

TERRITORIAL SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: THE OJIBWA VISION

The people who live in the Woodlands and Lowlands of northern Canada are hunter-gatherers in the true sense of that term. They are people whose lives depend on the ability to hunt game and gather wild rice and fish from the water resources in the area (Vennum 1988). Although the population of the modern Ojibwa is relatively high when compared to evidence from other hunter-gatherer societies, the earlier figures at the time of contact must have been significantly lower before the Ojibwa began their westward expansion along the major Canadian fur trade routes (see Dawson 1976, 1983; Hickerson 1988; McGee 1897:190-191; Wright 1965). Relatively small numbers of people are the norm in North American Indian hunter-gatherer Band society because of the seasonal variation in the amount of available resources (Riches 1982). This variation would have been compounded by the inability to predict precisely the location of game. There are, therefore, two conflicting tendencies in the relationship of hunter-gatherers to their physical habitat: variation and predictability. Both have a temporal and spatial dimension. Game animals are rarely found concentrated in particular locations at particular times, while fish runs and wild rice, when these are available, usually yield their bounty at specific locations and at specified times.

What kind of social organization is associated with these tendencies? People take account of certain unvarying factors, such as the fixity of some resources and the unpredictability of others. It seems likely, therefore, that any hunter-gatherer society has as its idiom of thought and communication a certain concern with location; in other words, territoriality. North American Indian societies clearly demonstrate a concern for territoriality, as shown by a concern for the location of and access to resources. There is also a development towards political autonomy, and, hence, economic independence vis-a-vis one's neighbours. In their art and myth a predominant theme is the location of people in time and space (See Turner 1978a, 1978b; Riches 1982).

The northern Algonkian and Athabaskan method of organizing moose hunting is one example of the expression of territoriality in a hunter-gatherer society. In both cases the large summer encampment is split into smaller units for fall and winter hunting. People spend six to nine months living in small and isolated hunting groups. These may consist of as little as one nuclear family, or as many as three or four families, friends (and the occasional anthropologist). In general, the hunting groups are not defined by the number of constituent families as such, but of a varying number of non-hunters who attach themselves to a core of hunters. This core may consist of two brothers, or sometimes of two brothers-in-law, either a man hunting with his wife's brother and his dependents (parents, juvenile brothers and sisters, and children), or a man hunting with his sister's husband and his dependents. Modern Ojibwa groups are generally organized around two brothers (Dunning 1959; though there is evidence that in the early fur trade period the core group consisted of a man and his brother-in-law; Bishop 1974:170-172), Cree favour in-laws (wife's brother) as partners (Turner 1978b) and Sekani (an Athabaskan group in northern British Columbia) men either hunt alone or with sister's husband. In sum, there is considerable variation among hunters and gatherers, all of which amounts to roughly the same thing: the formation of cross-cutting networks of potential co-producers from which partners are selected on an instrumental and temporary basis.

Splitting the large group and dispersing the hunting units throughout the Band range increases the efficiency of hunting effort in several ways. First, the knowledge of the land and its resources <197> normally the result of people following different hunting strategies <197> is increased as different areas are visited. Second, dispersal increases the overall flexibility of the group: the Band is conceived by the hunters as being composed of several small autonomous groups rather than one undifferentiated mass of people. In sum, it is people seeking to maximize their individual material security that results in an overall tendency to disperse rather than aggregate. There is no strong pressure, therefore, to engage in collective hunting by the entire band. If pursued this strategy would undermine long term survival in several ways. First, resources would be quickly depleted wherever the Band was located <197> a consideration in splitting up the summer encampments when fish become scarcer, and a situation that was avoided whenever possible in the fur trade era (see Lanoue 1984). Second, in order to avoid the risk of scaring all of the game away, a highly centralized form of control would have to emerge in order to organize the hunt. Since there are more people to coordinate in mass hunting than in small group hunting, there is an increased risk that the premature actions of one person can deprive the entire group of food. In societies where mass hunts do occur, as among the Inuit (Riches 1982) and the Montagnais-Naskapi (Henriksen 1974), there are always means of social and cultural control which prevent individual action from spoiling the survival chances of the group. These institutions, however, are an unattractive choice for most Indian Band societies unless they have no other alternative, since too much control in a situation where people must assess a constantly changing environment is not a wise choice.

There are many reasons why such institutions of control are not favoured, but the primary reason lies in the absence of effective means of using power within a band. Hunting as one large group would leave open large tracts of land which are claimed by the band, but which are only sporadically occupied due to the small numbers of people in the band. Hence, unoccupied portions of the Band range invite occupation by neighbouring people, and these short term visits can easily become long term habitation. In brief, this territorial and economic aspect of hunter-gatherer social organization simultaneously upholds the tradition of individual autonomy <197> people are free to respond to changes in the resource base <197> and the Band as a self-defined entity, the most important category of people with which individuals identify.

Paradoxically, however, if everyone acts in accordance with the ethics of individual autonomy and social flexibility, then the physical existence of the Band is threatened (Turner 1978b). Since there is no strong leader who holds real power, people are free to move around more or less as they wish. Hence, there are no institutionalized constraints on the exercise of freedom as such. People can thus aggregate together in particularly inviting zones within the Band range. If this results in neighbouring people moving into these now vacant areas, then the original occupiers are obviously no longer free to re-occupy their former territory if environmental circumstances change, which they invariably must.

The economic and social considerations that are engaged by people making a living by hunting and gathering are bound together in the notion of territoriality. This notion refers to a sense of co-ownership which arises out of the fact that shared occupation of the entire Band range depends on social and political solidarity. It is not ownership by

legal fiat, nor is it ownership which depends on force. Both of these traits are indications of sovereignty, and bands are anything but sovereign. Territoriality refers to ownership by co-occupation, and co-occupation can only take place if people literally occupy land and cooperate in their co-occupation. Hence, territoriality implies more than a simple claim to land <197> which it is, after all. It is also an idea which defines cooperation and sociability. Flexibility, in other words, can only be maintained if people cooperate in making decisions regarding occupation. The accent on sociability in hunting societies does not necessarily result in the undertaking of cooperative endeavours, but it does lead to a pooling of knowledge, in sharing risks, in sharing resources, and in sharing the fruits of one's labour. Ultimately the bonds which result make a statement about ownership to members of adjacent groups.

Territoriality has advantages and disadvantages as a strategy that deals with the question of ownership. Claims must ultimately be backed by the threat of violence, as there is no effective way of accommodating the weak claim made by occupation to counterclaims which may be pressed by outsiders. Solidarity of the entire Band must be maintained, but people cannot surrender too much independence of action. The cost of unity may be fewer available resources at any one time. Hence, a notion of territoriality has within it antagonistic forces, and it is precisely within the notion of flexibility in which these contradictions surface. Flexibility grants people autonomy in decisions over location, and this autonomy impedes the development of effective military response to territorial encroachments by neighbours. In fact, members of a hunting group may be free to invite their neighbours for a visit, much to the regret of other Band members, who see 'their' resources being used to feed strangers. No one in the Band can effectively stop this, nor even protest. Luckily it does not happen too often, as most people develop a sense of solidarity with their fellow Band members that parallels distrust and fear of strangers. Territoriality is not only different in form from sovereignty, it also actively creates social tendencies which militate against any attempts to claim land by decree; that is, it is different in substance. Flexibility invites encroachments by neighbours because there is no concentration of military or political force. On the other hand, it is the paradox of territoriality that flexible social arrangements encourage the dispersal of people, and thus simultaneously strengthens their claim to all portions of their Band range while creating a strong sense of solidarity on the level of the band. Since the Band is always 'becoming', it is not surprising that its myth proposes alternative, albeit doomed, arrangements as a means of supporting the status quo.

A modern Ojibwa story expresses some of the important themes that mark political and social structure in Band society, especially the emergence of leadership. The tale is ostensibly about buffalo which, incidentally, never played a large economic role in the life of northern Ojibwa. However, as this story shows, because buffalo are powerful and mobile they are "good to think" (as Lévi-Strauss' apocryphal phrase aptly puts it in *La Pensée Sauvage* [1962]), and it is not surprising that the Ojibwa use them as means of explaining <197> and hiding <197> problems. The Ojibwa story of Buffalo acquiring a hump was collected by Emerson Coatsworth (1979:63-68) from Ojibwa living at Rama Reserve northwest of Toronto. As in other stories from Bands, the story presents an orderly exploration of the unknown. The obvious literary style in which the tale is told,

including the dialogue which adheres to the literary notion of psychological consistency, no doubt reflects Coatworth's emphasis rather than the original style.

Why the Buffalo Has a Hump

One day, while Nanabush [Algonkian trickster and creator] was walking through the tall northern forests, he thought to himself:

"These trees have been my friends and companions all my life. Just for once, however, I would like to be able to see for miles around me with no trees to block my view.

Nanabush had heard that far to the northwest of his homeland lay the broad plains of the prairies. He decided that he would make the long journey westward to see the flat prairies country for himself. He packed his few belongings, said goodbye to all his friends among the birds and animals and Indians of the northland, and set out for the west.

"I'll be back in a few months," he told his friends as he left. "The northland is my home, and I will always return to it while I live on earth."

For many days he travelled through the forests, over rocky ridges and across many lakes and rivers until he finally came to the edge of the prairies. He stopped to stare. He had heard all about the great western plains, of course, but when he first set eyes upon them he could hardly believe what he saw. The prairie seemed as boundless as the clear sky above. The land stretched out, flat and treeless, for as far as his powerful eyes could see. Even in his imagination he had not thought the prairies to be as wide as he actually found it. Excited by what he saw, Nanabush ran out into the waving grass. Then he heard the sound of someone crying. He stopped and looked around. There was no one in sight, but he heard the sound again. It was a small voice crying, and it seemed to be coming from the ground. Nanabush looked down, and there, almost at his feet, he saw a bird's nest and, inside it, a small mother bird sitting on her eggs.

Nanabush stooped down.

"What is the matter, little bird?" he asked. "Why are you crying so hard?"

The little bird looked up, startled to see a great man leaning over her nest.

"Who are you?"

"I am Nanabush, the friend of the birds."

"A friend, you say?" said the little bird. "We birds who make our nests on the prairie need a friend."

"Why is that?" asked Nanabush.

"Well, every morning at about this time, the prairie foxes come by, ordering all the birds to get out of the way, and if we don't move quickly when they tell us, we are likely to be trampled to death."

"What!" exclaimed Nanabush. "I have never heard of a fox trampling a bird to death."

"Alas," sighed the little bird sadly, "it is not the foxes who run over us, but the buffaloes."

"Buffaloes? What are buffaloes?" asked Nanabush, who only knew the animals of the forest.

As the little bird began to explain to him that the great, shaggy buffaloes were the chiefs of all prairies animals, a furious barking arose.

"Who is making that noise?" asked Nanabush, looking up in surprise.

"Just as I've been telling you," said the little bird. "The foxes are out running, ordering all the birds and small animals to make way for the buffaloes. After the foxes pass by, the great buffaloes will come charging through and hold their races for the day."

In the distance Nanabush could see the first of the foxes bounding over the grassy plain. As they came closer, he could hear what they were saying.

"Make way! Make way! The chiefs of the prairies are on their way!"

Then, without any further warning, Nanabush heard the thundering of mighty hooves, and the first of the buffaloes came charging toward them. The buffalo breathed heavily as he moved his huge body so quickly across the plains. Nanabush scooped up the little bird and ran to one side. And not a moment too soon. Following behind the foxes, the buffaloes raced over the spot where the little bird had its nest. When they had passed, Nanabush went to look in the trampled grass for the nest, but all he could see were the hoof marks left behind by the stampeding buffaloes. The nest had been pounded right into the ground.

"Just as I feared," sighed the little bird. "That was the third nest I've built this summer. Now I'll have to start all over again."

When the noise of the thundering buffaloes had passed, Nanabush began to hear cries coming up from the prairies grass in all directions. many other birds' nests had been trampled and crushed, too.

"Not only do our nests get broken, but many of the birds are killed every day," said the little bird, and began to cry again.

Nanabush grew very angry.

"This is a terrible thing," he said in a voice of thunder. "I will not allow the great buffaloes to trample on the little birds, and I will not allow the foxes to act as their helpers and frighten the little birds with their threats."

Nanabush turned to the poor bird. "Don't cry," he said soothingly. "Tomorrow will be the last day that you need fear for your homes and lives. I have just worked out a plan."

The next morning, Nanabush came and lay in the tall grass where he thought the foxes and buffaloes would pass by. Then, as soon as he heard the foxes barking, commanding all the birds and the little animals to get out of the way, he jumped up, holding in his arms a great stick he had brought with him. When the foxes saw him, they veered off quickly, wondering who he might be, but afraid of his stick nonetheless. A few seconds later the first of the buffaloes came charging up. the great beast happened to be the chief of all the buffaloes, but he was running so fast that he could not stop or even turn when Nanabush sprang at him. Nanabush hit the chief on the shoulders, and the chief came to a sudden stop.

Until then, buffaloes had always had smooth, flat backs, but the buffalo chief was so afraid that Nanabush would hit him again that when he tried to move away from the mighty magician, he hunched up his back into an enormous hump.

"Shame on you," raged Nanabush, "shame on you, you great beast! Do you not realize what you are doing to the little birds and animals of the prairies with these daily races of yours?"

The buffalo looked down at the ground, too ashamed to look at Nanabush.

"From now on, you and all your tribe of buffaloes will be cursed by having humps on your backs, just like the one you have now. Also you will always hang your heads low in shame, just as you are doing now."

Then Nanabush turned to speak to the foxes, but in their fright they had quickly borrowed holes in the ground, and crawled into them, hoping that Nanabush would not see them. They did not realize that they could not escape from his powerful eyes.

"Hide in holes in the ground, will you?" Nanabush shouted at them.

"Very well, from now on, for what you have done, you shall have to live in those holes you have dug in the ground. They will certainly be cold when the winter comes!"

Thus it was that the buffaloes and foxes came to be as we know them today, all because of what they had done to the little birds and animals of the prairies.

The scene opens with Nanabush at home and, appropriately, he is walking through the forest. This is an immediate and strong suggestion about the paradox facing Indian band society to be 'at home' is to travel constantly over the entire Band range, and to 'own' your home means intermittent occupation. Nanabush is hemmed in; his vision is blocked. The nature of this paradox is now made clearer to the audience: how can Nanabush be sure of owning his home if the whereabouts of his neighbours are unknown to him? If people move over the Band range they leave certain areas unoccupied. Vacancy invites occupation by neighbours. Territoriality among Indian Band societies produces this weakness: a gap in knowledge about potential foreign claimants to 'my' territory.

Nanabush leaves his forested home in order to go westward and discover his neighbours' intentions. This is definitely a scouting mission from which he intends to return, as he makes clear. It is not mere expansion. Hence, our suspicions about the problem facing Nanabush are confirmed. The knowledge gained will benefit his friends. His march to the west recaptures the traditional route of expansion followed by the historic Ojibwa. This is a stylistic device which makes the story more vivid to an Ojibwa audience, and hints that the problem how to claim territory that is not permanently occupied was (and would be, in the future) intensified by migration.

Nanabush reaches the prairies and is astounded at their vastness. If Nanabush and the other forest people had problems at home because their "vision" was blocked, imagine his wonderment at an environment in which everything is clearly in view (although there are enough references to "tall" grass to anticipate the eventual point of the story, that going elsewhere is only a palliative). Here is a clear view, literally and figuratively, into his neighbour's intentions.

The prairie at first seems unoccupied, hinting at the possibility of expansion. The prairie is not empty, however. A little bird befriends Nanabush. This is a clear reversal of the norm, in which an encounter with a stranger would more likely lead to tension rather than friendship. Significantly, the bird's attempt at friendship points to a way out of the dilemma of occupation. If many people become one, yet retain their unique personalities (the foxes, birds and buffaloes are all given particular niches within the same society), then there is no need for distrust. This, after all, is the normal process of the formation of Band solidarity. The problem remains, however, that the process must have limits. If

everyone is a friend then there is no Band as such. Without the Band there is no guarantee that the hunting group can leave certain parts of the Band range unoccupied and return to them at some future date without fear of encountering some 'friends'. Paradoxically, if everyone appears to be friend there is no sociability as such, and without sociability there is no co-occupation. Furthermore, limits are reached when the frequency of interaction falls below an unspecified but nonetheless tangibly felt threshold.

The imagery of the mother guarding her nest simultaneously recaptures the structure of Ojibwa society and the problems which Ojibwa face as a result. Domestic groups (no matter how configured), and not individuals acting alone, are the basic working and exogamous unit in Ojibwa society. The nest is guarded, just as a domestic group prizes its autonomy of action which is continually threatened by other members of the band. The problem is compounded when Nanabush is introduced to prairie society. Although no clear picture of the forest society emerges in the story, it is reasonably certain that it resembles the prairie society in broad outline. The hierarchies within the two are alike. Nanabush has greater powers than birds, beasts and Indians, just as the buffalo have such great power that they are indifferent to the sufferings of the lesser animals.

The story works very well in presenting what is highly valued by Indian hunter-gatherers: social hierarchy is emphasized despite the high value placed on sharing and equality within Indian society. Birds, who are creatures of the air and symbolize freedom (good souls travel to heaven as fast "as birds can fly" [Skinner 1911:160], for example), are at the same time depicted in only one aspect, living on the ground below the hooves of the mighty buffalo. The foxes are intermediate between the two, as well they might be, since they are creatures of the ground who occasionally live below ground in dens.

Significantly, Nanabush does not suggest that the bird move her nest - an admission not only of the futility of flight, but of its impossibility. The implicit message is clear: nests cannot be done away with - re-moved - just as domestic groups cannot be 'moved' from Band society. Nanabush attempts to solve the problem by addressing the issue of hierarchy in the Prairie society in its own terms.

Hierarchy involves several themes in Band society. The question of leadership in northern Canadian societies is extremely vexing, largely because leadership is emergent rather than institutionalized and is based on moral qualities rather than measureable power (Fisher 1968; Rogers 1965; Smith 1973). For example, Leacock states (1969:3) that bands have no hierarchical political organization. As Morantz says (1982) of the Cree, authority is 'latent' within the band system. In another admirable turn of phrase, Ingold states (1980:273) that if a leader is to retain a following, he must "under-communicate" his dominance. In brief, people agree that there is leadership, but a type of leadership that is hard to classify.

In order to coordinate the movements of the hunting groups some leadership is necessary. The question remains: how much leadership will Band society tolerate before individual freedom is compromised? In fact, very little power is granted to a headman in most Algonquian and Athabaskan societies. His position, which essentially depends on securing the best knowledge of the Band range, allows him to use his moral authority in order to suggest possible locations to the hunting groups ("the most trustworthy man", states Skinner 1911:57), "a man who attained power through his own ability and personal influence" [1911:150]). He does not need or have political or economic power. Second, hierarchies point to a problem of flexibility within Band society. Relationships are

intended to be flexible so that people may quickly respond to changing environmental conditions. If there are no constraints on behaviour apart from moral precepts, then there are few restraining mechanisms as such on the development of coercive power. Decisions about movement are always balanced between a desire to follow the technically skilled hunter <197> and thus grant him de facto power <197> and the necessity of maintaining some autonomy for the various hunting groups. This political balance mirrors the economic structure very well, since decisions about movement involve a trade-off between the desire of one hunting group to exploit a productive area and the similar desires of other people whose arrival would immediately turn these areas into over-exploited zones.

Nanabush apparently resolves the paradox of freedom versus authority by temporarily saving the bird from the hooves of the buffalo and by humbling the buffalo. The bird moves up the social ladder, and the buffalo moves down: the bird is lifted off the ground, and the buffalo's head is lowered. The bird gains a bit of dignity, and the buffalo learns a bit about shame and cowardice. The story ends with the world operating as it should. Buffalo are indeed powerful but can be subdued; birds are indeed tiny and weak but can fly freely if they listen to authority; and foxes are no longer masters of the ground, since Nanabush roots them in the ground itself. In brief, there is more equality, less coercion and people are still 'free' to move around, although with more circumspection than before.

Nanabush apparently solves the buffalo problem with the same wisdom with which he saved the mother from destruction. The buffalo are not destroyed. They are not evil; they are merely acting out a tendency which is implicit within the system, albeit in extreme form. Nanabush has solved the problems of prairie society by re-creating it in the image of his forest home, and the story ends with a twist which apparently resolves all problems: lateral movement, which is at the core of the problem of sociability in Band society, is now turned into vertical movement as foxes alternate between living above and below ground. The substitution gives the problem of movement a degree of finality and, hence, an appearance of resolution.

The germ of the paradox remains, however; Nanabush (and the buffalo) is still powerful, and it is his power which was necessary in order to regulate the tensions at play within prairie society. Nanabush did not remove the bird and her nest from destruction by the hooves of the buffalo. He only removed the bird herself. Significantly, the nest (and the eggs) are destroyed, hinting at a fundamental problem with the reproduction of the prairie society and the domestic group. The bird must "start all over again", suggesting that the domestic group might well stick to the buffalo since the beneficent intervention of Nanabush was useless in solving the immediate problem, the reproduction of society. Furthermore, since the final intervention is supernatural, the tensions that he resolves still exist and threaten to upset the equilibrium. The story teller cleverly ends the tale on a positive note, and the original problem in Nanabush's forest home is never resolved, literally or metaphorically.

The story provides an illustration of the forces which characterize territorial Band society. It illustrates the themes of movement, possession and ownership, and the paradox of freedom versus authority which forms a central and dominant idiom in these societies. The point of the story can be stated in broader terms: there is no solution to the problems

of territorial Band society, only accommodation by means of compromise. These paradoxes <197> freedom versus authority, aggregation versus dispersal, exclusivity (solidarity of the band) versus inclusivity (knowledge of neighbour's intentions) <197> do not arise naturally within Band societies. They are created by people who arrive at a series of trade-offs in order to secure a living, given a particular set of environmental constraints. More importantly, the compromises are such that alternatives are always explored: supernatural intervention, non-reproducing domestic groups and unresponsive rulers.

Even though non-environmental pressures are primarily responsible for the development of a particular type of social organization, people still express a strong notion that their society is extrinsically determined; in this case, by environment considerations. This can take many forms: a notion of determinism by economic forces in our culture or other societies may lay causality at the doorstep of spirits. Both options successfully hide the fact that society, like culture, is continually created by human thought and action. The sense of powerlessness pervades all aspects of life, particularly those aspects which are expressions of the paradoxes which confront people in these societies. They feel that they are trapped by social structure they did not make, just as we feel trapped in ours.

It is not only that paradoxes give rise to a state of continual social and cultural tension; they also create a sense that history dominates all spheres of life. The paradoxes, in other words, become imbued with a sense of inevitability despite the fact that people in territorial Band society are ultimately aware of the dominant and external source of tensions in their society. In our own society we know how capitalism works in broad outline. This knowledge does not alleviate the sense of powerlessness we feel in our attempts to change it for better or worse. This sense of historicity pervades all of our individual actions, even though it is these very actions which form our history. Hence, myth is 'about' the exploration of those areas which lie beyond the blinders imposed by this particular sense of historicity. Given the territorial metaphor of extrinsic determination in Ojibwa society, it is not surprising to find that an idiom of boundary expresses and contains the thought and discourse of all people in territorial Band society. Location, in other words, is not only the cultural heart of territorial society. Its importance vis-a-vis territoriality imbues it with a sense of finality in all areas of discourse.