Chapter 2

The Past: In the Time Before Community

...cultural realities are always produced in specific sociohistorical contexts and ... it is necessary to account for the processes that generate those contexts in order to account for the nature of both the practice of identity and the production of historical schemes (Friedman, 1992:837).

A shared sense of the past, of historical experience with others of the same family or ethnic group, provides a strong sense of identity, of belonging to and connection with the land where that history was lived and with the culture that binds the Innu. The Innu conception of the past and culture is potently associated with life in the country.

The Innu word for country or interior is <u>nutshimit</u> which historically was seen in opposition to the coast, <u>uinipekut</u>. Uinipekut, was seen as the "domain of the Euro-Canadians" (Mailhot, 1987:50). It is in the country that the language, history and beliefs of the Innu are passed on to the children and where contact with <u>Innu-assi</u>, their land and territory is renewed (Mailhot, 1987:51).

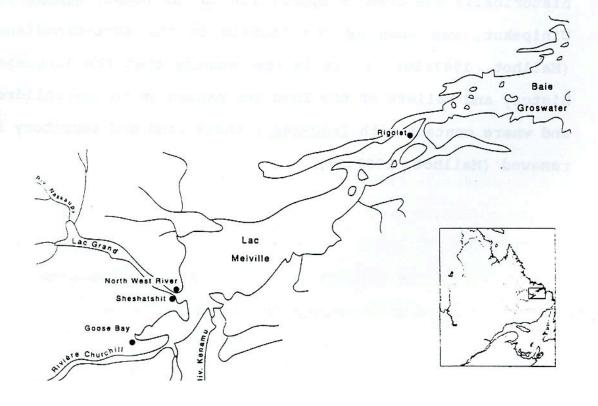
Map 1. Labrador

Source: Plaice, 1991



Map 2. Hamilton Inlet

Source: Mailhot, 1993



Today Sheshatshit, on the shore of Hamilton Inlet is surrounded by Settler and Euro-Canadian society. When Innu speak of the past, it is envisaged as being synonymous with life in the country. Community life is set in an extended sense of the present and is contrasted to life in the country which for the Innu represents a continuity in their cultural heritage. Today the definition of the past as well as country life is defined in its juxtaposition to the present, life in the community with its inherent troubles and tensions.

The Innu of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula make up a total population of about 13,0004. In Labrador about 1,000 Innu reside in Sheshatshit and 500 live in Utshimassit (Davis Inlet). Prior to the fairly recent employment of the term "Innu" this group was known as the Montagnais-Naskapi Indians. The Montagnais-Naskapi, Algonkian and Cree Indians have traditionally inhabited the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula, and together they form the Algonkian cultural and linguistic group. Mailhot (1986b:388-392) suggests that the terms Montagnais-Naskapi came into use at the turn of the nineteenth century and prior to this the Naskapi were often regarded either as a sub-group of the Montagnais or the two terms would be used interchangeably. Since the nineteenth century

⁴ The Innu communities of the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula are: Sheshatshit, Utshimassit (Davis Inlet) in Labrador and Schefferville, Saint-Augustin, Musquaro, La Romaine, Natashquan, Mingan, Betsiamites and Sept-Iles in Quebec.

Montagnais, from the French word for "Mountaineers", has been used to refer to the Innu living closer to the coast and trading post, who were thought to be more acculturated. The Naskapi were viewed as the inland Indians who had less contact with the trading post and had not yet adopted Christianity and were therefore less civilized (Mailhot, 1986b:398). Today the term Naskapi does not carry these connotations, and is generally used to refers to the "Barren ground or Mushuau Innu" of Utshimassit on the North Coast of Labrador. More recently, Innu, meaning "human being or the people" has been used to refer to all the Montagnais-Naskapi of the Quebec Labrador Peninsula, who "stress the fact that they are one people" (Armitage, 1989:7)⁵.

The Labrador boundary is "inextricably tied to history since the arrival of Europeans" (Budgell and Stavely, 1987:2) and has traditionally held little meaning for the Innu of the Quebec-Labrador peninsula. Today, the established boundary of Labrador contains a triangular area of 112,000 square miles. Its western and southern boarders cut an L shape through Northern Quebec. The eastern North Atlantic coastline of 11,000 miles runs from Forteau on the Strait of Belle Isle up to the northeastern tip of Ungava Peninsula. Included in this coastal stretch is the Hamilton Inlet (also known as Lake

^{5 &}quot;Innu" will be used through out this thesis except in quotes or references which employ Montagnais and/or Naskapi.

Melville), which reaches approximately 170 miles into central Labrador. Northwest River and Sheshatshit are located on the northern shore on the western edge of Lake Melville, in the interior. The abundance of wildlife and rich vegetation along the shores and tributaries of Lake Melville has been an attraction for Innu bands, Inuit, and more recently Settler populations for hundreds, and in some cases, thousands of years. Happy Valley-Goose Bay, and Mud Lake also lie at the head of this Inlet, 30 kilometres from Northwest River and Sheshatshit. The combined population of these communities established around the head of Hamilton Inlet today is approximately 9,000, (Plaice, 1991:xi). remaining The population is spread out in smaller communities along the coast and in the larger interior towns of Labrador City and Wabush (see Map 1). The Innu living in Labrador today make up less than 5% of the 40,000 inhabitants which today includes, Inuit, Settlers6, and Newcomers7.

⁶ Settlers are descendants of the early Europeans from Scotland, Britain and France who came to Labrador on fishing or trading vessels, or to work at a trading post. These men married Inuit, and in some cases Innu women and set themselves up as independent trappers.

⁷ Newcomer refers to people from other parts of Canada (or the world) who have come to work in Labrador and settled here. The settlement of Newcomers in Labrador is as recent as this century. The majority have arrived since the construction of the Goose Bay Air Base.

2.1 Historical Overview

Until the late 1960s a tendency existed among anthropologists to view hunter gatherer societies as being relatively untouched prior to settlement, and existing in isolation from the rest of the world since the beginning of time. However, Carmel Schrire (1984) argues that these assumptions and images of the pristine past of hunter gatherers are inaccurate and misleading.

There exists today in hunter gatherer studies a marked gap between observed facts of the existence of contemporary groups and inferences drawn about prehistoric people. It is as though contemporary hunter gathers have been catapulted from a timeless and stable past into a turbulent, labile present, with ancient adaptations crammed into a dissonant framework (1984:1).

The Innu were undoubtedly overwhelmed with the impact of rapid changes occurring prior to and at the time of permanent settlement. However, for hundreds, maybe thousands of years they have been affected by patterns of trade with Europeans or interactions with other Aboriginal groups and changes in patterns of harvesting animals throughout the world. Schrire points out that different configurations of trade, hunting and fishing in one area would have reverberations in trade and animal populations in other parts of the world. A "broader perspective will help release hunter gatherers from the frozen tableaux of our thoughts and integrate them into the wider world of which they have always been a part" (1984:20).

Archaeological research in Labrador and the far north more generally has changed our assumptions of cultural stasis by demonstrating that

cultural adaptation in the north has a much greater time depth than had originally been suspected and a greater degree of social flexibility and dynamic cultural adaptation to changing social and environmental conditions than previously presumed (Loring, 1992:2).

Linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological data from the arctic and sub-arctic regions of Canada suggests that prehistoric groups of Indian and Inuit hunters and fishermen have never been "significantly autonomous" (Loring, 1992:24).

The glaciers covering coastal and interior Labrador receded between 9,000 - 10,000 years ago. Archaeological research indicates that the Strait of Belle Isle on the southern Labrador coast was first occupied by Indians of the Maritime archaic tradition as early as 8,000 B.P. (Tuck, 1975:11). Hamilton Inlet has been home to Inuit and Indian groups since 6,000 B.P. (Fitzhugh, 1977:1). Loring (1992:514) established that a link exists between the Naskapi-Montagnais of the historic period with the pre-historic cultural continuum that reaches back "at least 2,000 years".

Beyond that there are chronological breaks, stylistic discontinuities, dramatic settlement-subsistence differences, and historic precedents that make deriving a direct historical connection between the Innu and the Intermediate Period Indian groups and/or Maritime Archaic populations tenuous (Loring, 1992:513).

Loring's thesis runs counter to the current claims of the Innu to have lived in Nitassinan since the glaciers receded 9,000 years ago (Loring, 1992:514). Whether or not the Innu were descendants of the earliest occupants of Labrador, they were not alone in Labrador for long and nor was their occupancy limited to one region. In response to other cultural groups, the historic and prehistoric Indians of Labrador were compelled to "perfect the social strategies necessary to provide access to resources and information on a large geographic scale" (Loring, 1992:54). This was achieved through the development of social institutions and practices that allowed for interaction with distant neighbours. These social forms may have enabled interaction with foreign groups of Inuit and possibly Europeans. Loring argues that survival for early Indian groups depended not only on an inherent flexibility in adaptation to changing environmental and social conditions but also on the maintenance of a strong ethnic identity in relation to Inuit hunters (Loring, 1992:28).

accounts) a Viking expedition lead by Thorvald Erikson on a voyage from their base in Vinland (L'anse aux Meadows on the Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland) to Markland (meaning 'Wood Land' referring to Labrador) sailed into Hamilton Inlet. Here at the mouth of English River Thorvald Erikson was killed by an Indian arrow (Fitzhugh, 1972:208). This was the first known

contact between Aboriginal inhabitants and Europeans in Hamilton Inlet. This early encounter between Norse explorers and Indians was most likely passed on in the oral histories of the late Prehistoric Period Indians (Loring, 1992:97, Zimmerly, 1991:35) (first published in 1975).

Innu bands in the Quebec-Labrador Peninsula were already familiar with European interests in the fur trade by the time Cartier arrived on the shores of the St. Lawrence in 1534 (Leacock, 1980:25). Due to the expansive presence of Europeans and Inuit along the Labrador coast during the 1500 and 1600s, the Innu population left their coastal habitations and moved further into the interior where they "developed a specialized interior adaptation based on the exploitation of the large barren ground caribou herds" (Loring, 1992:4).

Written accounts of the Innu began in the early 1600s. The first were the diaries and reports of Pere Le Jeune, a superior of the Jesuit mission in Quebec who spent a winter among the Montagnais, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 1633-34. His early accounts were written both to convey his observations of Innu life as well as to stress the need for religion, education and the forces of "civilization" necessary for their assimilation and control (Leacock, 1980).

In 1702, Seigneur de Courtemanche was granted a concession in New France by the King of France. The area granted included Hamilton Inlet. The French had already

established trading posts along the coast North of the Gulf of St. Lawrence. He recorded in his diary a description of the abundance of animals on land and salmon in the rivers. The 'Esquimaux', he describes as

becoming more sociable and are beginning to trade with the French who are settled there and who trade in their commodities. I have also attracted in the interior a tribe of Indians who had not as yet come into contact with the French. They are very intelligent and a missionary would have no trouble to implant Christianity among them (in Zimmerly, 1991:36-37).

In other historical accounts from this period and up until the early 1900s, the Indians appear to be aloof and are usually described as being off in the distance, paddling by in their birch bark canoes. The distance between Europeans and Indians was physically changed when, around 1743, a French trading post was established near Northwest River and believed to have been maintained until 1763 when Labrador was placed under the jurisdiction of a British Governor. From 1774 until 1809 Labrador was part of Quebec until 1815 when it was finally placed under the jurisdiction of Newfoundland (Zimmerly, 1991:47).

⁸ Harper wrote that the "history of the Northwest River Band is somewhat vague and incompletely documented. We have only a meagre knowledge of its origin, composition, wanderings and shifting territory"(1964:44-45).

The perception that Euro-Canadian administrations actually controlled Labrador has largely been the product of an ethnocentric imagination. As long as Aboriginal groups have been the primary

In 1777 two British men established themselves as independent settlers in the Northwest River area. Both married Inuit women and adopted a combination of Innu, Inuit and European technologies in order to survive. They were the first of a small group of mostly English and Scottish Settlers who began to populate the shores of Lake Melville as trappers and traders (Zimmerly 1991:45). In 1784 two French Canadians established trading posts, one in Northwest River and the other across the channel in Sheshatshit. In 1799 these two men, Marcoux and Dumontier, united their interests (1991:44). Reports from them in 1821 indicate that trade in furs with the Montagnais-Naskapi was strong and Hamilton Inlet had a well established Settler population (1991:49).

In the mid-1800s Newfoundland fishermen began to settle with their families along the shores of Hamilton Inlet to fish during the summer. The Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) set up posts in the area in 1836 beginning "a new period of immigration and cultural innovation" (Zimmerly, 1991:70). Drinking was common amongst the Indians and the Settlers at this point. The Indians were described as being "insufferable drunkards" and the trading companies were already in the habit of supplying alcohol (Zimmerly, 1991:74). The Settlers were equally

inhabitants of the territory, the land has ultimately continued to rest under their jurisdiction (Peter Armitage, personal communication 1993).

predisposed to drinking. A permanent Protestant mission was not established until 1884 in Northwest River, because the Settlers had a bad reputation for drinking and showing disregard for the visiting preachers (Zimmerly, 1991:51).

An American tourist who visited Northwest River in 1860 described the settlement and the Indians camped there: "A little apart from the houses are the frame poles of numerous Nascopi lodges, disposed in a large circle. These are covered with skins and occupied when the Indians come down to trade" (Hallock in Zimmerly, 1991:97). Hallock also provides an interesting description of their physical characteristics and dress at that time.

They are tall, straight, graceful, of light complexion and pleasing features... The men are passionately fond of dress; and their native garments, of softest buckskin, are of most faultless cut, and fancifully decorated with pigments of various colours, and wrought with silk, in designs representing birds, flowers, canoes, etc. Their yellow dye is obtained from the spawn of trout. a scarlet sash, which girds the coat is worn about the waist, the flowing ends reaching to the knees. women affect the Bloomer costume-petticoats and trousers; but their dress is far inferior to their lords' and masters'. Tall conical caps of gaudy flannel are invariably worn, ornamented with beads, and sometimes with bears' and eagles' claws. The style of dressing the hair is unique. The women, parting theirs behind, draw it forward and do it up in egg-shaped bunches on either side of the head; while the men wear theirs in queues, decorated with beads, and terminating in a bead tassel. An indispensable article of dress is the fur gauntlet, which is made to reach above the elbow. These are held in place

by a thong passed over the shoulders. A few have adopted the dress of the whites in part, but will wear only the finest cloth, and that of the gayest colours (Hallock in Zimmerly, 1991:99).

The Hudson's Bay Company during this period was eager to maintain the flow of incoming furs from the Innu hunters. In 1873 a clinic was held by the HBC to vaccinate the Innu against smallpox. Zimmerly (1991:107-108) suggests that though there may have been humanitarian motives behind this gesture, it is likely that the HBC's more powerful desire was to maintain a high turn over in the fur trade. The HBC Post Records in Northwest River from 1865-1883 (see also Roche, 1992) refer to the various ways the Indians were involved with the company:

some worked as labourers hauling goods to the inland posts, some were outfitted by the Company and worked on the "share" system, while others merely came to the post and traded their furs for ammunition and supplies on an irregular basis (Zimmerly, 1991:109).

These records also reveal the degree of independence the Innu exercised in their earlier trading relationships. In contrast the HBC Post was at times dependent on the Innu for supplies of caribou meat and furs upon which the Post's existence relied. The HBC often employed Innu hunters as guides (Roche, 1992). The Labrador Innu were able to maintain their independent ways despite the colonizing tendencies of the HBC, as long they were able to hunt caribou which furnished most of

their needs. But the transition from being independent hunters to becoming increasingly dependant on ammunition and supplies available from the HBC eventually occurred over several decades beginning in the mid-1800s (see Cooke, 1981 and Roche, 1992).

Many Labrador Innu were converted to Catholicism during the 1800s (Mailhot, 1993:29) and would often travel to trading posts in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in order to see the mission priest who performed baptisms and marriages. The visits by the Catholic missionaries to Sheshatshit were somewhat variable during the late 1800s (Mailhot, 1993:29-37). The Innu continued to visit the trading post in Northwest River, but the frequency of visits and the number of Innu who came to the post was reduced and irregular (Roche, 1992:42-70). In an attempt to bring back the Innu traders to the post, the HBC offered financial aid for a priest to visit Northwest River in the summer of 1858. George Simpson wrote to inform Donald Smith, the HBC manager in Northwest River in March 1858,

...I have rendered aid to a priest, the Rev'd Pere Arnoud, who proposed making a tour during the summer from the Gulf of St. Lawrence by the way of the River Moise to Northwest River.
...I trust that the visit of the missionary to the Nascopies in their own country may satisfy their desires in that respect and that they be content to remain steadily at their post (Roche, 1992:65).

Pere Arnoud did not make it to Northwest River that summer and it was not until 1866, that Pere Babel eventually

came to Northwest River (McGee, 1961:130). Competition between the trading posts was so acute that the Hudson's Bay Company was willing to meet the conditions the missionary had set forth as essential to opening a mission in Northwest River (1961:131). These conditions included financial assistance, provision of a suitable building; suspension of all alcohol sales to the Innu, and assistance from the HBC in separating the Innu from the Settler population (1961:131). In the end a permanent Catholic mission was not established in Northwest River until 1952.

Periodic visits by a priest brought some Innu families back to the Northwest River post, though the majority of family continued to travel to Mingan and other coastal missions. Thus the absence of Innu hunters and trappers in the Lake Melville area opened the way for local trappers to expand into the Innu hunting territories. When the Innu hunters returned to their territories in the early 1900s they began to complain to the trading companies of the encroachment by trappers into their hunting grounds. A number of potentially violent encounters ensued between the Settlers and Indians

over hunting territory. 10 (See for example Bert Blake's story in Zimmerly, 1991:127).

The Settler community by this time had established its own set of laws and customs. Tracts of land were trapped in lines and trapping lines were passed on by ultimogeniture or in the case of a trapper's death they would be leased to other trappers by the trapper's widow. The Settlers saw their law as rational and applicable to everyone, and did not recognize Innu rights to the land. If the land was not being trapped with established lines, then it was open territory, as far as the Settlers were concerned. A trapper left his family to trap his line as a means of economic survival, trapping for the Settlers was seen as an occupation.

The patterns which governed Innu land use and occupancy were in stark contrast to those of the Settlers. For the Innu hunting on the land was integral to their religious beliefs and social organization as well as their livelihood. The Sheshatshit band traditionally hunted in six territories to the southeast, south, southwest, west, northwest and north of

Though the confrontation between Bert Blake and the Innu was potentially violent, the relationship that Bert Blake had with the Innu more generally was described by Merrick (1987:70) as being very amicable and he also states that Blake was fluent in Innuaimun.

The appropriation of human property in this manner also occurred in Australia where "whites sought to acquire land on the basis of Aborigines' failure to understand the idea of possession" (Youngs, 1992:30).

Northwest River. Mailhot (1986) argues that the occupancy of Innu hunting territories in Labrador is not fixed. The territorial mobility of the Labrador Innu resulted from matrilocal residence and band exogamy. The land use patterns were based on "structured mobility" enabling families to change hunting territories from year to year according to their kinship connections (1986:100). Mailhot's research, on the terms in the Sheshatshit dialect used in reference to hunting territories, demonstrated that no concept of individual land ownership existed (1986:94).

The increase in the Settler population, which tripled between 1901 and 1941, intensified the extension of trap lines into Innu hunting grounds (Zimmerly, 1991:192). In 1937, animals like the marten and beaver started to disappear. By the 1940s, the Innu were suffering not only from the on-going invasion of their hunting grounds, but also from a sharp drop in fur prices as well as a drastic decline in the caribou population in the area (Armitage, 1991:48). They were hesitant to return to the country in the fall due to the

fear of starvation and the deadly diseases that struck at this time and took many lives. By their own standards, the Indians were living in extreme poverty. In order to survive, they increasingly had to seek assistance from the government of Newfoundland (Armitage, 1991:48).

An American and Canadian military base was established at Goose Bay during World War II. Construction began in the

summer of 1941 and the face of Hamilton Inlet was changed forever. Within a short period of time, a large airport and city for 8,000 people had been built (Zimmerly, 1991:200). The development of the base in Goose Bay was a welcome relief for the Settlers who looked forward to the security wage labour provided. The Innu and Inuit were not able to respond to the expectations of wage employment and did not fare as well, though a few managed to get jobs on the Base (Zimmerly, 1991:206-207). Many settlers from all over Labrador moved to Happy Valley, a town five kilometres from the airport, that had sprung up to house the civilians working at the base. When the year-round settlement of Sheshatshit was first established in 1952, it was hoped that if Innu youth went to school and learned to read and write in English, they would then get jobs on the Base and adopt a modern lifestyle. However, this expectation, held by both the missionaries and government officers, was never met and the majority of Innu families continued to spend the winter months hunting in the interior up until the late 1960s.

In 1949 the government of Newfoundland joined Confederation, but the Labrador Innu did not become status Indians like their counterparts in the rest of Canada. Instead the two governments decided that the Innu would remain non-status and have the same rights as citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador. Shortly after confederation, the federal

government entered into an agreement with Newfoundland. The agreement, which has since been renewed several times, involved the transfer of federal funds to the province for specified services for the Innu, such as health and social services. As a result of this decision, the Innu did not have access to the federal programs for status Indians (Armitage, 1991:48)¹².

By the early 1950s, the situation of the Labrador Innu was so desperate that both the federal and provincial governments actively undertook to establish communities with government-built houses for year-round residence. The two government officials appointed to implement this project had great visions of industrial development for the region. But the "Indian's traditional practices of hunting and fishing were seen as incompatible with this vision" (Armitage, 1991:49). To this end, provincial games laws were later enforced among the Innu who then found themselves arrested, their game and guns confiscated, for hunting caribou or other animals out of season.

¹² The Innu recently made an appeal to the Canadian Human Rights Commission contesting this agreement and the discrepancy between their treatment by the federal government and the economic resources which have been awarded them in contrast to Native groups in the rest of Canada. McRae's Report (1993) for the Human Rights Commission recommends federal acknowledgment of its constitutional responsibility towards the Innu and the instatement of direct federal funding to the Labrador Innu (the Quebec Innu are status Indians) in compliance with the Indian Act.

John McGee, an anthropology student lived in the Lake Melville area while doing research on the Innu for a total of three years between 1942 - 1953. During this period, the Sheshatshit Innu, with a total population of 150 people, continued to spend the short summer months camping together in Sheshatshit. The summer was a period of rest and preparation for the fall and winter expedition back into the country. It was during these gatherings that marriages and baptisms were performed. Several Innu worked on the American Base in Goose Bay or for the Grenfell Mission in Northwest River which allowed them to buy supplies for the fall and winter months ahead. In September and October the band in Sheshatshit would split up into family groups and travel 40 or 50 miles up the rivers and lakes in the direction of their hunting grounds, to build and repair canoes, pick berries and get tents and clothing ready for the winter months (McGee, 1961:79-86). During the late fall and early winter the Innu lived in the bush, moving when necessary to follow game. These small family hunting groups, related by blood or marriage, would sometimes be camped in close enough range to visit occasionally (McGee, 1961:86). McGee notes that once the mission was established in Sheshatshit along with a few houses, about twenty-five percent of the band came back in December or January. These families set up their tents up next to the houses of relatives and friends who were unable to go into the country. They escaped

the coldest months in the bush and were able to collect welfare and send their children to the mission school (McGee, 1961:57). The remainder of Innu families stayed in the bush through the winter, returning to Sheshatshit in June after breakup¹³.

McGee argued that, despite hundreds of years of contact with Europeans and the products industrial society had to offer, the Innu seemed to incorporate what they needed, make some practical adaptations to their seasonal activities, yet maintain their primary existence as hunters.

Although the indigenous natives of the Labrador Peninsula have been directly or indirectly in contact with European culture for at least three hundred years, and probably much longer than that, most of them have remained in roughly the same socio-economic condition which prevailed at the time of first recorded contacts with Europeans (McGee, 1961:vii).

Found in many earlier writings and more recently in those of McGee (1961) is a portrayal of the Innu as strong and proud people whose life as hunters equipped them with all their needs.

Lake Melville Indians appear to be imbued with a will for happy survival. In other words, their aim in life seems to be to live happily and peacefully as long as possible, just above the bare subsistence level. That is, they realize that certain minimal requirements in

¹³ Breakup refers to the breaking up of ice in lakes and rivers which makes travel by sled or canoe almost impossible during the months of April and May.

the way of food, clothing, housing, warmth, sleep and mental satisfaction are essential for survival in their milieu. Formerly, these Indians depended completely on themselves and nature. Today, survival is to some extent contingent on the fur trade, as it has been for the last three hundred years or more (McGee, 1961:54).

McGee expresses a rather romantic notion that changes since contact were minimal, and the Innu merely incorporated what they needed, maintaining throughout this period the central social and religious practices associated with survival in the country. However, it appears that contrary to McGee's observations the Innu were undergoing fairly major changes. Today, McGee's thesis appears to be over-simplified. He underestimated the now visible, longer-term effects of these changes on the stability of Innu society.

2.2 The Social and Spiritual World of the Past

Innu society was originally perceived by outsiders to be markedly egalitarian. Though men and women had separate spheres of activity, these became interchangeable when necessary. Le Jeune remarked on the "great power" held by women (in Leacock, 1981:34-35). Leacock (1981:43-62) argued that the later manifestation of structured inequality between the sexes was predominantly a consequence of the Jesuit program for colonization. The internalized obligations of new Christians to be submissive to the will of God included submission of men and women to the hierarchy of the Church,

and the submission of women to men and of children to their parents.

Lucien Turner (1979), who spent time among the Naskapi of the Ungava Peninsula in 1882-1884 also observed that men and women each had separate spheres of activities. Women, he pointed out do the majority of manual labour around the home. They are considered inferior to men, and "in their social life they soon show the effects of the hardships they undergo" (1979:107).

In examining religious practices of the past, Speck wrote, the "Montagnais-Naskapi have no formal religion any more than they have a nationality" (1935:18). McGee, on the other hand, describes the Northwest River Innu as having accepted in toto Catholicism (1961:vii). Perhaps both these interpretations hold some truth and are able to provide us with some insight. The Innu claimed to be Catholic and their commitment to having a priest perform marriages and baptisms is evidenced in the fact that they travelled to coastal missions during the summers that Sheshatshit was without a visiting priest (McGee, 1961:26).

A young Innu man would learn that there are two things essential to his existence. The first is to hunt, fish and trap and the second is to manage the force of Manitu, which Speck defines as the "universe, the natural law, the unknown, spirit-forces, supreme power" (1935:34). However, other

authors (see for example Horwood, 1981:27 and Harper, 1961) dispute this and suggest that the major and most powerful force was the Spirit of the Caribou. All aspects of Innu life, according to Speck, were permeated by the spirit world. As a consequence of the power of these spirits, in all the functional and practical aspects of life such as hunting, and crafts, "there is a tendency to dematerialize nature... in their systems of thought" (1935:19). Speck stresses that without recognizing the power of the spiritual forces in Innu life, large parts of the ethnographic picture would be left out:

In accordance with the idea that hunting is a holy occupation and that game animals are holy as well, we see how the entire aboriginal life and being of this people is held in a holy light. This simple statement explains the whole economic and social doctrinal program of the natives. The distinction between the meat of wild and domestic animals is wide. The diet consisting of wild game was to the ancients a sanctified medicinal one (1935:20).

The Innu separate animals into the following categories: four legged, waterfowl, birds, fish and insects (animals found elsewhere are considered European and have no role for the Innu). Each species belongs to a kingdom and each kingdom has a chief spirit. The caribou spirit has the most power and governs over the others (Armitage, 1991:77, see also 1992). Relationships with the animal spirits determine the spiritual and material well-being of the community. Hunting is done in cooperation with the animal masters or chief spirits. Animal

bones are handled with the utmost care as they are used by the animal masters to replenish the animal stock (1991:78-79). Through dreams, drumming, scapulmancy and the shaking tent ceremonies, the Innu can communicate with the animal masters and receive "invaluable information about the world around them as well as the world of the spirits" (1991:79).

The makushan feast is perhaps one of the most significant Innu rituals.

The ceremony begins with the crushing and boiling of caribou leg bones. This process is supervised by a utshimau-ushkan, or "first man of the long bones." When the meal is ready for consumption, a menatshitsh makushan (he who looks well after makushan) takes over the supervisory role. He makes sure that proper disposal and other feast rules are followed ... that most of the caribou bone marrow, cakes of caribou fat called atiku-pimi, and caribou meat be eaten indoors... and none of the caribou be given to the dogs.

During makushan, the oldest men eat first, then the other men, then the women and finally the children. On some occasions, a dance is held after the feast during which an older man drums and sings quietly in a subdued, candle lit corner of a tent or house

(Armitage, 1991:83-84).

Innu acceptance of Christianity was based on practical considerations. Though it did not provide guidance for the hunter as did Innu religious practices, it did however, promise a bountiful afterlife, providing certain commitments were adhered to (Speck, 1935:32). Christianity was fairly well accepted among the Innu and yet it did not radically alter

their spiritual, social or economic base. Armitage suggests that a probable reason for this is

that they see no contradiction between belief in God and Jesus and their belief in their own traditional deities— the animal masters and the forest spirits. God is responsible for overseeing the activities of human beings and the animal masters watch over the activities of animals and their treatment by human beings (1991:77).

The summer visits with the missionary established the settlement as the centre for the practice of Christian rites such as baptism, confession, communion, marriage and funerals. Non-Christian practices such as paying respect to the animal masters became reserved for the country (Armitage, 1992:67).

Both Speck and McGee seem to agree that despite the influences of Catholicism and the fur trade, there was essentially little change in the pattern of Innu life. McGee's analysis of conditions among the Innu at the eve of semi-permanent settlement, was that the "economic aspect of their culture has remained relatively primitive and their socio-religious culture has remained relatively stable" (1961:125)¹⁴.

David Turner (1993:40) suggests that material advancement among the Australian Aborigines was not given priority over the maintenance of peace and social order. Though they possessed the necessary technical and environmental knowledge to further exploit the resources available to them, this knowledge was never applied. "Having solved the problem of living together through transcendent Forms, material advancement seems to be have been arrested at a particular stage, although material well-being was ensured under the arrangement" (1993:40).

Speck wrote that,

There has been...little alteration in the spirit of Montagnais-Naskapi culture, despite the many material innovations which have been acquired from Europeans. Their culture has continued largely in its original pattern-hunting and wandering. And the elementary religious associations of this phase of existence cannot be conceived of as being likely to change, as long as the culture-pattern holds firm. Radical change would only ensue upon change of their cultural base, e.g., from hunting-nomadism to agriculture, to pastoral life or to civilized employment (1935:30).

2.3 The Transition to Permanent Settlement

The cultural base of the Innu underwent a radical shift when they moved off the land and were forced to abandon their traditional means of subsistence. The eventual shift to settlement life, despite promises and dreams, never provided an alternative cultural or economic base for Innu residents. Village life was at the same time incapable of sustaining the conditions under which traditional values could be preserved.

A permanent mission was established in Sheshatshit in 1952, but it was not until 1968 that the majority of the population made this their year-round base. Prior to 1968, Sheshatshit remained a summer and occasional winter residence for many families. Housing was initially limited to the elderly, widows and the disabled who could no longer accompany

family members into the country for the fall and winter months. The majority of families who continued a semi-nomadic existence would live in their tents while visiting the settlement. Those who remained in the community were able to collect welfare and government pensions (McGee, 1961:30).

By 1959, fourteen houses were built, twelve with government assistance to house the old and disabled, and two by men who provided the lumber and labour to build houses for their families (Mailhot and Michaud, 1965:11). Until 1959, the school remained part of the mission. After 1959, when the first school was built, a few more families took up year-round residence. The eventual settlement of the remaining Innu, who had maintained an semi-nomadic and independent existence, took place in 1968. This final component of sedentarization was influenced in part by enforced school attendance upon which government assistance became conditional (McGee, 1961:31). In addition, a large housing project responsible for building 51 houses in Sheshatshit between 1965 and 1968, helped sway the semi-nomadic families permanent settlement into last (Armitage, 1990:10). The government-built houses were all without water and sewerage facilities. It was not until late in the 1980's that the majority of residences were equipped with indoor toilets and running water.

Settlement introduced structural changes which made adaptation particularly difficult. Traditional forms of

egalitarianism and economic control were no longer relevant. Leadership models which existed primarily in relation to the caribou hunt and other means of subsistence could not be sustained in the social and economic environment of the community. The Innu were subjected to the coercive influence and leadership of the missionary, traders and government officers. The dominant attitude of these Euro-Canadian missionaries and government officers towards the Innu was that of superiority and control.

Education was seen by the missionaries and government officers as the key to sedentarization. McGee suggested that

compulsory school attendance may well become the chief factor conducive to a change of Montagnais outlook and culture. This is partly because through school the Indians are forced to learn English, which is certainly a means to their being employed above the menial level (1961:147).

Though McGee saw the school as a means of improving the situation of the Innu, he also pointed to aspects of the school which were quite inappropriate for Innu children.

The curriculum of required studies, established in accord with what is suitable and necessary for white children in the capital city, shows little relevance to the needs of children, Indian or white, in the remoter areas. The required language of instruction is English and the texts and other class materials are virtually useless in the Lake Melville environment. This means that the missionary, in conjunction with the local school board, must make heroic efforts to maintain some semblance of instruction and to

try to meet rather ridiculous standards (McGee, 1961:145).

Despite that fact that the incongruence of a Euro-Canadian education system with the language, values and culture of the Innu students was recognized, the struggle to rectify this dichotomized situation obviously had little success as these conditions persisted for decades. A government officer, Walter Rockwood, advocated that the foundation for social evolution was education and it was essential that the Innu children begin this process through schooling (1959:4).

The rapid increase in the non-Innu population of the area beginning in Northwest River in the early 1900s and then accelerating in the 1940s with the construction of the Base in Goose Bay, further entrenched the social system of class and status. The racist attitudes of Whites, the paternalism of the government, church and education system all contributed to the diminishing of self-esteem among the Innu.

Spending less time on the land resulted in the consumption of less "wild" food. Caribou, considered "real" Innu food for the body as well as the soul, ceased to be a staple in Sheshatshit. Like other country foods, it began to play a less prominent role in the daily Innu diet. Chips, cheesies, french fries, carnation milk, cold cereal, beef, chicken, coke and pepsi were incorporated into a diet which

was occasionally supplemented by wild foods like salmon, trout, caribou, ptarmigan, hare, geese and beaver.

The process of procuring food in the community was transformed into a unidimensional activity regulated primarily by the flow of cash. Families were now living in separate houses, receiving separate cheques to buy food which was to be shared and eaten primarily with their immediate family.

Henriksen (1989:ix-xi) (first published 1973) suggested that the "fundamental interdependence" of the Innu was required by the environment in which they lived and hunted. Settlement did not command the equivalent degree of sharing and dependence upon one another and thus gave people the freedom to exercise their autonomy in ways never possible in the country.

The physical health of the Innu suffered under the sedentary conditions of village life. Regular access to alcohol in combination with a bad diet and inactivity brought on weight gains and poor skin conditions. The lack of clean running water in the village caused gastroenteritis, impetigo, and related infections. In 1966, the conditions in the village were described as being "horrible" (Budgell, 1984:43). In 1967 water wells were drilled in Sheshatshit; prior to this, clean drinking water had to be obtained from the mission house (1984:46).

Fur prices had dropped by 1968 so that trapping was no longer a viable means of subsisting. More importantly, the imposition of Newfoundland provincial hunting laws severely restricted their access to caribou. The delivery of social services, upon which everyone became dependant, restricted their movements into the country as cheques could not be obtained if people were not residing in the village. Distribution of government cheques was made conditional on school attendance, in an effort to increase low rates of attendance. Compulsory schooling and an increasing dependency on social assistance restricted trips into the country and caused a breakdown in the traditional transmission of knowledge and skills from older to the younger generations.

Village life had initially offered a sanctuary for the Innu who, at the time of settlement, were suffering from poverty, disease and were in need of assistance (Armitage, 1989:12). At the time, many were eager to settle and to send their children to a Catholic school (Armitage, 1989:12, McGee, 1961:142). Yet the conditions of community life, with institutional controls exercised by church and government served to sabotage the ability of the Innu to adapt to settlement life. The Innu found themselves settled in the domain of the Euro-Canadians, removed from Innu-assi, from contact with their land and their Innu identity.

Man 3. Community of Sheshatshit