

# **RECONCILING AMERINDIAN AND EUROAMERICAN (MIS)UNDERSTANDINGS OF A SHARED PAST: CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE 1832 HANNAH BAY “MASSACRE”**

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## **Abstract / Résumé**

The 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre” reveals that the problem of reconciling cross-cultural (mis)understandings of a shared past in contexts of conflict can only be resolved by rethinking the paradigm and culture theory typically used to frame such conflicts. Defining culture as clusters (held and renegotiated by persons-in-relationship) of shared understandings embodied and shaped by our experiences and actions can help avoid certain culture theory pitfalls identified by Adam Kuper. Defining culture in this way also reveals a divide between cultures of epistemic integrity and epistemic incompetence that runs deeper than any differences between Amerindians and Euroamericans.

Le « massacre » de la baie Hannah de 1832 révèle que le problème de faire concorder la compréhension (ou l'incompréhension) interculturelle d'un passé commun dans des contextes de conflit ne peut être résolu qu'en jetant un nouveau regard sur les paradigmes et la théorie de la culture utilisés pour expliquer de tels conflits. En définissant la culture comme des grappes d'éléments de compréhension communs incorporés dans nos expériences et actions et formés par celles-ci (possédés et renégociés par des personnes dans des relations données), on peut éviter certaines embûches de la théorie de la culture cernées par Adam Kuper. Une telle définition de la culture révèle également un fossé entre des cultures d'intégrité épistémique et d'incompétence épistémique qui est plus profond que les différences entre les Amérindiens et les Euroaméricains.

“Massacre of Europeans at Hannah Bay (apparently induced by shamanic influence from Cree disgruntled with white presence).” By this account, the 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre” would appear to be simply another example of the clash between Amerindian and Euroamerican cultures. However, as this article aims to show, today’s dominant polarizing interpretive paradigm of “Amerindian versus Euroamerican” can sometimes cast more shadows than light on such shared pasts. Ultimately, the problem of reconciling Amerindian and Euroamerican cultural (mis)understandings of a shared past can only be resolved by deconstructing the very paradigm used to frame it and certain assumptions that underlie it – regarding the nature of culture itself.<sup>1</sup>

The summary account of the 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre” cited above appears in Hap Wilson’s *Missinaibi: Journey to the Northern Sky, From Lake Superior to James Bay by Canoe* (1994: 15-17). On the last stretch of this journey, the Missinaibi merges with the Mattagami to form the Moose River, and following its final northward descent by plane on a summer day there are few more striking vistas than that of the light clay-brown waters of the Abitibi catapulting down the Allan Rapids into and alongside the dark blue waters of the Moose. From the air, an almost clean line appears to divide them initially, but—broken at times by an island or shoal—it hazes downstream. Where they empty into James Bay on the northern horizon, the two rivers merge into one. Looking back towards the south, however, the sources of the two rivers disappear at very different points on the horizon, and to the east we see Hannah Bay, where this “Massacre of Europeans” by Cree is alleged to have occurred.

Wilson’s information was gleaned from conversations with a couple of residents of Moosonee, one of several communities near Hannah Bay—at the bottom of James Bay—that are home to descendants of those who partook in or witnessed the sequence of events that left their mark in individual and collective memories during the winter of 1832.<sup>2</sup> Oral traditions have kept the memories of this fur-trade era conflict alive, both in the lands that drain into Hannah Bay—where Cree continue to harvest resources—and in the neighboring communities, especially Waskaganish (Rupert House), Moose Factory and Moosonee. Furthermore, these rich but diverse Cree oral accounts are coupled by a large collection of even more diverse Euroamerican sources, including an oral tradition passed on in the Orkney Islands by the descendents of one Orcadian Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) servant.

While these sources coincide in more than simply casting doubt over Wilson’s summary phrase, diversity and discord are also present. If they flow in the same direction, their origins appear to be nevertheless of

very different colors, and the question remains: can they ever merge? Addressing this question will help explain, diminish, and even remove significant obstacles in order to form and communicate a better understanding of what happened, in what context, why, and to what effect, at Hannah Bay in the winter of 1832. Conversely, attempting to answer these four historical questions may shed light on the historiographical problem that extends beyond the context of the Hannah Bay conflict in which it has just been framed. It is a problem faced by all historians attempting to chart understandings of cross-cultural histories that are marked or defined by conflict, especially the one(s) which Euroamericans and Amerindians have shared, to an increasing extent, and narrated for half a millennium since Columbus' 1492 voyage.

If reconciling Amerindian and Euroamerican accounts of the past is an overwhelming challenge, it is primarily because the merging of their pasts has been an overwhelming reality. As Steve J. Stern puts it, the "magnitude of consequence that issued from the collision of European and Indigenous American histories...forces us to consider the problem of meaning: to discover, define, appropriate what 1492 means to human history" (1993: 4). These words echo those spoken by Lord Acton, Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, at the close of the 19th century: "if the Past has been an obstacle and a burden, knowledge of the Past is the safest and the surest emancipation" (1896: 10). The shared past of Amerindians and Euroamericans has certainly proven to be "an obstacle and a burden." Yet its conflicting narratives are equally "an obstacle and a burden" to the emancipating knowledge of this shared past.

Recognition of the cross-cultural nature of such shared pasts and their narratives, however, is the first step towards emancipating knowledge. If it is true that among French and English Canadians, for example, there has always been a tendency to favor sources and perspectives that are rooted in one's own culture, it is all the more true in the case of the history shared by Amerindians and Euroamericans, where differences of perspective are compounded by significant differences in the nature of many sources used to convey these perspectives. As Jennifer Brown notes with regard to Amerindian history, the "juxtaposing of different kinds of records—written, oral, and material—and the attention paid to oral texts and voices are fundamental to practice in this field" (2003: 613). Moreover, the principle that no historical source or factor should be neglected because of—or examined outside—its individual and cultural context applies not only to the analysis of events like the Hannah Bay conflict, but equally to the broader historiographical problem of reconciling sources in order to form and communicate a better understanding of the past shared by Amerindians and Euroamericans.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise,

the “credibility gap” between them, to use Ken Coates’ term, will only grow wider (2000: 112).

In addition to the two separate dimensions of the problem—*forming* an understanding based on diverse sources of an event like the Hannah Bay conflict and *communicating* it to diverse audiences—there are also at least two perspectives. The “credibility gap” lies between these perspectives, which, when polarized according to the dominant paradigm, would normally be defined by some equivalent to “Amerindian and Euroamerican.”<sup>4</sup> In a balanced relationship, a condensed version of the two-dimensional question as posed by each of these perspectives would be: (how) can *their* historical sources and understandings better *our* understanding and (how) can/should *our* historical sources and understandings be shared with or communicated to *them*?

Each side ultimately poses this question in a very different manner, however, for the burden of the past, which is rooted in and fosters the ongoing “credibility gap,” has been borne unequally by Amerindians. There is simply no Euroamerican counterpart to the Amerindian “Trauma of Colonialism” (Duran, Duran, & Yellow Horse Brave Heart 1998: 62), and this is largely due to the shift in balance of power that gathered momentum in the early 1800s in North America.

At the close of the eighteenth century, most Amerindians still held a position of primacy or equality (economically, socially, politically, militarily, and demographically) in their cooperative and competitive relationships with the various Euroamerican peoples then under British or American rule (Trigger 1986: 316-18). In the first decades of the nineteenth century, however, the balance of power began to change rapidly, especially following the British-American war of 1812-14. In what was left of British North America, for example, the military and economic cooperation and competition that previously defined relationships was soon replaced by increasingly unidirectional policies of protection, civilization and, before long, assimilation (Tobias 1991: 127-144). In the United States, both the idea and reality of westward expansion took on impressive force, culminating in what Helen Hunt Jackson would call, in 1881, a *Century of Dishonor*, exemplified at its worst by the infamous phrase attributed to American General Sheridan: “The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.”<sup>5</sup> Father Louis Cochin’s comments in an 1880 edition of the *Saskatchewan Herald* speak poignantly of the worst of what was occurring on both sides of the 49th parallel: “if the Dominion Government intends to carry out a starvation policy with the Indians, then we will be no better than our cousins across the line whom we condemn so lustily for their extermination policy” (cited in Adams 1989: 69). For the first time, a majority of Euroamericans only had contact with Amerindian

peoples or cultures through the prism of Euroamerican books, newspapers and popular culture, or on opposing sides of a battlefield (Trigger 1986: 318).

On June 11, 1895, Lord Acton delivered an influential lecture (cited above) at Cambridge University on the “Study of History.” He stated in his opening remarks that “history made and history making are scientifically inseparable and separately unmeaning.” As he then elaborated, not only the past—“history made”—but also perceptions of the past—also “history made”—are inseparable from “history making” (Acton: 2-3). In nineteenth-century *history-making*, Euroamericans took the upper hand; yet they also had the upper hand in defining *history-made*, and the depiction of Amerindians therein.

It was only in the nineteenth century that the balance of power shifted significantly and Amerindian peoples on a continental scale for the first time began to really be affected by, and therefore concerned about, first Euroamerican *history-making*, and shortly afterwards, Euroamerican *history-made*. Inaccurate historical accounts narrated by Euroamericans about Amerindian or shared pasts have since led to much more obvious and grave consequences than their counterpart, which—where they exist—have only recently started to acquire influence outside of Amerindian societies. It is not surprising, therefore, that many academics, especially over the past three to four decades, have focused primarily on critiquing the treatment of Amerindian peoples and voices in Euroamerican history and historiography (Sheehan 1969).

Because of the power imbalance between Amerindians and Euroamericans, they each tend to address the question of reconciling sources in very different ways, if at all. Essentially, most Amerindians feel a pressing need to have their perspectives heard *and* respected – if for no other reason, simply because of Euroamericans’ influence in their lives.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, most Euroamericans feel no pressing need to learn from or to influence Amerindian perspectives – even if only because they have little or no direct contact with them or their culture(s). There are also other reasons at play in the latter case, however, for listening seriously to Amerindian understandings of the past requires a willingness to renegotiate the power imbalance and public memory (Thomson, Frisch & Hamilton 1994).

If a “credibility gap” persists today, it is in spite of the efforts of many academics (most of them European and Euroamerican) who, over the last four decades in particular, have taken great pains to critique the treatment of Amerindian peoples and their voices in Euroamerican history and historiography, and to try to integrate Amerindian(-sensitive) perspectives and sources in mainstream historiography.

Nevertheless, the “credibility gap” may persist not only in spite of such revisionist historiography, but—to some extent—also because of it. The current historiographical debate revolves around revisionists’ “culture of criticism” (Ken Coates’ phrase) and a reaction to it in the public sphere and among certain academics, primarily outside the field of Amerindian history (2000: 112-113). Some revisionists fail to fully account for the positive side of the Euroamerican history and historiography they criticize or to put its defects in context or perspective. Counter-revisionists, on the other hand, fail to accept the validity of much of this criticism.

If the “credibility gap” is to be narrowed, it may be helpful for historians to explicitly acknowledge and explain the unequal scrutiny and criticism of Euroamerican sources, historiographies, and ideologies. Whether just or unjust, it has been Euroamerican actions that have been more numerous—if only for demographic reasons—and have left the deepest mark on the recent history of this continent. It has been the negative repercussions, whether intended or not, of their actions that have demanded an account, often producing whitewashing and pseudo-justification, on the one hand, or moral analysis and criticism (including self-criticism) on the other.

It is easy to forget, essentially, that criticizing the negative effects of the unequal influence on *history-making* and defining *history-made* leads to an unequal scrutiny and criticism of Euroamerican sources, ideologies and historiography – above all by Europeans and Euroamericans, who have a very long tradition of self-criticism or mutual scrutiny. In some cases, implicit—if not explicit—arguments are made (again, mostly by Euroamericans) that this unequal scrutiny and criticism is proportional not to the influence of Euroamericans, but to a supposedly greater propensity of all, or a particular group of, Euroamericans for evil – a propensity inherent in their culture(s), religion(s), or even in their race(s).

In some of the more extreme expressions of this culture of criticism, the “colonial other” is merely replaced by a “victimized other” or the “resistant other,” laid out against the backdrop of the “colonizing, imperialistic and oppressive other,” the main character or caricature in a postcolonial “meta-narrative,”...[both] political and moralizing in its origins and implications” (Bayly 2004: 8). Frequently, it is marked by self-distancing from a scapegoat chosen for sacrifice or symbolic flogging on the altar of public catharsis, accompanied by a litany of explicit or implicit claims to the effect that “this happened before our enlightenment, in the *grande noirceur*” or “we would never have done this” or “they were worse than us.” When still deemed powerful, the scapegoat in such postcolonial narratives is often “burned in effigy” with little

thought to the consequences of imbalanced or imprecise criticism, an assumption that begs the question in the case of what is perhaps the most iconic scapegoat of recent postcolonial meta-narratives: the White Christian patriarch. Curiously, some of the earliest critiques of colonialism were written by men such as Bartolomé de las Casas, Francisco de Vitoria, and Guillaume-Thomas François Reynal, all of them European Catholic priests, who represent what is now perhaps the epitome of the iconic White Christian patriarch.<sup>7</sup>

Europeans and Euroamericans have left behind not only a half-millennium-old trail of mutual scrutiny, but also a vast array of detailed records that were never meant for historians' eyes; Amerindians have not. Historian Francis Jennings acquired his "strong aversion toward the Puritan gentry," as he put it, "in the course of the research." His contemporary, James Axtell, cited this comment in a 1978 historiographical essay on the "Ethnohistory of Early America," pointing out that Jennings did not make the same effort to understand the Puritans as he did to understand Amerindians (cited in Axtell 1978: 136). To his credit, Jennings later praised Axtell's essay as a "very important article in this field, which all interested readers should consult and file" (Jennings 1982: 32, footnote 9). Few Amerindians have left behind a firsthand record of their words and ideologies for the scrutiny of historians. Oral tradition, moreover, is always passed on by the living, who, in Acton's words, "do not give up their secrets with the candor of the dead" (1896: 4).

The roots of the "credibility gap" do not stop at particular cultures, but extend to the depths of the human condition, and the heightened scrutiny and criticism of Euroamericans is proportional more to Euroamerican power and influence than to a propensity for evil that is unique and/or inherent to (some) Euroamericans and their culture(s). As Georges Sioui and others have shown, many Euroamerican ideologies, through their influence on Euroamerican history and historiography, have been an obstacle to knowledge of the historical *self* and *other* – the Amerindian in this instance (Sioui 1992). Yet the opposite has also been true; moreover, many of these ideologies were rooted in sincere attempts at understanding the self and the other.

Credibility gaps between persons and communities are, to a large extent, inevitable and natural—initially at least—simply because of our epistemological limitations, and no culture escapes this. Culture certainly plays an important role, but if one is to argue that some cultures foster or overcome credibility gaps more than others, it is important to first define the nature of culture, cultural interaction, and the relationship among experience, understanding, action and reality.<sup>8</sup>

Anthropologist Adam Kuper, in his acclaimed but controversial in-

tellectual history of the concept of culture, argues that

the more one considers the best modern work on culture by anthropologists, the more advisable it must appear to avoid the hyper-referential word altogether.... There are fundamental epistemological problems...[that] become most acute when...culture shifts from something to be described, interpreted, even perhaps explained, and is treated instead as a source of explanation in itself. [Such]...appeals to culture can offer only a partial explanation of why people think and behave as they do, and of what causes them to alter their ways. Political and economic forces, social institutions, and biological processes cannot be wished away, or assimilated into systems of knowledge and belief. And that...is the ultimate stumbling block in the way of cultural theory, certainly given its current pretensions. (1999: x-xi)

Kuper's critique, however, goes beyond the intellectual plane; in the concluding lines of his book he underlines a more profound "moral objection to culture theory...[because of its tendency] to draw attention away from what we have in common instead of encouraging us to communicate across national, ethnic and religious boundaries, and to venture beyond them" (1999: 247).

Although Kuper initially states that the problems with culture theory "cannot be solved by tiptoeing around the notion of culture or by refining definitions" (1999: xi), he later concedes that "some form of cultural explanation may be useful enough, in its place," but only if we are ready to "separate out the various processes that are lumped together under the heading of culture, and then look beyond the field of culture to other processes" (1999: 247).

By defining culture as *clusters—held and renegotiated by persons-in-relationship—of shared understandings embodied and shaped by our experiences and actions*, it may be possible to provide a useful form of cultural explanation that does separate out the various constitutive processes. Such a culture theory not only avoids the isolating tendencies (individual or collective) that Kuper objects to on moral grounds, but—on the contrary—it shores up his critique. It helps deconstruct, for example, the problematic dichotomizing interpretive paradigm of "Euroamerican versus Amerindian."

Within cultures we find both unity and tension among experience, understanding, action—the constitutive elements of culture—and reality. A large degree of unity and integrity is essential for the survival of culture and its ability to promote the well-being and competence of its adherents and proponents. If "culture is integrated into a whole that



tends toward consistency” (Salzman 2001: 69), then, conversely, the “death of a culture begins when its normative institutions fail to communicate ideals in ways that remain inwardly compelling” (Rieff 1966: 18). We and our communities suffer if we cannot connect our understanding of reality to our experience of it, if we cannot or do not act as we understand we should, or if we never experience the results realized and/or intended by our actions. In other words, our psychological well-being and competence (practical and ethical) are largely dependent on our ability to unite:

- our understanding of reality to our experience of it,
- our experience of reality to our action on it, and
- our action on reality to our understanding of it.

A competent relationship among understanding, experience and action, therefore, is circular and it revolves around reality, which no human being can understand, experience, or act upon in its fullness. Our action, experience, and understanding, moreover, are not formed either in isolation from, or in complete unity with, others (Preston 1999: 159). Contact and contingency draw their root from the Latin *contingere* – literally “to touch together,” a meaning not so different from its homonym, which means “to bathe together.” Our very being is contingent upon contact between our parents, and both they and others we have contact with (physically, emotionally or intellectually) help shape our experiences, our understandings and our actions. Moreover, insofar as we “bathe together” with others in the same river of reality, we form with them a common culture, which is nothing more than a collection of shared understandings (from how to use a fork to the nature of divinity) based on shared experience and action. Nevertheless, we always remain distinct. If we come from common earth and even a common seed, we are nevertheless *cultured* (formed and informed) distinctly. Culture—defined as our collection of lived understandings—lives in each of us, and it evolves as our understandings evolve. “The ‘culture’ of a group as a whole is not a true reality...the individual is the bearer of culture” (Sapir 1999: 545). Nevertheless, insofar as we share and live out key understandings with others, we also share a culture with them.

In this sense, when we speak of “cultures” as independent entities, what we are referring to are clusters of common understandings, or cultural centres of gravity with some understandings that are closer to the core and others that may be more peripheral. In that sense, we can participate in numerous cultural centres of gravity simultaneously. Moreover, within cultural groups there are varying degrees of tension and unity, both within generations and between them. Therefore, while Amerindians and Euroamericans cannot be *separated* from their cul-

tural contexts, they must be *distinguished* from them. Finally, across separate cultural groups there are also common understandings of culture, though language barriers, political polarization, and racial constructs may often hide them.

When contact with new cultures demands co-action we need to form a common understanding – a “middle ground” to borrow Richard White’s term (1991). Yet, in order to evaluate each other’s understandings we need to comprehend (*cum prehendere*, “to grasp, together”) each other’s experiences. The less we have in common, the more sharing of “experience” (evidence) we require. However, when the record of such experience is framed and communicated in an understanding very different from our own—the very understanding we seek to verify—we can only evaluate its merit by somehow living new experiences together or stepping into each other’s shoes. It is in this sense that “credibility gaps” between persons and communities are to a large extent inevitable and natural simply because of our epistemological limitations. Sustained incommensurability that fosters conflict, however, is more often rooted in our ethical choices.

Fear, egoism and malice can lead us to seek unity of understanding with our actions rather than unity of understanding with reality, as best we experience it. The result is a break with reality on several fronts: as we bend our understanding to fit our chosen course of action, we are forced to misconstrue or ignore any experiences that contradict our artificial understanding; ill at ease with this dichotomy, we then seek to avoid experiencing the full consequences of our actions. The resulting “culture” is often psychologically unhealthy and may be extremely unethical. If we do not seek unity of understanding with reality in our own life, moreover, we may not seek it in our relations with others. Rather, because we do not live in isolation, we may demand uniformity of understanding or at least of appearance (i.e. uniformity of action) from those around us. We resent any explicit or implicit challenge of the skewed understandings of reality we have adopted in conformity with our harmful or defective actions (often habitual), understandings and actions that we fear changing or, from malice or egoism, refuse to change. And if others do not conform (or simply are not in conformity) to ourselves, if we cannot *selfize* (assimilate) them, we often completely *otherize* them, sometimes forcefully.

Extreme otherization is the de- or sub-humanization of people. It can lead to the denial of our relationship of common humanity. We are persons-in-relationship, and while some of our relationships are accidental and temporary—in that we can take them off and put them on—others, like our common humanity and filial ties, are part of our very

essence. They are permanent. We are also in relationships with other living and nonliving beings. We can be healthy and competent if we acknowledge and seek to understand these relationships, but the more we deny some of our relationships and the responsibilities that flow from them, the more our ethical grounding is lost.

Otherization in cultures, however, does not always stem from negative impulses. In fact, it has often been an effective means of preventing, punishing, and correcting illegitimate or unethical otherization. In Cree culture, someone whose actions are ethically incompetent in the extreme—someone who resorts to cannibalism to relieve starvation for example—is otherized as a *witiko*—a de-humanized aberration (Flannery, Chambers, & Jehle 1981; Brown 1971). Otherizing someone as criminal or psychopathic is a comparable measure used in Euroamerican cultures. Even this type of otherization, however, has its problems.

Our cultures (common understandings) include criteria for determining what should be done in the face of misunderstandings (cultural conflicts) and for differentiating between legitimate and illegitimate forms of otherization. At the heart of this problem lies the question: What does it mean to be competent (above all ethically) within a particular culture's context and how relative to its particular context should any culture's definition of competence be? Both Euroamericans and Amerindians have often been forced to ask this question and to reconcile their perspectives.

The history of the 1832 Hannah Bay "massacre" and its narration provides an excellent context for examining this problem in further detail. Moreover, it does so precisely by forcing us to question the adequacy of the very paradigm—Euroamerican *versus* Amerindian—used to frame the problem. This dominant paradigm reflects real differences, but not those that were the primary factors either in the 1832 conflict or the narration of it.

The 1832 conflict took place at Hannah Bay House, a small HBC outpost at Hannah Bay, at the bottom of James Bay and roughly halfway between the HBC's two oldest trading sites: Moose Factory to the west and Rupert's House (Waskaganish) to the east. Both Rupert's House and Moose Factory were important posts, but the latter was the headquarters of the HBC's Southern Department, and its chief factor, John George McTavish, outranked the chief trader, Joseph Beioley, stationed at Rupert House. Hannah Bay House was a goose camp and trade outpost (for the few Cree families attached to it) that depended upon Moose Factory directly and supplied many geese as provisions for this larger post.

Although all the Amerindian people of the region are now collec-

tively referred to as Cree, at this time the HBC referred to them simply as Indians. Any children born of mixed marriages were considered “natives,” but the boundaries were blurry as some native children joined their mother’s family on the land, others worked for the Company, and still others did both. There were also distinctions among the James Bay Cree (who are quite different from the Plains Cree). They spoke—and still speak—different dialects, as their different words for “person” illustrate: *ililiw* at Moose Factory and *ininiw* further north on the west coast (with the exception of Kashechewan), *iyiyuu* on the east coast of James Bay, and *iinuu* further inland on the east side of James Bay. Another dialect—now disappearing—once flourished in south-central James Bay; their word for person is *iriniw*, and the Harricanaw River (“Bread River” in this r-dialect) owes its name to them. These are also the proper nouns used today to refer to themselves (plural forms are *Ililiwak*, *Ininiwak*, *Irinivak*, *Iyiyuuch* and *linuuch*). The west-coast Cree (*Ililiwak*, *Ininiwak* and *Irinivak*), however, more often refer to themselves collectively as the *Mushkegowuk* or “dwellers of the muskeg,” which defines the lay of the land down the western and southern James Bay coasts, in contrast to the rocky eastern coast of James Bay. The *Mushkegowuk* dialects are much closer to each other, while the *Iyiyuuch* and the *linuuch* share more in common as well. Inter-marriage between all these groups, however, has always occurred, especially in southern James Bay, where their traditional hunting territories overlap.

It is no surprise, then, that boundaries get very hazy at the bottom of the James Bay, especially around Hannah Bay. Today, the Ontario-Quebec border runs north-south through Hannah Bay, but it does not respect the boundaries of traditional family hunting territories associated with *Iyiyuuch*, many now settled at Rupert’s House (Waskaganish), or those associated with *Ililiwak* or *Irinivak*, most now settled at Moose Factory. The *Mushkegowuk*, being in Ontario, signed Treaty 9 in 1905, and are politically represented by Mushkegowuk Council; the Quebec Cree, both *Iyiyuuch* and *linuuch*, signed the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement in 1975 with the governments of Quebec and Canada, and are now politically represented by the Grand Council of the Crees. Politically, *Iyiyuu* claims to lands in Ontario are unresolved, and since the 1930s many *Iyiyuu* families have settled in Moose Factory, where they are now organized politically as the Mocrebec Council of the Cree Nation. Despite inter-marriage between many *Iyiyuuch* and *Mushkegowuk* in Moose Factory, political and social tensions do exist. The messy political situation created in the twentieth century—largely by outside political forces—is partially to blame for this, but these tensions also have a longer history.

According to very early HBC records, *Mushkegowuk* used to go on war parties up the east coast of James Bay into Inuit territory, and would sometimes enter into conflict with the *Iyiyuuch* of the northern coastal region (Francis & Morantz 1983). If there are any accounts of these conflicts in James Bay oral traditions, however, they are much rarer than stories told of Iroquois attacks on both the *Mushkegowuk* and the *Iyiyuuch*, attacks that are confirmed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Euroamerican records. One of the most striking conflicts that occurred in the region, however, does involve *Mushkegowuk* and *Iyiyuuch* on either side, as well as the HBC. This conflict is known as the 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre,” and conflicting (mis)understandings of this 1832 event have played into, and/or been (re)shaped by, numerous local, regional and international political, social, and cultural conflicts.

These conflicts include frictions between HBC men, both in the early aftermath of the event and decades later; between the HBC and its mid-nineteenth-century Euroamerican critics; between Christianity and “paganism”; between “savagery” and “civilization”; between “primitivism” and “progress”; and, between “legal order” and “disorder.” The Hannah Bay “massacre” has also been referred to as an example of HBC-Cree conflict, or Indian-White, colonizer-colonized conflict (as suggested by Hap Wilson’s summary phrase, cited earlier), and it has also been evoked in the context of *Mushkegowuk* and *Iyiyuuch* conflict.

Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) post journals are full of evidence that the winter of 1832—compared to those that preceded and followed it—was unusually difficult for the inhabitants of James Bay.<sup>9</sup> Drastic temperature fluctuations created an unexpected time of hunger with environmental conditions similar to early spring when travel is made difficult and food is harder to obtain. In January, Quappakay, a Cree *okimaw* (leader), and his extended family found themselves in a desperate situation on the Ministikawatin Peninsula, between Hannah Bay and Rupert Bay.

*Mushkegowuk*, *Iyiyuuch*, and HBC accounts are nearly unanimous in affirming that Quappakay was an *Iyiyuu* who traded at Rupert’s House (Waskaganish) and belonged to the band associated with that region. John Blackned, a *Iyiyuu* elder from Rupert House, commented in the 1960s, however, that Quappakay and his family used to get their supplies at Hannah Bay and that they “talked a little different from the Rupert’s House Indians” (cited in Chabot 2002: 142). It is possible that Quappakay and his family were from the region south of Hannah Bay (perhaps they were *Irininwak* with *Iyiyuuch* relations), that they traded both at Rupert’s House and Hannah Bay, and that Blackned’s account complements rather than contradicts the other versions (Chabot 2002). On the other hand,

as Scott and Morrison point out, there may simply have been a distancing going on, with neither community wanting to be associated with Quappakay's family (1993).

The majority of HBC and Cree accounts reveal that, facing starvation and unable to seek help at Rupert House, the HBC post where they normally traded, Quappakay and his sons used the *quashapachikun* (shaking tent) to ask their *mistabeo* (spirit helper) for guidance. They then headed for Hannah Bay House, which was more accessible given the conditions of the ice on the rivers and the bay that separated them from Rupert House. There, Orcadian-born HBC trader William Corrigan had already been provisioning several *Mushkegowuk* families – most likely with the same geese these families had traded at the post the previous fall. When the temperature dropped on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, Quappakay, his sons, his son-in-law, and their families were able to cross the Harricanaw River to Hannah Bay House (Chabot 2002). According to late nineteenth-century recollections shared by retired HBC servants, Quappakay's last visit with Corrigan, the previous fall, had left the two of them at odds over the amount of winter supplies Quappakay – who usually traded at Rupert House – was to receive on credit at Hannah Bay (Chabot 2002).

Three days later, three *Mushkegowuk* and a young HBC apprentice fled from Hannah Bay House to Moose Factory. Arriving cold and shaken, they hastily divulged the news that Quappakay and his family, after arriving at the house, had shortly thereafter made a surprise attack, killing Corrigan. They feared, moreover, that none of the nine others (all of Cree – apparently *Mushkegowuk* – or mixed ancestry) who were there had escaped. Within two days, John George McTavish, chief factor at Moose Factory, sent out a party to investigate, warn, and punish if possible. Led by William Swanson, these HBC men arrived at Hannah Bay to find frozen evidence confirming the report, but no sign of the alleged assailants. Quickly, they advanced to Rupert House to alert its chief factor, Joseph Beioley. On their return to Moose Factory, Swanson and his eleven men passed by Hannah Bay House to bury the dead (Chabot 2002).

There was no sign of the accused until the end of March when Shaintoquaish and Bolland (Quappakay's son and son-in-law) arrived at Rupert House with their wives and children. Although alleged to have stripped Hannah Bay House of provisions, they were nevertheless starving. When questioned, the men soon confessed their involvement in the sacking of the post and were then escorted towards Moose Factory by Beioley, Swanson and several others. Bolland escaped before they arrived. Shaintoquaish, however, did not escape. Several days after being interrogated at Moose Factory, he was executed by an HBC-led posse

(with *Mushkegowuk* members) as it set out from the island post on a mission that had now put Beioley and McTavish sharply at odds. Beioley was apparently in favor of leniency; McTavish was not. By the end of April 1832, Quappakay and his two other sons—Staicimau and a 15-year-old boy—had been found and executed. Bolland was the last to be apprehended, apparently with the help and consent of his father, who told him he must face the consequences of his conduct. Other *Iyiyuuch* apparently also helped apprehend Bolland. Many of them had fled the Ministikawatin area, believing that Quappakay and his family had become *witikowak* (plural of *witiko*) or in the very least quite dangerous (Chabot 2002).

The sources that shed light on these incidents are rich in their variation. The earliest records are HBC journals, correspondence and reports from the time of the incident, written by a number of HBC men, in particular, Joseph Beioley, John George McTavish, William Swanson and James Anderson. In these accounts, as Preston points out, we find contention between Beioley – more inclined to attribute the attacks to mental derangement in a desperate situation, and the latter three – more inclined to see the attacks as a minority nativistic movement threatening the HBC (Preston 1990) or general law and order. Anderson, for example argued in an 1849 rebuttal to accusations of injustice that “by every principle of justice, honor and expediency the Company were bound to avenge the death of their servants as well as the poor Indians who were then living under their protection...the relatives of the Indians murdered would have made war on the murderers, and there would have been an endless feud” (cited in Chabot 2002: 100).

In the 1830s and 1840s, additional correspondence, and published and unpublished reports and accounts, circulated as a storm of controversy arose throughout British North America and in England with regard to the HBC’s retaliation and other allegations of retributive justice. Genuine concern for the exercise of justice in the British Empire was combined with a quest for information—on the part of those seeking to expand British North American settlement westward—that could help obtain the revocation of the HBC’s charter. *The Times* of London published an editorial piece on 9 November 1838, that spoke directly to this scandal: “I have not heard as yet of any Indians being wantonly killed by any of the men belonging to this company [the HBC]; nor have I heard any boasting among them of the satisfaction taken in killing or abusing Indians, as I have elsewhere heard” (cited in Chabot 2002: 98). Two decades later, HBC Governor George Simpson would be questioned on this issue before a Parliamentary Committee (Chabot 2002).

By the 1840s, the first missionary—a Wesleyan named George

Barnley—established himself in Moose Factory. A decade later, he was replaced by Anglican missionaries, who gradually established other missions around the James Bay coast. Barnley and his Anglican successors heard the story of the Hannah Bay “massacre” and almost all of them interpreted it in light of what they saw as a conflict between paganism and the progress of Christianity. Barnley published a book in 1898 in which the Hannah Bay “massacre” was used to depict what life had been like before the arrival of Christianity. It was something of a morality play, with vices and virtues dressed up as people, and Indians and Whites on both sides of the vice/virtue divide. Barnley’s interpretation was echoed by other missionaries who recorded accounts of the event or made reference to it over the next century. Yet they were not alone in this interpretation. Many Cree saw or came to see things in a similar light, particularly in Moose Factory. Even if they did not see the incident as a conflict between Christianity and “paganism,” they tended to see it as a manifestation of misguided conjuring (Chabot 2002). John Long suggests, for example, that as a result of the Hannah Bay “massacre,” faith in the shaking tent’s “benefits may have begun to wane” (1987: 8-9).

Running on a separate track, and sometimes contrary to, the nineteenth-century evangelical and missionary renewal, was a nineteenth-century faith in scientific and civilized progress, frequently contrasted with primitive stagnation. In the latter half of the century, the alleged conflict between “savage” and “civilized,” or “primitive” and “progressive” shaped the way people both portrayed and understood the story of the Hannah Bay “massacre.” Geologists and government officials visiting the James Bay region made reference to the event in this light, as did Martin Hunter, who wrote an early twentieth-century account for an outdoor magazine (Chabot 2002).

Nevertheless, not all nineteenth-century Euroamericans saw things in this light. Dr. Robert Bell of the Geological Survey, for example, took a keen interest in Cree customs and stories, developing a deep respect for the people he encountered in his work and on whom he depended as his guides. The story of the Hannah Bay “massacre” caught his attention and, with the assistance of retired and current HBC employees, he collected a number of oral history accounts of the event with the intention of “making a contribution to the history of Canada” – as he put it in a 1905 letter to George Wrong, Canada’s first formal professor of history (cited in Chabot 2002: 116). With one exception, these accounts tended to interpret the Hannah Bay “massacre” in terms of individual actions rather than actions representative of a larger group. Although Bell, himself, did not write an account of the event, the stories he gath-



ered and the attitudes he conveyed in his correspondence and work reveal a keen scientific approach to understanding what had happened in 1832; he did not draw conclusions without having gathered the evidence (Chabot 2002). There were also others, such as E.B. Borron, Stipendiary Magistrate of the Province of Ontario, who saw the “massacre” as an exceptional incident among a people whose character was “quiet and inoffensive” (cited in Chabot 2002: 112).

The foregoing accounts were either first-hand written accounts or, more commonly, oral testimony: transmitted, transcribed and sometimes transformed by intermediaries, with the original storyteller fading into the background at times, or even fading out of the picture altogether. Some of these accounts were originally Cree—both *Mushkegowuk* and *Iyiyuuch*—others were from HBC servants, some of them sympathetic to Quappakay and his family, some seeing them as part of a conspiracy to overthrow the HBC’s empire (Chabot 2002 and Preston 1990). Throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries the Hannah Bay “massacre” story has continued to be told in the James Bay region and captured intermittently by interested local residents and visitors—academic and non-academic—who took note of it. A parallel oral tradition has also survived as far away as Scotland, where accounts—brief as they may be—were recorded as recently as 2008.<sup>10</sup>

The range of explanations among non-Cree accounts (“savagery,” “paganism,” revolution against the HBC, greed, insanity, starvation and desperation, cannibalism, breach of Cree notions of personal respect, and maintenance of good relations) is wider than the range of explanations among the Cree accounts. The latter—*Mushkegowuk* and *Iyiyuuch* alike—tend to attribute the “massacre” to misguided conjuring, to “what happens when a *Mistabeo* gives poor (morally and tactically) advice, and the people are foolish enough to accept it” (Preston 2002: 153) – even if they recognized that Quappakay and his family were starving.

In a minority of recent cases, however, some *Mushkegowuk*—Moose Cree specifically—have referred to the Hannah Bay “massacre” in the context of an attack on the moral character of the *Iyiyuuch*. This (mis)understanding of the Hannah Bay conflict appears to have both historical and contemporary origins. There live in Moose Factory today descendents of those who were victims of the attack, while across the bay are found descendents of those who perpetrated the attack. Yet more influential, perhaps, are the above-mentioned political frictions that have flared up from time to time in recent decades between Mocrebec Council of the Cree Nation and Moose Cree First Nation – despite the greater predominance of intermarriage and cooperation in the relationships their peoples have formed (Chabot 2002).

Drawing from all the various Amerindian and Euroamerican sources, however, it is possible to come to a clearer understanding of what happened at Hannah Bay in 1832. Forced to compromise in a desperate situation caused by unpredictable weather in an unforgiving land, neither Quappakay nor Corrigan acted according to the socio-economic norms that guided relations in the Cree world that the HBC had entered some 160 years earlier. Corrigan was unwilling or unable to provide enough food to satisfy Quappakay's family, or—some sources suggest—may even have taken advantage of the desperate situation of Quappakay and his family. One way or another, he appears to have provoked Quappakay, who had led his family to the post because they were starving for food, not a fight. Quappakay, however, was too willing to resort to violence in order to satisfy his hunger and perhaps also his anger. If the planned surprise attack was initially directed against Corrigan and the other men, in the end, it did not spare women and children.

The HBC's retaliation was not based on a unanimous decision by the officers in charge, for there was clearly a split between McTavish and Beioley, one that had much to do with their different personalities. However, McTavish was the superior officer so his was the final decision. Moreover, he had the support of many of the HBC servants at Moose Factory, particularly those who had personal issues to settle with the accused men they hunted down.<sup>11</sup> Other servants, however, later criticized McTavish for his harsh retaliation against the accused. No *Mushkegowuk* appear to have objected to the punishment that was meted out; some even participated in it. The same can be said of most of the *Iyiyuuch*, even some of those who were related to the accused. Overall, the HBC men proved more critical of McTavish's response, and personal conflicts and differences among HBC men account for most of the variations in the narration of the event.

Although the HBC had strengthened its position since its 1821 merger with the North West Company, its relatively unopposed—by the Cree at least—punishment of the accused men cannot be seen as a sign that it had gained mastery over the land. Rather, it is a confirmation that few *Mushkegowuk* or *Iyiyuuch* approved of the actions taken by Quappakay and it is also a sign that the Company's post-1821 monopoly had not changed the relationship enough to provoke sympathy for an attack on Hannah Bay House. There is little evidence—contrary to the claims of posse leader James Anderson and a few others—that a general Cree uprising against the HBC was imminent or that a blood feud between the families involved would ensue. Anderson made these claims in order to counter possible accusations that the retaliation was motivated more by a desire for revenge than for justice, and he reiterated them

when the HBC came under fire in the mid-nineteenth century.

As for the claims that the Cree ceased to perpetrate such acts of violence after converting to Christianity, it may rather be that those who adopted Christianity—as many of them did—did so not in rejection of Cree “paganism,” but in continuity with their long-fostered cultural ethic of personal respect and responsibility towards the human and non-human beings with whom they were in relationship, and upon whom they depended. The Hannah Bay “massacre,” according to every *Iyiyuu* and *Mushkegowuk* account of it, was a breach of this culture and ethic, especially on the part of Quappakay.

Only a minority of the Cree accounts hint that the HBC trader Corrigan was also to blame, and the only account—recent interpretations aside—that places the primary responsibility for the conflict on Corrigan is an 1881 narrative by James Morrison, a retired HBC employee of Cree and Scottish ancestry. Almost all of the accounts concur in assigning the primary blame to one or both of these men. Quappakay’s sons and son-in-law are also seen as culpable, but to a lesser extent.

The so-called massacre, was caused by an intersection of a personality conflict with a desperate situation brought about by extreme weather fluctuations in an unforgiving land. Amerindians were involved on both sides of the conflict, both in the initial attack on Hannah Bay House and in the HBC-led response; Euroamericans were divided in their support for the retributive “justice” ordered by McTavish. While *Mushkegowuk* and *Iyiyuuch* were apparently on opposite sides of the conflict, the attack provoked equivalent fear and rejection on the part of all the Cree—*Iyiyuuch* families were among the first to flee the vicinity, likely fearing the attackers as *witikowak*.

The broader historical context is certainly important, but it is ultimately at the personal level that this particular event must be understood; this in turn will help us revise and refine our understanding of the broader historical context. In cases such as these, paradigms such as Euroamerican versus Amerindian or *Mushkegowuk* versus *Iyiyuuch*, are often no more helpful than the “savage” versus “civilized” or the “pagan” versus “Christian” paradigms. To draw an example from another context, the Black versus White paradigm—despite being a helpful tool for understanding much of American history—distorted what really should have been at issue in the infamous 1995 trial of American football star O.J. Simpson and increased the polarization of American society and American perceptions of their past.

While the Amerindian versus Euroamerican paradigm may account for some differences between the narratives, such differences are more often complementary than they are contradictory. Effectively, the ac-

counts provided by Amerindians (Cree oral tradition in this case) and by Euroamericans are more often alike than different, because their cultures share similar ideals, regardless of the degree to which they attain these ideals. Both of them collect *experience* (with the goal of being faithful to reality, as they perceive it) in order to build, reaffirm, or refine an accurate *understanding* of who they have been and who they are. The extent to which the narratives of the 1832 conflict are contradictory instead of complementary depends primarily on the degree to which their narrators share(d) this goal and the differing means they had of attaining it.

It is spring near the mouth of the Harricanaw River. Around a distant bend to the south, the melt-water that has swollen silently beneath its frozen ceiling emerges now, tumbling before it a crashing wall of ice that threatens to send the river over its banks till it finds its old path or gouges out another. The beds of James Bay's north-flowing rivers can be carved anew by an early break-up, but the wildest of these is dwarfed by the tremendous glacial break-up that occurred thousands of years ago. As the James Bay lowlands continue to rebound from the icy burden they once bore, the mouth of the Harricanaw stretches out further and further into the ever-shrinking shallows of Hannah Bay (Bell 1896; Francis & Morantz 1983).

In September 1999, along with Cree elder Eddie Trapper and the archaeologists Luke Dellabonna and John Pollock, I searched along the east bank of the Harricanaw for the remains of the old Hudson's Bay Company fur-trade post that had been closed following the 1832 conflict. The maps we had were nearly two centuries old, and the river, like the land that held it, had transformed. After flying over the area and walking for several hours along the shoreline and through dense willows shaded by poplars, we were still unable to discern where the remains lay or whether the earth and water had swallowed them.

The land seems to have forgotten the Hannah Bay conflict, and any decomposing memories lie well hidden. In contrast, as noted already, accounts of this event are still transmitted orally from generation to generation among the *Iyiyuuch* and the *Mushkegowuk* who call this land home. Nevertheless, recognizing that time here also takes its toll, many Cree elders have welcomed the opportunity to record, in more than human memories, the *tipâchimôwina* ("news" or "histories") and *atâlohkâna* ("stories" or "legends") they recollect. In 1965, *Iyiyuu* elder John Blackned

told anthropologist Richard Preston: “I know a lot of stories but only remember parts of some of them. Since the old stories were not written, they change because they are told from memory. I tell you the stories that I can remember very well” (Preston, 2002: 69). One of these *tipâchimôwina* was about the 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre.” In 1998, when George Diamond told Christopher Stephen the *tipâchimôwin* about the same event, he began with a similar historiographical introduction:

I will talk about what I was asked to talk about today. This was really long ago. Many of the Elders who told the stories are not alive anymore.... I don't really like what I'm going to try because it was too long ago. Because some stories [*tipâchimôwina*] that are told are not the same. Just like the legends [*atalôhkanā*]; they're not all the same. That's what happens to the old stories. I think the young people should have tried to get these stories earlier. But I guess they didn't hear the stories that we heard in the past.... I will try to tell the story of what I've heard. I'll try to tell the story carefully. (cited in Chabot 2002: 94)

Although Cree narratives of the Hannah Bay “massacre” continue to be told orally, many of them, like those of John Blackned and George Diamond, have also become part of a wider collection of “documents” (in writing or in other media) that record first-hand and transmitted accounts of this event. Many of these documents are not of Cree origin. George Diamond comments:

Today, we all know that white people document everything that they hear. I'm not sure if there is a document that exists of that story I told [about the Hannah Bay conflict]. But if there is one, it must be written with all the facts that happened. And for us who only heard it through stories, there are many versions. I have heard that there are documents out there of things that have happened in the past. *I am told of things that have happened from documents [, things] which I didn't know.* (cited in Chabot 2002: 94-95, emphasis added)

He suggests the use of “white” documents in order to supplement and verify the oral tradition he has learned. Yet, in the words of Richard Preston, “If we had to work from only one of these documents, we would find sometimes wildly different histories indicated, depending on which document we had” (Preston 1990: 322). Like Diamond's comment above, John Blackned's remark that elders “probably tell the story slightly different” applies also to non-Cree documentary sources (cited in Preston 2002: 69). If Cree narratives of the Hannah Bay conflict are varied and

can be supplemented and verified by comparing them with non-Cree narratives, the converse is equally true. Nevertheless, in order to affirm oral tradition's strengths, we must recognize its limitations.

Since oral tradition retains a smaller amount of *experience*, it emphasizes the *understanding*—the “process” or “meaning” rather than the “event” (Preston 2002; Cruikshank 1996; Portelli 1981)—and it may often omit details of *experience* by which that *understanding* was formed. This helps explain the continuum between the two forms of Cree narrative, *tipâchimôwin* (“news” or “history”) and *atâlôhkân* (“legend” or “story”): the first emphasizes *experience*, the second *understanding*. The *tipâchimôwina* (plural form) can be both oral history—accounts of specific first-hand or second-hand experience relating to events that occurred within one’s life time—but also include oral traditions—accounts of specific past experiences that occurred before the narrator’s birth and were transmitted by a previous generation. *Atâlôhkâna* (plural form) fall predominantly under the category of oral tradition, where the essence of the story has been transmitted by a previous generation (Ellis 1995; Preston 2002).

Secondly, whereas document-based historiography can hold more aspects and versions of such *understandings* as well as chronologically isolate them, oral tradition tends to retain primarily what is essential, the perception of which changes as the *understanding* is transformed in response to new *experience* (Trigger 1983). Both, therefore, are dynamic, although oral tradition tends to hide this dynamism. This is a key limitation of oral traditions: we cannot re-evaluate the *understanding*, because the *experience* it was based on is no longer available (Henige 1982). This is also true of many historical documents, however, that are simply written “oral traditions” (second, third, and fourth-hand accounts) often lacking the strength of an oral culture to maintain their accurate transmission (Portelli 1981). Oral traditions are also limited by the fact that they are always passed on by the living, who—as noted earlier—“do not give up their secrets with the candor of the dead” (Acton 1896: 4). Again, many written historical accounts share this limitation. In contrast with oral sources, however, most documents used by historians were not produced by, or for the sake of, historians; therefore, they often reveal things that the authors might not have included or wished to include had they been narrating historical accounts.

As Diamond and Blackned suggest, Cree oral tradition has more limitations than most (but not all) document-based histories, simply because of the limitations of human memory and oral narrative. Yet, given the importance of the spoken word in oral cultures, the limitations of Cree oral traditions cannot be equated with the limitations of hearsay in

non-oral cultures. Furthermore, oral traditions cannot be dismissed because they include more than simply a “factual” account of the past or because they do not include the same type of chronological anchors that Euroamerican historians rely on (Vincent 2002). Literate cultures can afford to systematically divide the labor into specialized fields for collecting particular *experience* and formulating particular *understandings*; oral cultures, on the other hand, have less capacity for specialization, so the scope of their oral tradition “is broader and less specific than that of print-based” Euroamerican historiography, which has a much more constrained focus and methodology (Friesen 2000: 220; see also Cohen 1989; Morantz 2001). On the other hand, it should not be assumed that Euroamerican cultures have not maintained oral traditions in similar ways, as evidenced by the existence of a recently recorded Orcadian oral tradition relating to the Hannah Bay “massacre,” or that Amerindians have recorded their history in memory alone.

What would happen if predominantly oral cultures like the Cree began using different media that enabled them to specialize in a manner more systematic than they were earlier able to do, to “inform” in more detail than oral traditions earlier allowed, to retain a wider variety of versions, and to keep records that could be later used in historical accounts? Such changes, of course, are already underway (Calliou 2004). Although James Bay Cree culture is still predominantly oral, the James Bay Cree are no longer a non-literate people. They readily adopted syllabics when introduced by missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century, and most of them now also (or sometimes only) write in English, and they also master many other media. Ultimately, the fact that many James Bay Cree wish to have their oral traditions recorded suggests that their historiographical goals are much the same as Euroamericans’: they wish to record an accurate rendering of past *experience* and *understandings* in order to update and refine their *understanding* of who they are and who they have been.

Non-academic Euroamerican historians and Cree narrators of James Bay history, moreover, have long drawn from both Euroamerican and Amerindian accounts, written and oral evidence (both oral histories and oral traditions). With a few exceptions, academics (historians, ethno-historians, and anthropologists) are relatively recent followers. The last four decades of academic and non-academic historiography of the James Bay region have drawn heavily from Cree and non-Cree sources and perspectives, both written and oral. This includes work by Pierre Trudel, John Long, Colin Scott, James Morrison, Toby Morantz, Richard Preston, Victor Lytwyn, Louis Bird, Regina Flannery, Emily Faries, Lilian Small, Fred Close, Carol Judd and others.

Nevertheless, some anthropologists have suggested that Amerindian and Euroamerican understandings of the past are profoundly incompatible, that all attempts to harmonize them will necessarily lead to the end of history as recounted by Amerindians (Vincent 2002), that writing “a history that tries to find a correspondence between the full body of oral tradition and the archival records would only destroy what is left of Cree notions of their past” (Morantz 2001), or that the “question of which versions are ‘correct’ may be less interesting than what each story reveals about the cultural values of its narrator” (Cruikshank 1996: 433). Their important contributions highlight the problems of merely sifting through Amerindian oral traditions for facts that can be plugged into Euroamerican historiography and the challenges of ensuring that Amerindian understandings of the past are preserved and understood in their integrity. Shifting emphasis from questions of historical fact and accuracy to equally important questions of historical perspective, however, does not satisfy historians interested in the former (Calliou 2004) or courts of law that are presented with evidence from Amerindian oral traditions and Euroamerican historiography (Borrows 2001; Lovisek 2002; Ray 2003). Of equal concern, however, are potential problems that flow from the predominant value given to cultural continuity.

Any attempt to address these issues, however, must be anchored in an appreciation of some of the more profound cultural differences that arise between Amerindian and Euroamerican understandings of the past. And on this theme, anthropologists such as Sylvie Vincent, Toby Morantz, Julie Cruikshank and Richard Preston have made indispensable contributions. Kuper, on the other hand, has perhaps overstated his case on this point. “Good ethnographers,” he argues, “...may stop worrying that cross-cultural understanding is beyond their grasp, and begin to worry rather whether by some malign chance they have landed in a society hardly worth describing, since it is so disconcertingly familiar and prosaic” (1999: 245). In support of this argument, Kuper cites anthropologist Roger Keesing’s reflections on his experience among the Maenaa’adi; however, Keesing actually acknowledged the radical nature of the “Maenaa’adi’s cultural alterity” and only emphasized that there is “no reason...to infer that the pragmatic way in which he [the Maenaa’adi’s] finds his way in the world is qualitatively different from the way in which I find my way through mine” (cited in Kuper 1999: 244).

Differences between Amerindian and Euroamerican understandings of the past are shaped not only by differences of oral and written medium, as discussed earlier, but more significantly by differences of “ideology.” Each culture *informs* using a particular “reasoning of forms” (etymology of “ideology”) in order to “form reasons.” In other words, *expe-*



*rience* is never collected or passed on in a neutral form, but is always formed by and for an *understanding*. Furthermore, the differing ideologies (“reasonings of forms”) are often embedded in the respective languages, which are expressions and tools of expression of the cultures in question. If it is rigid, like an eye that has lost its ability to focus, ideology distorts historiography. However, if it is dynamic like a living eye, ideology has more than a positive influence on historiography, for without a “reasoning of forms” one cannot “form reasons.”

Preston, who spent much of his life reflecting on *Iyiyuu* Cree culture, has received the highest compliment I have ever heard paid to any anthropologist. In 1997, a prominent *Iyiyuu* leader credited Preston as the source of much of her understanding of her own culture. He, on the other hand, has acknowledged that his most profound influence, along with anthropologist Edward Sapir, has been John Blackned, his *Iyiyuu* “informant” or mentor; nevertheless, he has also acknowledged there are still aspects of *Iyiyuu* culture (more precisely, John Blackned’s understanding of it) that escape him, and he certainly does not consider *Iyiyuu* culture “so disconcertingly familiar” as to be “prosaic.”<sup>12</sup>

Our pragmatism and motivations may have much in common, as Keesing highlights, but our ideologies (the particular reasonings of forms by which we form reasons) can remain radically different, though never—I would argue—so different as to be completely incommensurable. Ideological differences, therefore, should certainly not prevent Amerindians or Euroamericans—historians or not—from drawing on culturally foreign sources or understandings. To start with, where would we draw the line? To some extent, even if the difference is barely perceptible, no two people have a perfectly identical culture. We are, as Preston puts it, “individuals in culture” (2002: 237). In other words, although the understandings of the Hannah Bay conflict, for example, cannot be *separated* from their contexts, they must be *distinguished* from them, in order to better comprehend these very contexts. Differences cut not only between but also through “cultural groups,” both contemporaneously and between generations. Ultimately, cultural understandings live in persons-in-relationship who may have been *cultured* (formed and informed) in the same river of reality, but not necessarily in the same channels and eddies. And like the rivers, our cultures are in constant movement, even when they run the same channels.

Insofar as they seek to cultivate, refine, and transmit an *accurate* “understanding,” members of a culture will be open to all potential sources and means that might serve this purpose. Although they may express their revised or refined understanding within and by means of their own cultural norms, they seek, above all, to be well formed and

informed, to be *cultured*. Each new understanding, moreover, modifies the cultural context and norms within which the culture's participants express it. They may wish to preserve an exact copy of the understanding their ancestors have passed on to them; yet their goal is not necessarily to perpetuate it strictly as is, but rather to combine it with the best of other sources in order to rethink and enhance their understandings. The resulting culture may be less or more distinct from others than it was before, but what makes cultures viable and healthy is not their distinctiveness, but their success in cultivating, revising, refining, and transmitting an *understanding* that reflects the reality of who they have been, who they are and, ultimately, who they *should be*.

Furthermore, just as Euroamerican religious understandings or collective memories of the past have not only survived, but have also contributed to—and continue to transcend—rigorous empirically-based historical inquiry, so also can “non-empirical” Amerindian understandings of the past. On the other hand, as Morantz, Vincent and Cruikshank eloquently point out, this exchange cannot take place unless Amerindian understandings are understood and respected in their integrity; and for this reason it is vital that they be preserved and transmitted in an integral form and not in disintegrated morsels digested by Euroamerican historiography with its much heavier cultural weight and far more narrow methodological scope.

When asked what his community needed, Cree elder Raphael Wabano suggested that the “native students should be taught [Cree] cultural values with new values that are introduced...from southern communities...[and that] a cultural...centre would help people, both young and old to learn and exchange ideas on moral and cultural values” (James Bay Cree Society 1979: 18-19). Their success—like that of any other culture—is contingent on their being competent (technologically, socially, economically, but above all ethically), and knowledge of the self in relation to one's human and non-human environment is the root of competence. It is by seeking unity of understanding with reality and of action with understanding that competence is achieved, and not by attempting to preserve a perceived or desired, but non-existent, uniformity of understanding across time – i.e. a static and insular continuity of culture.

In contrast, a dynamic and open form of cultural continuity—authentic tradition—is viable in the midst of change, though it cannot be externally imposed. As Preston observes, “authentic traditions express the integrity of their cultural form/structure. Any given cultural form serves as a bridge between empirical reality, human nature, and culture” (Preston 1999: 159). The unity we seek among action, experience, understanding

(the constitutive elements of culture), human nature, and empirical reality is constantly renegotiated, as new experiences and understandings renew, reinvigorate, reconfigure or—in a manner much like “scientific revolutions” (Kuhn 1970)—replace old ones, and as we struggle to act accordingly. An inauthentic tradition that is jailor rather than guide (to reverse W. Somerset Maugham’s maxim), or a static and insular continuity of culture, will inevitably disintegrate as it ceases to converse with new experiences and understandings, ceases to be “integrated into a whole that tends toward consistency” (Salzman 2001: 69) and as “its normative institutions fail to communicate ideals in ways that remain inwardly compelling” (Rieff 1966: 18).

Amerindians’ embrace of change, exemplified by Cree openness to new media and new perspectives in preserving and revising their understandings of their past, does not, therefore, constitute a break with their traditional cultures but rather an open and dynamic continuity with them. As Theodore Binnema points out in his ground-breaking study, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains*, in the “northwestern plains...were the common and contested ground of diverse communities” that were little concerned “about cultural change and continuity”; on the contrary, they “assumed change and often embraced it” as they sought “to secure their lives” (Binnema 2001: xii & 3). Many changes that are taking place in the ways the James Bay Cree think about and communicate their history are often simply an adaptation in a long tradition of collecting and sharing *experience* with a demand for “maximum precision in narration” (Preston 2002: 255) in order to build, reaffirm, or modify an *understanding*. There are, of course, changes that stem from external pressures – including the legacy of assimilationist policies. Yet even the often overwhelming influence and power of Euroamerican cultures are experienced in a very particular way by most Cree. Furthermore, new Cree *understandings*—while influenced by Euroamerican cultures—continue to be distinctly Cree to the extent they are drawn from particular *experiences* and a particular evolution of *understandings*. Finally, Cree understandings also continue to shape—as they have my own—understandings of Euroamericans.

The Hannah Bay conflict is, by nature, a *métis* event within a *métis* history.<sup>13</sup> That is to say—whether they identified as *Métis* or not—the people involved were of mixed culture or of different but conversant cultures that were mutually influential and transformative. The most resounding critique of the inadequacy of the Amerindian versus Euroamerican paradigm, in fact, are the people of mixed or *métis* culture and ancestry who lived the history of this region and their descen-

dants who continue to tell stories of it today. In 1978, for example, John Kawapit, a *Iyiyuu* elder from Whapmagoostui (Great Whale River), told anthropologist Pierre Trudel a story about first contact that he had heard from Harold Utgardeen, an HBC employee of mixed Norwegian, English and Cree ancestry. Utgardeen, who was fluent in Cree, had moved to Whapmagoostui from Moose Factory, his birthplace. It was at Moose Factory that he had heard the following story, passed on later by Kawapit, who did not question Utgardeen on account of his affiliation with the Company:

They built a shaking tent and there was someone among them who could penetrate it. The Mistabeo [spirit helper] told him “The noise you heard [a canon shot] means that they are trying to contact you. If you are not afraid of he who made it [the noise], he will give you something that you can count on if ever you have need of anything.” (Trudel 2000:64)<sup>14</sup>

This *métis* reality is reflected in the sources; for this reason alone any account of an event such as the Hannah Bay conflict that seeks to understand what happened, in what context, why and to what effect, must also reflect this diversity; it must be a reconciling of *experiences* and of *understandings*, hopefully resolving those that are contradictory and both drawing from and adding to those that are complementary.

In any case, to hope, expect, or demand that cultures in contact will or should remain immutable is an “idea [that] is irreconcilable with the whole course of human history, which is nothing but a vast system of intercultural relations” (Dawson 1938: 42). It was, after all, in a context of fluid relationships and permeable boundaries that the Métis came into being, and that the Kanien’kehá:ka revitalized their struggling communities with adoptees.

On the other hand, as C.A. Bayly argues in *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*, “the rise of global uniformities...through the nineteenth century...created many hybrid polities, mixed ideologies...[but] could also heighten the sense of difference, and even antagonism, between people in different societies, and especially between their elites,” even while these differences have come to be expressed in more common language (2004: 1-2). This tension, and the resistance of pressure towards uniformity, has become increasingly present in the relationship between many Amerindians and Euroamericans, especially in contexts where rights are attached to cultural distinctiveness (Ray 2003) and a static form of cultural continuity, or where certain Euroamerican cultures exert themselves in an imbalanced power relationship. There is a risk, however, that in rejecting pressures and trends towards uniformity of understanding across contemporary society, we enforce it across time

instead, and so undermine the quest for unity of understanding with reality.

If the root of competence (especially ethical competence) is self-knowledge in relation to one's human and non-human environment, Amerindians and Euroamericans need to compare *experiences* in order to reconcile *understandings*, hopefully reconciling and resolving those that are contradictory and both drawing from and adding to those that are complementary. Problems arise when we seek uniformity of understanding—either through time, within a limited cultural group, or across contemporaneous society—instead of unity of understanding with reality, when we forget that our experiences of reality are limited and different, when we refuse to accept *manitou* (mystery)—the gap that will always remain between understandings, experiences and reality—or when we fabricate understandings in an attempt to justify our actions. Ultimately, the question of reconciling understandings of the past brings us back to the question that has been at the root of the 1832 Hannah Bay conflict and its narration: *what does it mean to be competent (above all ethically) within a particular culture's context and how relative to its particular context should any culture's definition of competence be?* In the nineteenth century many might have been too quick to answer such questions; early in the twenty-first century many appear too hesitant to even ask them.

If ethics are about relationship with others, especially those with whom we share a common humanity, and if the “individual”—the person-in-relationship—is the ultimate definer and “bearer of culture” (Sapir 1999: 545), then the suggestion that ethical competence can be defined purely in relation to one's own cultural context is absurd. The cultural relativism that suspends critique until an “individual-in-culture” (Preston 2002: 237) is understood in relation to his or her own experience of reality will help us understand, prevent, and resolve conflicts. The cultural relativism or multiculturalism that, for fear of conflict or reproach, suspends critique indefinitely or completely isolates our “realities” will only foster ethical and other forms of incompetence—our own and others'—that is at the root of conflict.

Kuper, in reviewing a draft of this article, suggested that it is possible to understand the nature of a conflict such as the Hannah Bay “massacre” without invoking the concept of culture at all.<sup>15</sup> I agree: we could simply refer, for example, to *clusters, held and renegotiated by persons-in-relationship, of shared understandings embodied and shaped by our experiences and actions*. The key question is whether the word “culture” can be used as a symbol of such realities without congealing into something that “inhibit[s] an analysis of the relationships among

the variables [that the concept of ‘culture’]...pack[s] together” (Kuper 1999: 245). It is certainly possible to forget the waters that continue to flow beneath the winter ice that annually covers the Moose and Harricanaw rivers, but spring break-up—ice ages notwithstanding—invariably smashes the illusion.

Ultimately, the problem of reconciling (mis)understandings of shared pasts in contexts of cross-cultural conflict can only be addressed by first deconstructing the polarizing paradigms with which we frame the problem and certain assumptions about culture itself. Then we can begin again to see the cultural persons-in-relationship who live behind, between, and beyond the rigid façade of cultural collectivism upon which such paradigms are built. The history and historiography of the Hannah Bay “massacre” reveals a cross-cultural conflict, involving Amerindians, Euroamericans, and others who defy such categorization. Cutting across, and deeper than, any differences between Amerindians and Euroamericans, and cutting through their very selves and ourselves, however, we find a divide between a culture of epistemic integrity marked by a quest for unity of understanding with reality, and a culture of epistemic incompetence marked by the extremes of relativism and fundamentalism (two forms of the same thing).

### Notes

1. My reflections on this theme are based on research into the 1832 Washaw Conflict—better known as the Hannah Bay “massacre”—a story that was so striking when I first heard it that I have an almost photographic memory of the context in which I heard the story, in the 1980s in Moose Factory, Ontario. My reflections are also based on personal experience, including my formative years in this James Bay Cree community and five years as a historian for the Indian Claims Commission. I am indebted to many people, whom I would thank individually if there were space. Here, however, I wish to mention Toby Morantz, John Dickinson, Richard Preston, and John Long, who were my formal and informal co-directors in my research on this topic for my MA thesis (“Merging Amerindian and Euroamerican Understandings of a Shared Past: the 1832 Washaw Conflict,” Université de Montréal, 2002), and who have commented on different versions of all or part of this essay. I am also indebted to Jan Grabowski, Leila Inksetter, Alicia Colson, George Sioui, Paul Delaney, Adam Kuper, Christina Nielson and Kenny Blacksmith, who have also provided comments on various drafts or elements of this essay.

Any errors or shortcomings in it, of course, are my own.

This article focuses primarily on broader historiographical questions. The historical event and context, as well as the details of its narration, will be re-examined as part of my PhD thesis (underway) and is the main theme of another article currently under revision.

2. Wilson, Personal communication, December 10, 1998. He recalled two people in particular: a Ministry of Natural Resources employee and a former HBC employee who used to do the “mail run” from Moose Factory to Mattice before the arrival of the railway in Moosonee in 1932.
3. This principle has been affirmed by Canada’s highest court of law with the 1997 *Delgamuukw* decision (Brown 2003: 621).
4. Other terms in use include: “Indian,” “American Indian,” “Aboriginal,” “Native,” “Indigenous” and “First Nation,” on the one hand, and on the other, “non-Aboriginal,” “European,” “non-Native” and “White.” All these terms are somewhat problematic, but I find “Euroamerican” and “Amerindian” the most suitable for my purposes.
5. This phrase is the source of the notorious American aphorism “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.” See Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971; reprint, Toronto: Bantam Books, 1972), 166.
6. In October 2008, the Canadian Journalism Foundation hosted a panel discussion at the University of Toronto, entitled “The Greatest Canadian Media Failure of the Century: Reporting on Aboriginal Issues.” There would be little comparable interest in organizing a panel on Aboriginal media’s coverage of Euroamerican issues.
7. A senior academic once suggested in a graduate seminar that Jesuit missionaries had been tortured and killed in seventeenth century America because they were pedophiles. By referring to oral tradition, speculative accusations arising out of more recent scandals were passed off as historical evidence.
8. “Reality” I would define simply as that which exists, regardless of the limitations of our ability to perceive, verify and understand it. Much of my thinking on the nature of culture is a result of conversations with Richard Preston and a close reading of his work, in particular *Cree Narrative: Expressing the Personal Meanings of Events* (2002), to which I am greatly indebted. He, in turn, has pointed out that he is greatly indebted to Edward Sapir and Cree elder John Blackned.
9. What follows is a brief summary of the 1832 conflict. Some sources are identified here; however, to avoid encumbering the text, most references will refer—for a full accounting and comparison of the

sources—to my MA thesis (especially chapters 2 and 3), “Merging Amerindian and Euroamerican Understandings of a Shared Past: the 1832 Washaw Conflict,” Université de Montréal, 2002. As noted above, this event is being re-examined as part of my PhD thesis (underway) and is the main theme of another article currently under revision. In the meantime, the thesis can be consulted through the Library and Archives Canada and the Université de Montréal library, or a PDF copy can be obtained from the author through the Moose Factory Historical Association website at [www.moosefactory.ca](http://www.moosefactory.ca).

10. In May 2008, I recorded a number of interviews throughout the United Kingdom with Orcadians, the youngest in his thirties and the eldest in her late nineties. According to their accounts they are indirect descendents of an Orcadian HBC servant named Corrigan, who they say was killed by “cannibals” in the early nineteenth century. Interviews were conducted with Margaret and Alexander Rosie, Elizabeth, Rene and James Thompson, Peter Bews, John Robertson and Neil Leask. I am indebted to Alison Brown of the University of Aberdeen and to Neil Leask for their assistance in finding and recording this oral tradition. I am presently conducting further research on the nature and context of this particular oral tradition and on Orcadian oral culture more generally.
11. Some of the servants were related to a woman who had been killed almost fifteen years earlier by one of the Cree men accused of attacking Hannah Bay House. He had killed her because she had resorted to cannibalism in a time of starvation (Chabot 2002: 149-152).
12. Gerti Murdoch, personal communication 1997; Richard Preston, personal communications, 2009 and 2010.
13. When I use the word *métis* I am not referring to the *Métis*, a specific group of people who have long defined themselves as such, and are politically represented today by the Métis National Council; rather, I am referring to the reality of mixed culture and ancestry.
14. This is an English translation of a French translation of a Cree account.
15. Personal communication, 30 April 2010.

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