ceremonies. I assisted one northern First Nation organization in organizing a feast and a cleansing ceremony. This ceremony was conducted to take away the negative energy and to bring in positive energy into the work environment. There are other Cree Nations communities who are returning to their spiritual ways and are developing programs to be culturally relevant. As a case in point, the Mathias Colomb First Nation developed a traditional tribal justice system. This system allows the Mathias Colomb First Nation to bring the sweet grass and pipe ceremony into the court system. As well, offenders are allowed to use their own language. Green (1998), studying justice in Aboriginal communities, states:

The Aboriginal practices incorporated into community sentencing and mediation included both spirituality (signified by prayers, the burning of sweet grass, and pipe ceremonies) and process (such as grassroots consultation, community consensus, and sharing). The circle itself has been viewed by Aboriginal people as having traditional significance.....the circle format employed in court and mediation represented a more egalitarian process of adjudication, one that reflected the community traditional aspirations of Aboriginal Society (Green, 1998.p.134).

There is a strong movement with the Aboriginal people to bring back their spirituality, cultural values and systems and incorporating them into programs and services serving them. These programs include policing, child and family services, health and education. However, these programs are only touching the surface as they continue to operate using colonial structures. The Elders that I

interviewed spoke of self-government and called for a return of the traditional ways. Their idea of self-government is completely different from the legal and political conception that is favored by mainstream governments. The struggle First Nations have today is bringing understanding on how these values can be incorporated into their political systems to entrench self-government for their survival and co-existence. The next chapter discusses a framework on how First Nations may begin rebuilding their institutions, to incorporate a cultural framework for self-government.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

Discussion

This study has explored the concept of Aboriginal self-government through literature review and interviews with Cree Elders in northern Manitoba with the purpose of understanding what this means to them. Capturing and documenting their oral history served to bring an understanding as to what may be required by the Cree Nation in order to begin restoring their traditional governing systems and processes. Through this research, I have come to understand why the concept of self-government has become such a controversial issue among Aboriginal peoples, the Government of Canada, and Canadian society as a whole.

First and foremost, the First Nations have their own ideas about Aboriginal self-government. Their concept of self-government is that it is an inherent right that derives from the Creator (Long and Boldt, 1992; Asch, 1992; Ground, 1997). This right has never been relinquished and can never be extinguished because it is a right that flows from the Creator. Relinquishing this right would mean that the Aboriginal people are disconnecting themselves and turning their back on the Creator. Many Aboriginal people believe that turning their backs on the Creator would bring consequences, as they would then be neglecting their obligations and duties as a people. Secondly, First Nations view self-government to mean that they can determine how to govern themselves without having anyone telling them how to be self-governing. Based on that notion, Aboriginal people state that their governing institutions must be based on a cultural foundation reflecting their traditional values and philosophies. Lastly, First Nations want to negotiate their terms to self-government and their future relationship with Canada. Their negotiations must include bringing forward their defined governing model to the

negotiation table.

On the other hand, the Government of Canada views Aboriginal self-government as a means of providing First Nations more autonomy over their own affairs and to be able to develop their own sources of revenue (Taiiaike Alfred 1999). Their view of self-government is that First Nations will have the authority to govern themselves under certain conditions. These conditions include developing modern effective governance regimes. The governing regimes are to be complete with structures defining Aboriginal peoples' constitution, citizenship, law making, judicial systems, executive branch, jurisdictions and accountability even when these structures are foreign to Aboriginal traditional culture. Another condition is that the exercise of self-government must fall under the current Canadian Constitution, including the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. As well, "Aboriginal governments would be required to operate in concert with the jurisdictions exercised by other governments" (Morse, 1999:p.29). Today, the First Nations, the Government of Canada and Canadian society as a whole continue to struggle to come to terms with Aboriginal self-government. Their struggle is how to work together in harmony and in collaboration to modify and restructure the Canadian state to accommodate Aboriginal self- government.

This concluding chapter discusses the issues confronting the northern Cree Nation and the challenges they face in developing a cultural framework for self-government. Finally, this chapter draws on the themes and brings them together to define how the Cree First Nation may begin to re-build a cultural foundation for self-government. It is anticipated that the Government of Canada and Canadian society can begin to understand what self-government means to the First Nations and why it is important to the First Nations to govern themselves as they had always done before European contact. As well, I anticipate the Cree Nation leaders will begin to understand what changes they need to make to

empower their citizens and how to work harmoniously with other governments to begin rebuilding their Nation. The concept that I present here captures a framework model of one Nation struggling to survive.

Challenges Facing the Cree Nation

Based on the literature review, interviews and data analysis, I understood that the Cree people were once a strong Nation governing on the principles of sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage and their whole way of life was connected to their spirituality. I understood the Cree people lived by these principles, guiding them and controlling their behaviour. However, what I learned during my research while travelling into the communities was totally opposite. I would be wrong of me to say that everyone is not living by the principles of the past. I would be correct in saying that a majority of our people are not focused on the teachings and are not living by their original instructions, given to them by Kitchi-Manito. These instructions are to believe in the Creator and to live by the principles of sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage.

I am compelled to share what I learned and experienced while conducting this research and writing this thesis. I am committed to “tell it like it is”, as it is my duty and my responsibility to my children, my grandchildren and to those who are not yet born. I state that it is my duty and my responsibility because if I do not tell it like it is then I am only ignoring the reality that exists in our communities. If I shut my eyes to unacceptable behaviour then I am enabling and supporting this behaviour to continue. My reason to “tell it like it is” is to identify what requires changing. I struggle with how to “tell it like it is” without coming across as angry, bitter or resentful. I can only assure you that I am genuine in my concerns and I am telling you in a soft way as it comes with kindness, love, caring and

understanding. Most of all, I tell it like it is because of my concern over our future existence as a Nation.

My experience began almost immediately when I set out to interview the Elders. My first interview was a disappointment as the Elder who had agreed to meet with me was not home. I was disappointed because he had made a commitment that we would meet and do the interview. Instead, the Elder had gone out to play a local poker game and did not return until the next morning. As I learned while traveling into the communities, gambling in First Nation communities was not uncommon and many local poker games ran into all hours of the night. One community I visited allowed bingos to be held right out of peoples' homes. While the parents are away playing bingo, the children are left home alone or are running around into the late hours of the night. Although gambling has been around Aboriginal people since time immemorial, today gambling is out of control, resulting in neglect of families.

As I continued to travel into the communities, I learned that many Elders have lost hope and are just living and passing time away. An Elder who shared his life story spoke of the teachings that were passed on to him by his father and grandfather. When he spoke about traditional culture his voice would change. As I listened to the Elder I began to realize that he was having a hard time speaking about the past. Perhaps it brought too many memories for him:

When the Elders look at their communities today, they no longer see a place where everyone has a role. Traditions have been eroded, and the values that once bound society together have been lost or abandoned. There is no harmony; the circle has been broken. Instead they see alcoholism, substance abuse, violence within families, unemployment, welfare, economic instability, and suicide. (RCAP.V4, 1996, p.136)

These traits were not evident in the past, and only began to surface as a result of the breakdown of families from colonization and the years of assimilation tactics.

While visiting another community, I decided to attend a sweat ceremony that was being held in the evening. That night while I was waiting for the ceremony to start, I drove to a nearby restaurant to eat and while I was driving there, I heard a loud bang. Something had hit my truck window. I found out that a group of children as young as 8 years old were playing in the bush and were throwing ice chunks at vehicles as they were passing by. One of the ice chunks had hit my truck. What happened to the traditional values the Elders had talked about? Had our traditional values changed so much that even our own children are showing disrespect? Is this what was causing the Elder so much sadness, because our young people are not learning the traditional values?

What is happening in our communities that is causing so much unbalance and creating chaos? Is the unbalance the result of our own neglect because we are not living by the principles? I recall Elder Spence's interview. He explained when that when a person experiences a difficult time, it is because that person is not listening. This person is not following the ways of the people and is being taught a lesson until they follow the ways. I found that other Elders shared the same perception. As an example, I attended a funeral in one of the communities and I learned that this community had been experiencing a lot of deaths in the past year. Some of the deaths were from suicide, alcohol related violence and accidents. An Elder from this community shared his sorrow and explained that his community was being taught a lesson, which is why they were experiencing these losses. There was fighting and jealousy. People were not working together in the community. He

believed the deaths happened for a reason to learn a lesson from them. Many of the communities I visited in the north were not spared problems of suicide, family violence and accidental deaths as a result of alcohol. Perhaps they were also being taught a lesson.

I attended community workshops and conferences, as I wanted to understand the issues the communities were dealing with. One particular workshop I will never forget was on residential schools. This workshop was focused on reconciliation with the community members and church representatives. The workshops included church representatives from the Roman Catholic Oblates, Anglican and United Church. Each came to the workshop and read an apology for the harm their church had done to children while in the residential schools. The community people each shared their stories of what happened to them during residential school. There was much emotion expressed and many were angry and frustrated, saying that an apology was not enough. They wanted the Church representatives to support them in suing the Federal Government and to fund community healing.

There were only a handful of community people that attended and I found out later that some community members did not attend because the workshop included a pipe ceremony and healing sweat ceremony. Some of the workshop participants attended the healing sweat. The church representatives who attended the healing sweat were from the United Church and Roman Catholic Church. After the sweat ceremony, the representative from the Roman Catholic Church informed everyone that she had received a phone call earlier and was discouraged from attending the sweat ceremony. She advised everyone that she might not be around for much longer because she had gone against the wishes of her church. I asked why she was discouraged. Her response was "I don't know, lack of understanding I guess".

My comment to her was "I don't think they are trying to convert you, all they are trying to do here is to bring an understanding". Her response was "I know". After a feast we went back to the workshop where a few local members met us. The members came to express their disappointment and confronted the organizers for having the workshop. One of the organizers stated the community members were upset because the workshop had involved traditional culture. The people that came to express their concerns were very involved with their church. From this workshop I understood that there were some community members that were against their own traditional culture.

I realized there were other community members from other First Nation communities who were against traditional culture. While travelling home one evening I was listening to the radio that was broadcasting a gospel jamboree from one of the northern communities. The host of the gospel jamboree was praying for the people and inviting listeners to call in prayer songs. He was encouraging his listeners to invite the lord into their lives and to save themselves from evil. He continued to pray and he shouted a message over the radio. The message was, "Indian culture is bad, it is devil worshiping. Those individuals who run to Indian culture are making a mistake to think that they can be saved. Those that call on the medicine people are lost and no sweet grass will save them". I was in disbelief when I heard this over the radio and I wondered how many people listened to this message and shared the same opinion.

Warry (1998), found in his research that there was conflict in many First Nation communities with respect to traditional cultural values and Christian values:

The influence of Christianity,....has left many people with distrust, if not fear, of traditional

medicine. For example...a number of individuals who vehemently denied that traditional approaches had any value, or who associated the revival of such practices as purification lodges or other forms of spiritual healing with paganism, 'the devils work' and 'bearwalking,' or what is commonly known as bad medicine. (p.114).

How did such attitudes develop that our own people have come to despise their own culture. I struggled to understand why this attitude existed in First Nation communities when so many were working on healing. I recall a ninety-year old female Elder sharing her story about her experience in residential school. She said she learned to steal and she learned to hate while she was there. She went on to explain that her mother went to residential school and she came out confused and lost because she lost her own spiritual knowledge. She added that her grandchildren were suffering today because of residential school.

I recall at another conference where I heard an Elder share his views on residential school and the impact it had on the people. At this conference he spoke about the treatment of our Elders who are the keepers of traditional knowledge and teachings. He conveyed this message to the conference participants: "when we left residential school, we became lost, we changed in that we were not ourselves anymore. We keep our Elders locked up in institutions and this hurts". The Elder was referring to personal care homes where a majority of our Elders are sent today when they can no longer be cared for within their own homes.

If we are locking up our Elders, who then can we learn our culture from? While travelling one day with my son and his friends to attend a community sweat, his friends started asking questions about traditional culture. My son's friends said they did not know too much about their culture but they wanted to

learn about it. What they learned was based on fear because they were taught Indian culture was bad. I tried my best to explain to them what I knew and that I too learned that it was bad but that I came to understand that this was taught behaviour that came from the residential school. Warry (1998), explained in his research that there is confusion and debate in Aboriginal communities on how to revitalize traditional practices for contemporary life. The confusion and debate stems from suspicion that some ceremonies and traditional practices are not authentic and "there is the fundamentalist Christian's concern that a return to traditional beliefs is a return to superstitious, paganism, or devil worship" (p.212). I sensed this was the same confusion these young people had as they were questioning their own culture wondering: what they should or who they should believe in?

Whose responsibility is it to teach our young people about traditional culture? According to my research findings, it was everyone's responsibility to care for a child. This responsibility included teaching the children how to live a good life and, by the time they reached adulthood, they are to know their responsibilities, to understand why children were not being taught their culture, I met with women at their meetings and gatherings. From these meetings, I understood their traditional role had changed from being part of the consensus decision-making process to being excluded from making decisions. The Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba (1991) defined the traditional role of Aboriginal women:

Women traditionally played a central role with the Aboriginal family, with Aboriginal government and in spiritual ceremonies. Men and women enjoyed considerable personal autonomy and both performed functions vital to the survival of Aboriginal communities. The men were responsible for providing

food, shelter and clothing. Women were responsible for the domestic sphere and were viewed as both the life-givers and caretakers of life. As a result, women were responsible for the early socialization of children. (P.475).

While women were considered life-givers and caretakers of life they were also considered equal partners in their communities. This partnership extended from decision making in the community to choosing a community leader, resolving internal disputes and healing their communities. In some cases women were chosen as leaders. The Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba (1991), explained European contact had a much greater impact on women as their traditional role was drastically changed:

For Aboriginal women, European economic and cultural expansion was especially destructive. The value as equal partners in the tribal society was undermined completely. (AJI, 1991, p. 477).

Women were no longer equal partners and were excluded from all decision making in their communities. The authorities they once held in their homes and communities were stripped and their roles devalued. Many Aboriginal women were forced to give up their political power because they threatened western political concepts. The Cree women no longer had a voice and the men became the decision makers in all family and community matters.

As I travelled into the northern communities, I found many Cree women were struggling to regain their traditional roles and were facing many challenges. These challenges include dealing with physical violence, emotional and sexual abuse. Sexism towards women is not uncommon today and many men will joke openly towards women about their sexuality. I experienced this sexism in one of the communities I visited. I was concluding my thesis, when I was asked to submit my name as a candidate for a northern Grand Chief election. While visiting one of the communities, I met with a group

of men to discuss my platform. My candidacy for Grand Chief was well received. As the men became comfortable with me they opened up and started sharing. One man made a comment about my candidacy and said that if I wanted to win I had better sleep with all of them. He said for sure I would have no problem getting in. His comment may have been intended to be a joke. I took it as disrespect towards women. Kim Anderson (2000), in her research on native women, found that sexual attitudes towards Aboriginal women changed at the time of colonization and introduction of Christianity. Prior to this women were treated with respect and were not seen as sex objects:

According to many Native peoples, womens' bodies, by virtue of their capacity to bring forth life, were powerful and celebrated through all their cycles. Respect for their bodies was related to the respect and responsibility they commanded in their families, villages, and nations. Because of this respect, women were not seen as "sex objects," and as well they had a great deal of individual control over their own sexuality (p.85).

Colonization and Christianity have made such an impact on Aboriginal people. The tactics that were used to colonize and Christianize Aboriginal people was to place them in residential schools. There, many children learned certain behaviours and developed attitudes about themselves and towards others. The Cree Nation did not escape the residential school era. For many, residential school was a home and the experiences they had were not always pleasant as many children were violated physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Anderson (2000) explains that when children grow up in an abusive environment, they come to accept abuse as normal behaviour and it just becomes a part of their adult life and:

If the cycle of violence is not broken, adults can pass violence on to their children. Instead of being positive role models, they risk teaching children violent behaviours (p.97).

Violent behaviour was very much evident in many of the northern communities I visited. I saw evidence of buildings vandalized and homes with broken windows and garbage everywhere. I asked one of the community members why their community was like that. Her response was that people didn't care anymore and they have given up and even when they do try to make change, people criticize them. Warry (1998) found in his research that many First Nation communities were internally divided; causing friction amongst community members. Fear of being criticized, many community members choose not to say anything and internalize their feelings:

Band members feel uncomfortable voicing their opinions at council meetings. Few people feel they can go to a public meeting and express themselves openly without the fear of criticism, or the risk of bad medicine (p.228)

As an outsider going into the communities, I found many community members wanting to share their feelings and to express their concerns. I heard similar stories of preferential treatment being given to certain individuals for housing, employment and education funding support. I heard stories of corruption and misuse of funding. One community member who was walking with me to where I was staying shared in confidence that cheques were being written to members living off reserve and being cashed without their knowledge. This person was afraid to say anything and asked how I would deal with this if I knew it was happening. I spoke about honesty and having the courage to say something: "if you know in your heart that this is wrong, you do something about it. If you don't it will not be you that will suffer the consequences, it will be the

children and grandchildren. This is the change we need to make in our communities because we are not corrupt. We are suppose to be caring, loving and honest people. We have to be brave and stand up to these issues. We owe it to our children". We walked in silence and I wondered if what I said made any sense. On 7, July, 2003, an article appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press about financial mismanagement. Ten First Nation communities were identified as being under third party management. Four of these communities were from northern Manitoba.

During my campaign, I met with many local people who echoed their words for change. They wanted change and assurance that their communities would not be forgotten. I met with leaders who also said it was time for change and this change was needed for the young people. They wanted to encourage and influence the young people to take an interest in politics. Some of the Chiefs spoke about getting rid of the "old boys club" as they often referred to their political regime. I was very encouraged when I met with the Chiefs. I took the election as an opportunity to share what I was learning in my research and I spoke about self-government the whole time as this seemed to be the main concern for many First Nation leaders. I spoke on how the Cree Nation could begin organizing themselves to revive their traditional governing systems.

I observed how the leaders were operating within their existing governing structure and how they chose a leader. I watched other candidates and their supporters handing out campaign materials and organizing meetings with elected Chiefs and Councillors who were the only eligible voters. I learned from this experience how much the current structural framework of the Cree Nation resembled a corporate model framed by colonial influence. This model does not take into account the traditional concepts that were once used by the Cree Nation when coming together to make group decisions. There was no

cohesiveness as the election drew near. The leadership become divided as they played the power game of voting guided by rules and regulations structured after the corporate model.

In his research, Taiaiake Alfred (1999) describes how a corporate model, framed by colonial influence, operates. This system operates based on coercion, power and authority creating certain behaviour and a style of leadership that prevents cohesion:

There is division between those who serve the system and those who serve the people. In a colonial system designed to undermine, divide and assimilate indigenous people, those who achieve power run the risk of becoming instruments of those objectives (Alfred, 1999, p.30).

I saw Community members who came to observe the excitement of the election. Some complained for not having a voice in the election process, others simply watched and waited for the new leader to be chosen. The youth watched the political dynamics unfold as they waited for the leaders to choose their next Grand Chief, all the while learning their future political roles. One Councillor introduced me to his son whom he brought along to watch and learn. I was saddened that this young man was not learning the traditional system. Instead, he was learning how to play the power game that centred on power, authority and manipulation.

I recall my meeting with the Elders who spoke of the changes that occurred in their communities and how sad they were about these changes. One Elder shared the experience he had while he was a councillor for his community. During his political years, he found that Elders were well respected and people listened to them. Today, the Elders are no longer respected in their communities. He spoke about traditional upbringing and traditional teachings

that were no longer being taught. The Elder spoke of the urgency to bring back the traditional teachings. He believed the reason why there are so many problems in the community is because the parents are not teaching their children properly. The children are being neglected and this is the reason why so many communities are having so many problems. The Elder added that we need to start speaking out on the issues and that we cannot forget who we are as a people. So, who are we as a people? This was a question I continued to ask myself while writing this thesis.

I understood so far, that the Cree Nation were spiritual people who lived by the principles of sharing, love, respect wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage. Everywhere I went I looked for these characteristics in people. In every community I visited, I found people to be friendly, very warm and courteous. Generally, this is how most of the people I met presented themselves. But I could not help but sense that the people were not totally happy, as they shared their frustrations and feelings of anger; and most of all, the hurt they felt due to loss of their own people as a result of suicide and violent deaths related to alcohol. Community members wanted change and they spoke of their leadership who are spending much of their time attending to band business away from their home community. This business is to secure increased funding which has been a priority for all leaders.

The Cree Nation is faced with these challenges when trying to develop a cultural framework for self-government. Their greatest challenge will be bringing an understanding of their traditional spiritual beliefs and their way of life as a people living according to the instructions of Kitchi-Manito. Returning to Cree culture requires the Cree Nation to make changes. These changes must include developing attitudes and behaviors to support their efforts in restoring their

traditional governing system as understood by the Cree Elders in northern Manitoba.

A-te-a-se-ke-way-tan (Lets go Back)

The Cree Nation must begin to understand their own history and not lose sight of who they are as spiritual people. They must not forget the teachings of their ancestors. These teachings are sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage:

Aboriginal people have always relied heavily upon teaching values through the use of custom and ritual. These practices remind them where they came from and who they were so that they might better understand who they are and what it is they must do (Russell 2000,p.129).

They must begin to understand that their governing institution was based on spirituality. They must begin to understand that their spirituality evolved around performing ceremonies to show appreciation and gratitude to Kitchi-Manito for all good things in life. These ceremonies were held for various reasons to celebrate birth, death, marriage, naming, life and good health. They were held for gift exchanges and when conducting diplomatic functions.

The Cree Nation must begin to understand the true meaning behind their spiritual beliefs and how their spiritual beliefs extended to all living elements constituting their Nation. Neglecting these spiritual beliefs resulted in O-ji-na, bringing consequences to their families and communities. They must begin to understand that they have spiritual duties, obligations and responsibilities that they must attend to for their own well -being and the well-being of their families. They must not forget the land and all animal life that are considered sacred and are connected to them as part of their family.

The Cree Nation must begin working towards re-establishing their kinship

system and begin to understand how their kinship ties united their Cree Nation. They must begin to understand the strength of kinship ties and how kinship gatherings served networking processes between families. These gatherings provided the opportunity to reconnect and rekindle relationships and served as forum to remind them of the responsibilities families had towards each other. The Cree Nation must begin to understand how each family member played a role in ensuring all family members were living up to their spiritual responsibilities, duties and obligations. They must begin to understand the sacred responsibility they have towards raising their children:

Children are constantly reminded to respect and respond to the feelings of all kin. They are praised for showing sensitivity and generosity to others, teased for self-centred, rude or acquisitive, but rarely punished (Youngblood Henderson,2000,p.270).

They must begin working toward bringing back the naming ceremonies and acknowledging their children's spiritual traditional names. I recall an Elder saying that if the Cree Nation were to return to their traditional governing system, this must include picking up their spiritual names because these will connect them to their spirituality, bringing balance and harmony to their families. The Cree Nation families must begin setting examples by teaching their children the traditional values that centre their traditional governing system. I remember my grandmother reminding me of my responsibility when I told her that I was going to be a grandmother. At that moment she told me that children become who they are as they are raised and whatever you teach them is what they become after they are grown up.

Reconnecting their kinship ties, the Cree Nation must begin to recognize how their kinship ties bound them together in unity even when they were apart. The connection they had when coming together as families formulated their

Nation. As a family, the Cree Nation must work towards re-establishing all kinship ties, which includes working towards re-uniting with the two Cree Nation communities who became disconnected when the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs was encouraging First Nations to move south to take up farming. They must begin to focus on their kinship system and understand how this system constituted their traditional governing system.

As the Cree Nation reconnects their kinship ties, they must also remember that their relationship does not only extend to the families; but it is also extended to their land, and all animal life considered sacred and part of the Cree Nation family. The Cree Nation must begin to revive the traditional ceremonies that were held to acknowledge the land and all animal life that was created to ensure the survival of their Nation. It must be understood that these ceremonies are essential in restoring the balance and harmony in the lives of all living elements that constituted the traditional governing system of the Cree Nation.

Picking up the ceremonies, the Cree Nation must begin to follow their specific instructions to preserve their traditional culture based on the principles of sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage. These ceremonies must include holding spiritual feasts to acknowledge the spirits watching over the Cree Nation. Food offerings must be made to all the Spirits so that they may continue to watch over the health and well-being of the people. Special ceremonies must be held for the land, animals and for the acknowledgement of people on occasions of birth, death and hunt or success. Gift-giving ceremonies that strengthen the unity of the Cree Nation must be revived. These ceremonies must become part of the way the Cree Nation govern themselves

The Cree Nation must begin to understand that they can no longer neglect these ceremonies, because neglecting them may result in further O-ji-

na. When I visited the communities, I saw evidence of animal bones that had not been properly disposed. An Elder, from one of the communities I occasionally visit, had gone to the local dump and found three caribou carcasses that had been thrown away. In his eyes, the caribou had been shown disrespect. The Elder was very troubled and demanded to know who was responsible. He was concerned that the caribou spirit would be offended and the caribou may not return. The following winter the caribou did not return to his community.

The Cree Nation must begin to recognize how their traditional practices played an integral part of the way they governed as a people. They must begin working with their traditional people who played a significant role in carrying out the important spiritual functions that ensured the unity, safety and survival of the Cree Nation. The Traditional people must take responsibility and take back their rightful places in the traditional framework that maintained the Cree traditional governing system. The Traditional people must begin to understand their spiritual roles as healers, teachers and visionaries. They must begin sharing their traditional and spiritual knowledge to help formulate the traditional governing framework of the Cree Nation. They must share how this framework will ensure the traditional values and responsibilities are upheld. They must assist in defining the protocols that carried the Cree Nation people that ensured their continued existence as a Nation. These protocols must derive from the spiritual framework that governed the Cree Nation people reflecting the principles of sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage.

The Traditional people must begin to understand the powerful positions they held in their communities and must begin working to revive the core principles and values that defined the Cree Nation as a people. They must remember their moral and ethical responsibilities and ensure their traditional

knowledge, spiritual powers and authorities are not abused in any way that might infringe on the core principles that governed the Cree Nation. They must begin setting examples by taking the lead to confront those who have lost focus and are abusing their spiritual powers. Finally, the traditional people must remove themselves from the mind-set that has led them to believe their traditional practices and ceremonies are not integral to the way the Cree Nation governed. The traditional people must fulfill their spiritual duties, responsibilities and obligation and start teaching the procedures and protocols that are necessary in restoring the Cree Nation traditional governing system. This is the cultural foundation that built upon the governing framework of the Cree Nation.

A Cultural Framework

A return to their traditional governing system will require the Cree leaders to reform their current political governing structures. Their structures must reflect their traditional values and philosophies. They must begin governing on the principles of sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage. They must begin to acknowledge that their way of governing was based on spirituality and they carry with them spiritual duties and responsibilities they must attend to in restoring their traditional governing system.

Governing on the principle of sharing, the Cree leaders must begin sharing their work with their people. Sharing will bring a sense of responsibility back to their people so that they may not have to carry the burden alone in trying to address the challenges that confront them. They must begin doing their work based out of love, so that no harm will come to them, their families and their nation. Love brings kindness and good order to the people. On the principle of respect, they must begin to acknowledge that everyone had a voice

and through respect they must give the voice back to their people. On the principle of wisdom, the leaders must begin applying their traditional knowledge wisely to know what is right and wrong when confronting issues.

Governing on the principle of humility, the leaders must maintain equal status with all members and not place themselves above others. Humility brings clear visions and good judgement that is not clouded with arrogance. On the principle of honesty, the leaders must carry their work in honesty as honesty brings good governance necessary to creating accountability and transparency. Honesty brings truth to the people, setting balance and sustaining harmony with one another. Governing on the principle of courage, the leaders must take courage and not be afraid to start confronting the challenges that exists in their communities. When courage is applied, it strengthens the people thereby, creating unity to confront those issues that bring harm to their families.

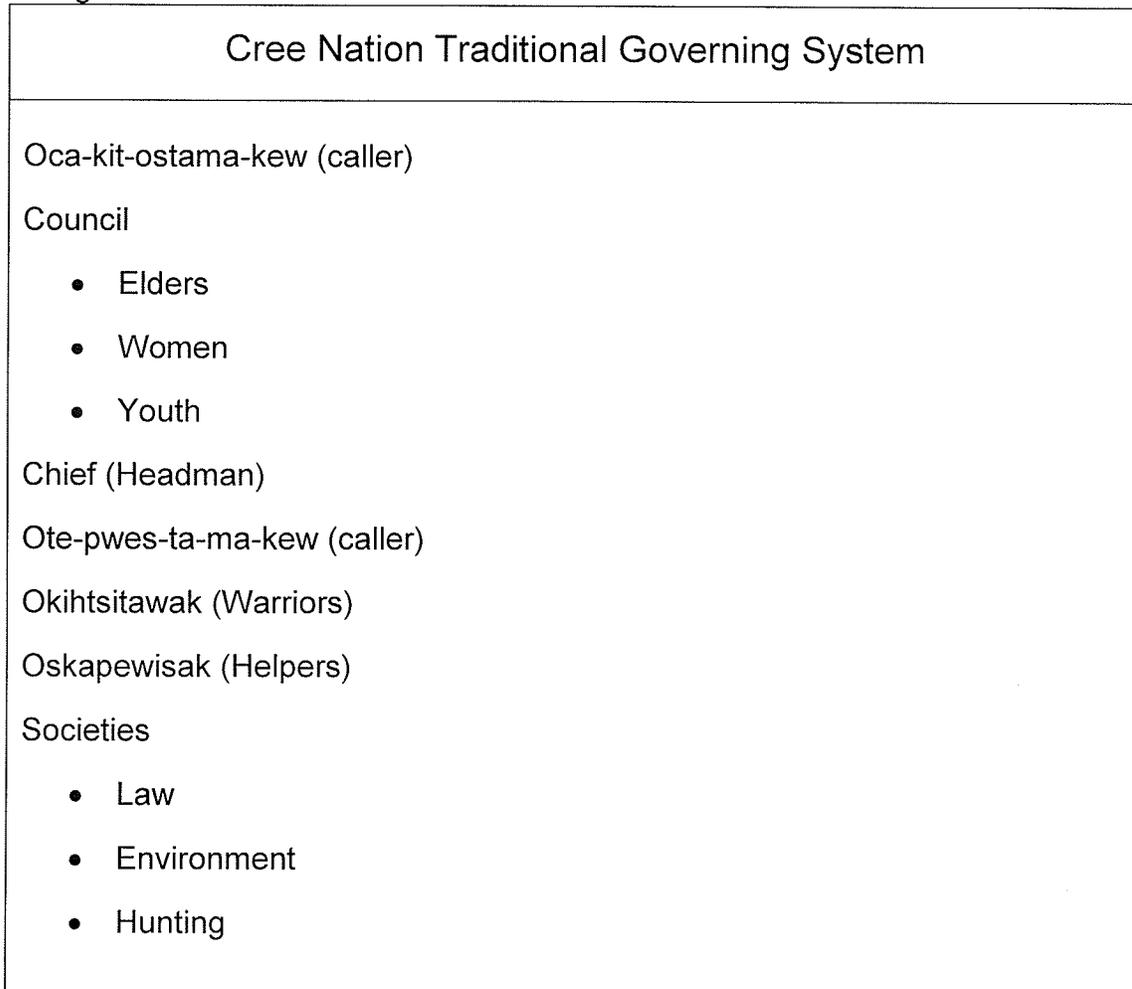
Governing by these principles, the leaders must always remain close to their spirituality. Spirituality is a reminder that we are part of Creation and we are a part of all life. Spirituality brings faithful living, ever reminding us to live by the principles of sharing, love, respect, wisdom, humility, honesty, and courage.

Drawing from the historical research findings from Chapter Four of this thesis, I have identified the diplomatic functions that formulated the Cree traditional governing system (Refer to figure 6). Each position had a specific role with corresponding duties, obligations and responsibilities ensuring their own well -being and families. This included caring for the land and all animal life considered sacred. This system operated on the collective; giving voice to everyone. Their functions involved carrying out ceremonies.

The Cree Nation must bring back the people who were identified as the

Oca-kit-ostama-kewak (callers). This position was held by an Elder honoured with the role to call on Council meetings. They were responsible for organizing ceremonies such as gift-exchanges. The role of the Oca-kit-ostama-kew could extend to setting things right concerning the Council. In the current structure, the Cree Nation has Elder position that functions as an advisor and this role is not considered political. This role is limited to keeping peace and order. Under the traditional Cree governing structure the Oca-kit-ostama-kew's role was much more than just an advisor. This position was responsible for calling ceremonies involving much preparation and this often included fasting and a vision quest. These ceremonies brought group cohesiveness, cemented alliances and re-affirmed friendships. The ceremonies were vital in bringing balance to the governing system of the Cree Nation.

Figure 6



The traditional role of the Otepwestamakewak must also be revived, a position held by an Elder. Their role involved bringing certain members to meet with the Chief and making official announcements to the community. Some Cree Nation communities currently have an Elder in place whose role involves bringing community members together to resolve internal family problems. This role is not defined as the Otepwestamakewa. Rather, this role functions as an advisor to Chief and Council. The Councils must also be re-established, consisting of the Women Council, the Youth Council, and the Elder Council. Each Council worked together in bringing the voice of their

people to the Council.

The Okihtsitawak (Warriors) must be brought back as they were responsible for keeping peace and maintaining law and order in their communities. The Okihtsitawak carried out their functions performing gift-giving ceremonies as a method of settling disputes in their communities. The Oskapewisak must also be revived and given back their responsibilities. Their roles as helpers served to help the different societies carry out their functions. Today, we have many Cree Nation people who are working for their communities; they are not referred to as Oskapewisak but their roles are considered as helpers working for their communities. One Cree community created a position to serve as a mentor and helper to students who are living in the city to pursue their education. The role this person has could be identified as one of the Oskapewisak.

The societies must be re-established to start helping to look after their communities. The responsibilities they held are vital in carrying out certain functions to ensure proper protocols are being followed when dealing with matters concerning law, environmental issues and hunting practices. In the current structure of the Cree Nation, they have committees that are established to deal with community matters. One example is the justice committee, which is responsible for dealing with justice matters. The problem with the present committee is that they replicate western concepts and they ignore the traditional values and practices that were followed to bring balance and harmony to the communities. What I detail here is an alternative political governing model the Cree Nation can work with, towards restoring their traditional governing system. Part of this model is already practiced by the traditional people who are holding ceremonies essential to the well-being of their families which constitute their Nation.

The political leaders must start bringing back the traditional bundles that were significant during diplomatic functions. They must begin using the sacred pipestem bundle, Oskitci that was used to bring harmony during diplomatic discussions as represented honesty. It was also used as a method to keep peace and order in their communities. The Cree Nation must begin working together and working with other Nations. As they have done in the past they negotiated treaties; and it was their treaty agreements that defined their relationships and coexistence that fostered peace, harmony and balance with each other.

As the Cree Nation moves forward to negotiate their self- government framework, they must negotiate their agreements based on their treaty. This is how they negotiated in the past and these negotiations have been going on since 1871. These negotiations were based on the notion of “as long as the grass grows, the sun shines and the rivers flow”. I am not suggesting that they negotiate a new treaty. I am only suggesting that this be used as the basis for their negotiations. Ray, Miller and Tough (2000), explain how the First Nations in Saskatchewan viewed the treaties they negotiated:

They understood treaties as guaranteeing a relationship within which specific terms could be modified from time to time to accomplish the overriding objective of maintaining their livelihood and maintaining control of their own affairs (Ray, Miller and Tough, 2000,p. 202).

Striving to follow the traditional Cree values and principles will be challenging to the Cree Nation as many do not understand what this entails. Therefore, achieving perfection in living according to the principles might be impossible to attain at a given moment in time due to the mainstream society influences. These influences included economic development, lands, minerals

and resource exploitation, all of which are driven by the Canadian state. The Cree Nation must look beyond economic development and resource exploitation simply for the purpose of generating revenue. They must begin looking at how these exploitations are infringing on their traditional values. I am not suggesting the Cree Nation disconnect from the mainstream economy. I am simply saying that the Cree Nation must begin seeking guidance through their ceremonies when economic opportunities are provided to them that involve resource exploitation. The guidance they seek must always be for the overall health and well-being of their Nation and to strengthening their Nation.

The Cree Nation must revisit their efforts in restoring their traditional governing system. The process they had set out to establish through the FAI must not continue to frame western concepts. These concepts do not fit the Cree traditional governing framework. It does not recognize the spiritual notion of self-government. Western ideas have only hindered the First Nations from truly achieving their goal to revive their traditional governing system. If the Cree Nation is to succeed, they must restore their traditional governing system first by reclaiming their spirituality. Secondly, they must begin to rekindle their kinship ties and thirdly, they must pick up their traditional spiritual practices and start conducting the ceremonies they need to bring balance and harmony back to their Nation.

The Canadian government and society must begin to understand why there is an urgent call for the Cree Nation to return to their cultural governing institutions. The Cree Elders cannot stress enough how critical it is for them to bring balance and harmony back to their communities. This can only be accomplished if the Cree Nation is supported to pursue self-government on the basis that is presented here. The Cree Nation cannot continue to operate in the system that they currently operate, as this only infringes their sacred

responsibilities towards their families. Neglecting their responsibilities as a people will only continue to result in the destruction of their communities.

I hope that this thesis has helped you to understand who you are as a people, as it has helped me to come to my understanding. A-te-a-se-keway-tan, we have much work to do; there is no room in our hearts for hate, jealousy, or anger. There is enough work for everyone and we cannot continue to exhaust our efforts in trying to fit into a regime that takes away from who we are as a people.

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Appendix A

Research Consent Form

Jennie Wastesicoot

University of Manitoba

Interdisciplinary Master=s Program

Department of Native Studies

Date:

Dear

I am an Interdisciplinary Masters student in the Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba and I am currently conducting research for my thesis. This project is titled **A Cultural Framework for Cree Self Government: Retracing our Steps**. My research thesis seeks to explore the views of northern Cree Elders in developing a model for self-government.

Upon signing this consent form you are agreeing to participate in an interview which will take place at a mutually agreed upon time and place. A tape recorder will be used in the interview. Notes will be taken to ensure that all information that you give is recorded accurately.

As a participant, you should know that you have certain rights. They include:

- X You may refuse to answer any questions at any time;
- X You may end the interview at any time;
- X Your suggestions and opinions are valuable and critical to this research, therefore I would encourage you to comment on any aspect of this project.
- X Should you prefer, you may remain anonymous and are assured confidentiality in the analysis and reporting of this study.

Your cooperation on this project is greatly appreciated and should you wish to discuss this project further please do not hesitate to contact me by calling _____ or if you wish you may contact my research advisor, Dr. Paul Thomas who can be reached (204) 474-8116. Thank you. Ekosi.
Ki-na-na-sko-mi-tin.

I _____ give my consent to be interviewed for the purpose of the research project described above.