bands in the past often set themselves up as “chiefs,” but to what extent they functioned as such is hard to assess. In any case, generally the position did not pass on to their children.

In sum, “ascribed” status, a status one is born into other than age or sex, is virtually non-existent among the Naskapi, and there is no way of holding even “achieved” status beyond the period of demonstrated ability through actual performance. Substantially the same appears to be true of other hunters. It applies even to the Australians in spite of their elaborate formal social structure, except that they presumably achieve a more automatic additional measure of respect with advancing age. Apparently the relations of production which characterize these societies means status is non-functional in the most immediate day-to-day sense of helping them wrest a living from nature. As to how this actually operates, one gets the impression that it arises from the fact that individuals retain a basic independence, a control over the entire source of their subsistence, which they lose with specialization and the division of labor. True, a person cannot exist alone and is utterly dependent on the group, but it is a direct dependence upon the entire group, not an indirect and somewhat obscure dependence upon one or another section or class within the group which can exert special control over him or her. It is this which makes it possible for the individual not to “endure in the least those who seem desirous of assuming superiority over the others.”

What has not been so widely noted as the egalitarianism among hunters is the fact that it is combined with a marked acceptance of, and latitude for, individuality. As mentioned above, this struck me forcibly when working with the Naskapi. True, it has often been commented upon for the Eskimo, and one also finds inferences of it in monographic material on other such cultures. In contradiction to a commonly encountered inference that egalitarianism among “primitive” peoples involves being pressed into a set mold by stern necessity, so that egalitarianism is achieved at the expense of individuality, one meets not merely a “broad-minded” “tolerance” for idiosyncrasies among the Naskapi, but a truly positive acceptance of them, as long as they do not threaten the existence of the group.

4. Montagnais Women and the Jesuit Program for Colonization

During the sixteenth century, the St. Lawrence valley was the scene of French and English competition for furs, especially for beaver which was used in the manufacture of hats. Sporadic trade of furs between native peoples and European fishermen was old, possibly preceding Columbus’s first voyage; for when Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence in 1534, the people he met were familiar with European vessels, products, and interest in furs. By midcentury, ships were coming to the area for the sole purpose of trading, and during the latter part of the century several companies competed unsuccessfully for a monopoly of the trade.

In 1559, a permanent French trading post was established at Tadoussac, downriver from Quebec, chosen by Champlain to be the headquarters of New France and founded in 1608. Three Rivers, further up the St. Lawrence, was established in 1617. Champlain was welcomed by the Algonkins and Montagnais.* They saw in him an ally in their warfare with the Iroquois, who, armed with weapons obtained from the Dutch, were raiding north and west for furs. Champlain’s main interest was in gaining

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*The anthropological term for the native population of the Labrador Peninsula, exclusive of the Eskimo, is “Montagnais-Naskapi.” At times I shall use the simpler “Montagnais,” a name applied by the French to the various groups that summered on the north shore of the St. Lawrence river. Like the Algonkins, the Montagnais are an Algonkian-speaking people.
access to the interior trade through making alliances with Huron and Algonkin middlemen. He agreed to join the Algonkins and Montagnais in a retaliatory expedition against the Iroquois and was led, in the process, to the “discovery” of Lake Champlain. His way west, however, was persistently blocked by friendly non-cooperation on the part of both Algonkins and Hurons. They were not eager to relinquish a middleman status that yielded a steady supply of iron tools, utensils (especially copper kettles), clothing, grain, and dried fruit.

Meanwhile, the number of trading vessels sailing up the St. Lawrence increased. Champlain wrote in 1611 that the Indians waited until several arrived before bringing out their furs, so that competition for them would push up the price. An average annual harvest of 15,000 to 20,000 beaver in the first years of the seventeenth century rose to 80,000 by 1670. By that time, the Iroquois had defeated and virtually annihilated the Hurons, the French were about to cede Canada to the English, and the English “company of adventurers” was opening up another route to the west with its post, Rupert’s House, on Hudson’s Bay. As the interest in furs pushed west, the northern and eastern parts of the Labrador Peninsula remained relatively distant from its influence. Not until the nineteenth century did the Hudson’s Bay Company begin setting up posts in the Labrador interior.

Several missionaries accompanied Champlain on his first trips, but missionizing did not begin in earnest until 1632, when Quebec, temporarily occupied by the English, had been regained by the French. The traders were interested in the Indians as a source of furs. By contrast the mission, under the able leadership of the Jesuit Paul Le Jeune, was committed to converting them to Christianity, resocializing them, and transforming them into settled farmers, citizens of New France. The Jesuits first worked intensively with the Montagnais-Naskapi, but soon began to pin their hopes on the populous, agricultural Hurons. When the Iroquois decimation of the Hurons dashed these hopes, some Jesuits remained to work with their Montagnais converts, but the main missionizing drive was over.

What was the status of the Montagnais-Naskapi women in the early seventeenth century when the French were establishing a foothold in the upper St. Lawrence valley? As is often the case, a look through accounts written at the time yields contrasting judgments. One may read that “women have great power. . . . A man may promise you something and if he does not keep his promise, he thinks he is sufficiently excused when he tells you that his wife did not wish him to do it” (Thwaites 1906: 5: 179). Or one may read that women were virtual slaves.

The women . . . besides the onerous role of bearing and rearing the children, also transport the game from the place where it has fallen; they are the hewers of wood and drawers of water; they make and repair the household utensils; they prepare food; they skin the game and prepare the hides like fullers; they sew garments; they catch fish and gather shellfish for food; often they even hunt; they make the canoes, that is skiffs of marvelous rapidity, out of bark,* they set up the tents wherever and whenever they stop for the night—in short, the men concern themselves with nothing but the more laborious hunting and the waging of war. . . . Their wives are regarded and treated as slaves. (2: 77)

Fortunately, the ethnographical record for the Montagnais-Naskapi is full enough so that contradictions between two statements such as these can be resolved. The view that the hard work of native American women made them slaves was commonly expressed by European observers who did not know personally the people about whom they were writing. The statement about female authority, however, was written by a man who knew the Montagnais-Naskapi well and recognized that women controlled their own work and made decisions accordingly. Paul Le Jeune, superior of the Jesuit mission at Quebec, had spent a winter in a Montagnais lodge in order to learn the language and understand the culture of the people he was supposed to convert and “civilize.” He commented on the ease of relations between husbands and wives in Montagnais society, and explained that it followed from “the order which they maintain in their occupations,” whereby “the women know what they are to do, and the men also; and one

*Actually, men usually made canoe frames and women covered them, though either sex could do both if necessary.
never meddles with the work of the other" (5: 133). “Men leave
the arrangement of the household to the women, without in-
terfering with them; they cut and decide and give away as
they please without making the husband angry. I have never
seen my host ask a giddy young woman that he had with him
what became of the provisions, although they were disappearing
very fast” (6: 233).

Le Jeune sought to change this state of affairs, and he re-
ported to his superiors in Paris on his progress in “civilizing” the
Montagnais-Naskapi through what became a fourfold program.
First, he saw permanent settlement and the institution of formally
recognized chiefly authority as basic. Second, Le Jeune stressed
the necessity of introducing the principle of punishment into
Montagnais social relations. Third, central to Le Jeune’s program
was education of Montagnais-Naskapi children. “How necessary
it is to educate the children of the Savages,” he stated. “We
shall have them at last if they see that we do not send them to
France” (5: 137).

If we had a good building in Kebec, we would get more children
through the very same means by which we despair of getting them.
We have always thought that the excessive love the Savages bear
their children would prevent our obtaining them. It will be through
this very means that they will become our pupils; for, by having a
few settled ones, who will attract and retain the others, the parents,
who do not know what it is to refuse their children, will let them
come without opposition. And, as they will be permitted during the
first few years to have a great deal of liberty, they will become so
accustomed to our food and our clothes, that they will have a
horror of the Savages and their third. (9: 103)

As the quotation suggests, Montagnais-Naskapi culture posed a
stumbling block for the Jesuits, in that the Montagnais did not
practice corporal punishment of children. Le Jeune complained,
“The Savages prevent their instruction; they will not tolerate the
chastisement of their children, whatever they may do, they permit
only a simple reprimand” (5: 197). Le Jeune’s solution was
to propose removing the children from their communities for
schooling: “The reason why I would not like to take the children
of one locality in that locality itself, but rather in some other place,
is because these Barbarians cannot bear to have their children
punished, even scolded, not being able to refuse anything to a
crying child. They carry this to such an extent that upon the
slightest pretext they would take them away from us, before they
were educated” (6: 153–155).

Fourth, essential to Le Jeune’s entire program was the intro-
duction of European family structure, with male authority, female
fidelity, and the elimination of the right to divorce. Lecturing a
man on the subject, Le Jeune said the man “was the master and
that in France women do not rule their husbands” (5: 179). The
independence of Montagnais women posed continual problems
for the Jesuits. Le Jeune decided that

... it is absolutely necessary to teach the girls as well as the boys, and
that we shall do nothing or very little, unless some good household
has the care of this sex; for the boys that we shall have reared in the
knowledge of God, when they marry Savage girls or women ac-
customed to wandering in the woods will, as their husbands, be
compelled to follow them and thus fall back into barbarism or to
leave them, another evil full of danger. (5: 145)

Le Jeune’s account of his problems, successes, and failures in
introducing hierarchical principles into the ordering of inter-
personal relations among the Montagnais-Naskapi affords a clear
record of the personal autonomy that was central to the structure
and ethics of their society—an autonomy that applied as fully to
women as to men.

Montagnais-Naskapi Economy and Decision-Making

The Montagnais-Naskapi lived by hunting and trapping wild
game—caribou, moose, beaver, bear, hare, porcupine and water
fowl—by fishing, and by gathering wild berries and other vege-
table foods. Like foraging peoples everywhere, they followed a
regular pattern of seasonal movement according to the proveni-
ence of the foods on which they depended. The Montagnais with
whom Le Jeune worked summereed on the shores of the St. Law-
rence River, where groups of several hundred people gathered to
fish, socialize, and make and repair canoes, snowshoes, and other
equipment. In the fall, groups of some thirty-five to seventy-five
people separated out to ascend one or another of the rivers that emptied into the St. Lawrence. During the winter hunting season, these bands might split up into smaller groups in order to spread out over a wide area in search of game. However, they kept in touch with each other so that if some were short of food, they could turn to others for help (Leacock 1969).

The smallest working unit was the group that lived together in a large cone-shaped lodge—some ten to twenty people, or, in Western terms, several nuclear families. In early times, as later, residential choices were probably flexible, and people moved about in accord both with personal likes and dislikes and with the need for keeping a reasonable balance in the working group between women and men and young and old. Upon marriage, however, a man ideally moved into his wife’s lodge (Thwaites 1906: 31, 169). Accordingly, mentions of a Montagnais man’s family might include the man’s wife’s sister, or a son-in-law, or a father-in-law (6: 125; 9: 33; 14: 143–145). Yet three brothers and their wives shared the lodge in which Le Jeune lived. Le Jeune is silent about the relationships among the wives who, judging from hunting-group compositions in recent times, could easily have been sisters or parallel cousins.* In any case, Le Jeune’s diary shows that the arrangement was not permanent.

Ethnographic evidence as well as the Jesuit Relations indicates that decisions about movements were made by the adult members of whatever group was involved. There is no question about women’s importance in making such decisions. In fact, one recorder stated that “the choice of plans, of undertakings, of journeys, of winterings, lies in nearly every instance in the hands of the housewife” (68: 93). Individuals might be chosen as spokespersons to mediate with the French, but such “chiefs” held no formal authority within the group. Le Jeune noted that “the Savages cannot endure in the least those who seem desirous of

*Parallel cousins are the children of two sisters or two brothers (and their spouses). Children of a brother and a sister (and their spouses) are called “cross-cousins.” As is common in many kin-based societies, the Montagnais-Naskapi terms for parallel cousins were the same as for siblings, while the terms for cross-cousins, who were desirable marriage partners, connoted something like “sweetheart” (Strong 1929).

assuming superiority over the others; they place all virtue in a certain gentleness or apathy” (16: 165).

They imagine that they ought by right of birth, to enjoy the liberty of wild ass colts, rendering no homage to anyone whomsoever, except when they like. They have reproached me a hundred times because we fear our Captains, while they laugh at and make sport of theirs. All the authority of their chief is in his tongue’s end; for he is powerful insofar as he is eloquent; and, even if he kills himself talking and haranguing, he will not be obeyed unless he pleases the Savages. (6:243)

Le Jeune was honest enough to state what he saw as the positive side of Montagnais egalitarianism:

As they have neither political organization, nor office, nor dignities, nor any authority, for they only obey their Chief through good will toward him, therefore they never kill each other to acquire these honors. Also, as they are contented with a mere living, not one of them gives himself to the Devil to acquire wealth. (6: 231)

In his final judgment, however, Le Jeune remained bound by his culture and his missionizing commitment: “I would not dare assert that I have seen one act of real moral virtue in a Savage. They have nothing but their own pleasure and satisfaction in view” (6: 239–241).

The Jesuit Program for Changing Montagnais Marriage

As indicated above, Le Jeune’s original assumption—that he could win the Montagnais to Christianity through converting the men—changed when he learned how far Montagnais family structure was from that of the French. He realized that he would have to give special attention to women as well as men if he was to eliminate the Montagnais’ unquestioned acceptance of divorce at the desire of either partner, of polygyny, and of sexual freedom after marriage.

“The young people do not think that they can persevere in the state of matrimony with a bad wife or a bad husband,” Le Jeune wrote. “They wish to be free and to able to divorce the consort if they do not love each other” (16:41). And several years later:
The inconstancy of marriages and the facility with which they divorce each other, are a great obstacle to the Faith of Jesus Christ. We do not dare baptize the young people because experience teaches us that the custom of abandoning a disagreeable wife or husband has a strong hold on them” (22:229).

Polygamy was another right that women as well as men took for granted: “Since I have been preaching among them that a man should not have more than one wife, I have not been well received by the women; for, since they are more numerous than the men, if a man can only marry one of them, the others will have to suffer. Therefore this doctrine is not according to their liking” (12:165). And as for the full acceptance of sexual freedom for both women and men, no citation can be more telling of the gulf between French and Montagnais society than Le Jeune’s rendition of a Montagnais rebuff.

I told him that it was not honorable for a woman to love any one else except her husband, and that this evil being among them, he himself was not sure that his son, who was there present, was his son. He replied, “Thou hast no sense. You French people love only your own children; but we all love all the children of our tribe.” I began to laugh, seeing that he philosophized in horse and mule fashion. (6:255).

Converts to Christianity wrestled with the dilemmas posed by the French faith. A recently married young man wished to be faithful to his wife, but felt himself “inclined toward infidelity.” Deeply disturbed by his criminal wish, he entreated to be imprisoned or publicly flogged. When his request was refused, “He slips into a room near the Chapel and, with a rope that he finds, he beats himself so hard all over the body that the noise reaches the ears of the Father, who runs in and forbids so severe a penance” (22:67). The adoption of severe punitiveness both towards the self and others was reported by Le Jeune.

The most zealous Christians met during the winter, unknown to us, in order to confer together upon the means of keeping themselves in the Faith. One of them, in making an address, said that he thought more highly of prayers than of life, and that he would rather die than give them up. Another said that he wished he might be punished and chastised in case he forfeited the word he had given to God. A third claimed that he who should fall into any error must be put into prison and made to fast for four days without eating or drinking. The acts of justice that they see from time to time exercised on delinquents give them these ideas. (20:143)

Upon hearing the news, the fathers informed the converts that “they proceeded with too much severity; that mildness had more power over souls than force.” The zealots argued, however, that the first among them who committed a fault, “however inconsiderable, should suffer imprisonment and fasting.” This so frightened “the weak,” Le Jeune continued, that “the report spread among the unbelievers that the Christian Savages had chains and bonds all ready to bind the refractory.” Le Jeune concluded, “Some pagans told us they were risking the ruin of everything and that the Savages would kill one another. All this consoled us much, for we took pleasure in seeing the union of the Christians; it is much easier to temper fervor than it is to kindle it” (20:143).

Women and children alike suffered punishment at the hands of the converts. “A young Christian, getting into a passion, beat his wife, who had insolently provoked him,” Le Jeune wrote. The man then repented of his sin and went to the chapel to pray to God for mercy. Le Jeune had the couple brought to him. “They were properly reprimanded,” he reported, “especially the woman, who was more guilty than her husband” (18:155). As for the children, they are all in an incredible state of satisfaction at having embraced the Faith. “We punish the disobedient,” said they. A young girl who would not go to the nets, where her father sent her, was two days without food as a punishment for her disobedience. Two boys, who came late to prayers in the morning were punished by having a handful of hot cinders thrown upon their heads with threats of greater chastisement in case the offenses were repeated. (18:171).

Several Christians even had a drunken, young, pagan relative thrown into prison—in Le Jeune’s view, “an act fit to astonish all those who know the customs of the Savages, who cannot endure that any one should touch their kinsmen; but God has more power than nature” (20:153).

In 1640, eight years after Le Jeune’s arrival in New France and the setting up of a Jesuit mission, the governor called together a
group of influential Montagnais men, and “having recommended to the Christians constance in their marriages—he gave them to understand that it would be well if they should elect some chiefs to govern them” (18: 99). Accordingly, the Montagnais sought advice from the Jesuits, who supervised the election of three captains. The men then “resolved to call together the women, to urge them to be instructed and to receive holy Baptism.” The women were used to holding councils of their own to deal with matters of concern to them and reported surprise at being lectured to by the men.

Yesterday the men summoned us to a council, but the first time that women have ever entered one; but they treated us so rudely that we were greatly astonished. “It is you women,” they said to us, “who keep the Demons among us; you do not urge to be baptized. . . . when you pass before the cross you never salute it, you wish to be independent. Now know that you will obey your husbands and you young people know that you will obey your parents, and our captains and if any fail to do so, we will give them nothing to eat. (18: 107)

Women’s responses ranged from zealous compliance to rebelliousness. An incident illustrating compliance with a husband’s wishes, and suggesting the internalization of guilt, occurred when a Christian woman joined some “games or public recreation” of which her husband did not approve.

Having returned, her husband said to her, “If I were not a Christian, I would tell you that, if you did not care for me you should seek another husband to whom you would render more obedience; but having promised God not to leave you until death, I cannot speak to you thus, although you have offended me.” This poor woman asked his forgiveness, without delay, and on the following morning came to see the Father who had baptized her, and said to him, “My Father, I have offended God, I have not obeyed my husband; my heart is sad; I greatly desire to make my confession of this.” (18: 95)

Other women continued to have lovers, to solicit married men to take a second wife, and to defy or leave their husbands. One convert complained, “My wife is always angry; I fear that the Demons she keeps in my cabin are perverting the good that I received in holy Baptism.” Le Jeune wrote of this man:

Another time his wife aimed a knife at his thigh, and he, evading the blow, had only his robe injured, in which this Megera made a great slash. Thereupon he came to us; meeting some Savages on the way, he began to laugh. “See,” said he, “the anger of her who considers me her servant; she thought she would be able to irritate me, but I have more power over myself than to fall into passion at the anger of a woman.”

Le Jeune added, “It is strange what Enemies the Savages are of anger, and how this sin shocks them,” and continued,

I know not what this simple man has done to win her over to God. “If thou wilt believe,” he said to her, “I will love thee above all things; I will wait upon thee in all thy needs, I will even perform the little duties that the women do, I will go for water and wood; I will love thee more than myself.” He pinched his arm and said to her, “Dost thou see this flesh? I do not love it; it is God whom I love, and those who believe in him. If thou are not willing to obey him thou must go away from me; for I cannot love those who do not love God.”

His wife derided him: “Dost thou not see that we are all dying since they told us to pray to God? Where are thy relatives? Where are mine? The most of them are dead. It is no longer a time to believe.” (20: 195–197)

Another particularly revealing incident offers an important comment on Montagnais ethics, and indicates the growing distance between the missionized Montagnais, with their acceptance of coporal punishment, and the unconverted. A Jesuit called some “chief men” together and, after commending them on putting a stop to “the disorderly conduct that occasionally occurred among them,” expressed astonishment at their permitting a young baptized woman to live apart from her husband. The captain responsible for her replied that “he had tried all sorts of means to make her return to her duty and that his trouble had been in vain; that he would, nevertheless, make another effort.” The Jesuit father counseled him to consult his people and decide upon what was to be done for such disobedience. “They all decided upon harsh measures. ‘Good advice,’ they said, ‘has not brought her to her senses; a prison will do so.’ Two Captains were ordered to take her to Kebec and . . . have her put in a dungeon.”
The woman fled, but they caught her and tied her to take her by canoe to Quebec. At this

some Pagan young men, observing this violence, of which the Savages have a horror, and which is more remote from their customs than heaven is from Earth, made use of threats, declaring that they would kill any one who laid a hand on the woman. But the Captain and his people, who were Christians, boldly replied that there was nothing that they would not do or endure, in order to secure obedience to God. Such resolution silenced the infidels.

To avoid being imprisoned, the woman “humbly begged to be taken back to Saint Joseph, promising thenceforward she would be more obedient.” Le Jeune stated,

Such acts of justice cause no surprise in France, because it is usual there to proceed in that manner. But, among these peoples..., where everyone considers himself from birth, as free as the wild animals that roam in their great forests... it is a marvel, or rather a miracle, to see a peremptory command obeyed, or any act of severity or justice performed.

Some Savages, having heard that in France, malefactors are put to death, have often reproached us, saying that we were cruel—that we killed our own countrymen; that we had no sense. They asked us whether the relatives of those who were condemned to death did not seek vengeance. The Infidels still have the same ideas; but the Christians are learning, more and more, the importance of exercising Justice. (22: 81-85)

Shortly afterwards, another act of violence towards a woman again threatened to provoke conflict between Christian and “pagan” Montagnais, and again called for commendation on the part of the recorder (in this instance, not Le Jeune, but Bartholemy Vimont). The Christian relatives of a young woman agreed in family council to beat her for speaking to a suitor against her parents’ wishes: “We are taught that God loves obedience. We see the French practicing it; they have such a regard for that virtue that, if any one of them fail in it, he is punished. Parents chastise their own children, and masters their servants.”

One of the relatives beat the girl and lectured other girls who had gathered: “This is the first punishment by beating that we have inflicted upon anyone of our Nation. We are re-
solved to continue it, if any one among us should be disobedient.” Vimont commented:

During the previous year the new Christians had a Savage put in prison. This year they have done more, for this last punishment seems to me very severe to be the first. Those who know the freedom and independence of these peoples, and the horror they have of restraint or bondage, will say that a slight touch of Heaven and a little grace are stronger and more powerful than the cannons and arms of kings and monarchs, which could not subdue them.

The angry suitor appealed to his father, who threatened the Christian Indians. They defended their action, saying that his son had not been affronted and that he should be satisfied with the girl’s punishment. At this, Governor Montmagny had the suitor called in and, through an interpreter, warned the young man to be careful, saying he would consider any attack on the Christian Indians to be a personal attack upon him (22: 115-127).

Long-Range Impact of the Jesuit Program

One must ask how fairly the Jesuit Relations can be used to evaluate the success of the Jesuit program for conversion and resocialization of the Montagnais-Naskapi. After all, the Jesuit fathers were, in effect, soliciting continued support for their work, and they spent many pages describing the piety of their converts. Furthermore, they drew heavily on second-hand reports from adherents to the mission who doubtless presented themselves in a favorable light when repeating conversations and describing incidents. However, as seen by quotations above, both Jesuits and converts reported fully and convincingly on the views and actions of the unconverted. There is no reason to doubt the evidence the Relations offer of the conflicting ideologies that caused profound social disruption for the group as a whole and deep psychological turmoil for these individuals, both women and men, who made an often agonizing decision to give up traditional beliefs and practices and adhere to new codes of conduct and commitment. Therefore, although they do not reveal the actual extent of conversion that took place among the Montagnais-Naskapi during the seventeenth century, the Jesuit
Relations document in detail what is more significant: the nature of responses to the Jesuit program, ranging from zealous dedication, through formal conversion, that might well involve backsliding, to indifference, and finally, to active hostility.

With respect to female-male relations, premarital chastity, male courtship, monogamy, and marital fidelity became accepted as ideal behavioral norms by dedicated converts. In 1639, Le Jeune wrote of the "evil custom" whereby a man who was courting a woman would go to her to make love at night, and he advised the girls to refer their suitors to the Jesuits (16: 61). Several years later Vimont reported that an old woman, "touched by the fear of God," gave the names of young unmarried lovers, who protested that such "suits of marriage" were "customary among them." The young people were lectured by their elders to "declare your affections to your parents; take their advice and that of the Father. . . . Make your visits by day and not by night; the faith and the prayer forbid this custom" (24: 139). Some people, Vimont reported, had already adopted a new form of courtship, whereby a suitor would send a girl a bark painting of a young couple "holding each other by the hand, in the position that they assume in Church when they get married." A girl who was rejecting her suitor would send the drawing back (22: 71).

In keeping with the reciprocity of Montagnais-Naskapi female-male relations, converted men accepted the same standards as were enjoined on women. Le Jeune wrote that he had heard on good authority "that some shameless women, who have approached some men at night and solicited them to do evil in secret, received for answer only these words: "I believe in God, I pray to him every day; he forbids such actions, I cannot commit them" (1906: 16: 61). Nor would a "worthy captain" take a second wife, even when solicited by the woman herself, but answered, "You come too late, I have given my word to God. I cannot gainsay it. I will obey him; I have said to him, 'I will obey thee' and I will do it" (16: 145).

The influence, direct and indirect, of formulating such ideals as these was enhanced by the Jesuit work with children. Le Jeune wrote,

We have done so much for these poor unbelievers that they have given us some of their daughters, which seems to me an act of

God. . . . These little girls are dressed in the French fashion; they care no more for the Savages than if they did not belong to their Nation. Nevertheless, in order to wean them from their native customs, and to give them an opportunity of learning the French language, virtue and manners, that they may afterwards assist their countrywomen, we have decided to send two or three to France, to have them kept and taught in the house of hospital nuns. . . . Oh if we could only send a certain one who is to remain in the house of which I have spoken. . . . The child has nothing savage about her except her appearance and color; her sweetness, her docility, her modesty, her obedience, would cause her to pass for a wellborn French girl, fully susceptible of education.

Le Jeune followed this entry with a reference to his wish for a building in Quebec, where three classes could be lodged, "the first of little French children, of whom there will be perhaps twenty or thirty Pupils; the second, of Hurons; the third, of Montagnes" (9: 103).

For their part, the Montagnais expressed resentment that their presentation of children to the French was not reciprocated. A "captain" complained: "One does not see anything else but little Savages in the houses of the French; there are little boys there and little girls,—what more do you want? . . . You are continually asking for our children, and you do not give yours; I do not know any family among us which keeps a Frenchman with it" (9: 233).

The contrast between the Montagnais attitude toward sharing children and that of the French was expressed by Le Jeune's statement that "they think they are doing you some great favor in giving you their children to instruct, feed and dress" (5: 197). Perhaps no incident in the Relations more poignantly reveals the cultural distance to be spanned by Montagnais converts than that in which a French drummer boy hit a Montagnais with his drumstick, drawing blood. The Montagnais onlookers took offense, saying, "Behold, one of thy people has wounded one of ours, thou knowest our custom well; give us presents for this wound." The French interpreter countered, "Thou knowest our custom; when any of our number does wrong, we punish him. This child has wounded one of your people; he shall be whipped at once in thy presence." When the Montagnais saw the French were in earnest about whipping the boy,
they began to pray for his pardon, alleging he was only a child, that he had no mind, that he did not know what he was doing; but as our people were nevertheless going to punish him, one of the Savages stripped himself entirely, threw his blanket over the child and cried out to him who was going to do the whipping: "Strike me if thou wilt, but thou shalt not strike him." And thus the little one escaped. (5: 219)

This incident took place in 1633. How was it possible that scarcely ten years later, adults could be beating, withholding food from, and even, if the report is accurate, doing such things as throwing hot ashes on children and youths? Above, I have referred to the punitiveness toward the self and others that accompanied the often tormented attempt on the part of converts to reject a familiar set of values and replace it with another. This psychological response is familiar. To say this, however, merely presses the next question: Why did some Montagnais feel so strongly impelled to make this attempt? The answer is that the Jesuits and their teachings arrived in New France a full century after the economic basis for unquestioned cooperation, reciprocity, and respect for individual autonomy began to be undercut by the trading of furs for European goods. On the basis of new economic ties, some Montagnais-Naskapi were interested in attaching themselves to the mission station and the new European settlement, thereby availing themselves of the resources these offered. By the same token, some were prepared to accept the beliefs and ritual practices of the newcomers, and to adopt—or attempt to adopt—new standards of conduct.

Elsewhere, I have documented the process whereby the stockpiling of furs for future return, to be acquired when the trading ships arrived, contradicted the principle of total sharing based on subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering (Leacock 1954). The process has subsequently been well described for the Canadian sub-Arctic generally, and it has been pointed out that parallel processes are involved when a horticultural people become involved in exchange relations with a market economy (Murphy and Steward 1955).

At the same time that the fur-trade was undercutting the foundation for Montagnais-Naskapi values and interpersonal ethics, the terrible scourge of epidemic disease, the escalation (or introduction) of warfare, and the delusion of relief from anxiety offered by alcohol were also undermining Montagnais-Naskapi self-assurance. Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey (1969) has described the effects of these developments in a review of the conflict between European and eastern Algonkian cultures during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fear of disease, particularly smallpox which raged in the decade after the priests' arrival, was only equaled by fear of the Iroquois. The prolonged and intricate torture of Iroquois prisoners, into which women entered with even more zeal than men, was a grim expression of profound fearfulness and anger. Alcohol, which temporarily elated the spirits, led to fights around the European settlement; in 1664 there is reference to a case of rape committed under its influence (48: 227).

This is not to say, however, that Montagnais-Naskapi society as a whole was thoroughly disrupted. The violence that occurred around the European settlement contrasts not only with the friendliness, gaiety, and lack of quarreling that Le Jeune described during the winter he spent in the interior in 1633–1634, but also with the general cooperativeness and good will—albeit laced with raucous banter and teasing—that characterized Montagnais-Naskapi life in later centuries in the rest of the Labrador Peninsula. Quebec was, after all, a gateway to the North American interior, and fur-trading posts and mission stations pushed ever westward. The non-racist policy of building a French colony in part with resocialized Indians was abandoned and replaced by a hardening color line. In time, all Montagnais-Naskapi became Catholic, but without the closer supervision of the Jesuits, they retained established religious practices and added Catholic sacraments and prayer. During the summer of 1951, the "shaking-tent rite," in which a religious practitioner converses with the gods, both gaining useful information and entertaining an audience in the process, was still being practiced in eastern Labrador.

The pace of change in most of the Labrador Peninsula was slow, as Indians living far from centers of early settlement and trade gradually became drawn into a fur-trapping economy. In the summer of 1950, I was able to document the final stages
of transition in southeastern Labrador, at a time when the next major change was about to transform life for French and English fishermen and fur-trappers as well as Montagnais-Naskapi hunters-trappers; a railroad was being built into a huge iron mine deep in the north-central part of the peninsula. When I was there, conditions in the north woods were still such that the traditional Montagnais-Naskapi ethic of cooperativeness, tolerance, and non-punitiveness remained strong.

What about the relations between women and men? As in seventeenth-century accounts, one can still find contrasting judgments. Burgesse (1944) has written that

labour is fairly equitably divided between the sexes under the economic system of the Montagnais. Each sex has its own particular duties but, within certain limits, the divisions between the types of work performed are not rigid. A man would not consider it beneath his dignity to assist his wife in what are ordinarily considered duties peculiar to the woman. Also, women are often enough to be seen performing tasks which are usually done by men. On being questioned in regard to this aspect of their economics, the Montagnais invariably reply that, since marriage is an union of co-equal partners for mutual benefit, it is the duty of the husband to assist his wife in the performance of her labors. Similarly, it is the duty of the wife to aid the husband...

The Montagnais woman is far from being a drudge. Instead she is a respected member of the tribe whose worth is well appreciated and whose advice and counsel is listened to and, more often than not, accepted and acted upon by her husband. (4–7)

Earlier, and by contrast, Turner had written:

The sexes have their special labors. Women perform the drudgery and bring home the food slain by their husbands, fetching wood and water, tanning the skins, and making them into clothing. The labor of erecting the tents and hauling the sleds when on their journey during the winter falls upon them, and, in fact, they perform the greater part of the manual labor. They are considered inferior to men, and in their social life they soon show the effects of the hardships they undergo. (1894: 271)

One could take these statements at face value as reflecting differences between two Montagnais-Naskapi bands, for the first statement refers to the southerly Lake St. John people and the second to the Ungava people of the north. However, the continuation of Turner’s account reveals realities of Ungava life that contradict his formal statement.

An amusing incident occurred within a stone’s throw of Fort Chimo. An Indian had his clothes ripped from him by his enraged wife. She then took the tent from the poles, leaving him naked. She took their property to the canoe, which she paddled several miles upstream. He followed along the bank until she relented, whereupon their former relations were resumed, as though nothing had disturbed the harmony of their life. The man was so severely plagued by his comrades that for many days he scarcely showed his head out of the tent. (Ibid)

Translating the incident into the terms of political economy, women retained control over the products of their labor. These were not alienated, and women’s production of clothing, shelter, and canoe covering gave them concomitant practical power and influence, despite formal statements of male dominance that might be elicited by outsiders. In northern Labrador in the late nineteenth century, dependence on trading furs for food, clothing, and equipment was only beginning. Band cohesion was still strong, based on the sharing of meat, fish, and other necessities and on the reciprocal exchange of goods and services between women and men.

By the middle of this century, the economic balance had tipped in favor of ultimate dependence upon the fur-trade (and, in many cases, wage labor) throughout the entire Labrador Peninsula. The Montagnais-Naskapi lived in nuclear family units largely supported by the husband and father’s wages or take from the trap line. Nonetheless, the resources of the land were still directly used, were still available to anyone, were acquired cooperatively insofar as it was most practical, and were shared. Furthermore, partly through their own desire and partly in accord with the racist structure of Western society, the Montagnais-Naskapi maintained their status as a semi-autonomous people and were not separated into an elite minority versus a majority of marginal workers. Thus, a strong respect for individual autonomy and an extreme sensitivity to the feelings of others when decisions were
to be made went with a continuing emphasis on generosity and cooperativeness, which applied to relations between as well as within the sexes.

In my own experience living in a Montagnais-Naskapi camp, I noted a quality of respectfulness between women and men that fits Burgess's characterization. I also observed such behavior as an ease of men with children, who would take over responsibility even for infants when it was called for, with a spontaneity and casual competence that in our culture would be described as "maternal." Nonetheless, men were "superior" in ways commonly alluded to in anthropological literature. The few shamans who still practiced their art (or admitted practicing it to an outsider) were men; band chiefs were men; and patrilocality was both an ideal and statistically more common among newlyweds than matrilocality. In short, Montagnais-Naskapi practice at this time fitted what is considered in the anthropological literature to be usual for people who live (or have recently lived) by direct acquisition and use of wild products; strongly egalitarian, but with an edge in favor of male authority and influence.

Seventeenth-century accounts, however, referred to female shamans who might become powerful (Thwaites 1906: 6: 61; 14: 183). So-called outside chiefs, formally elected according to government protocol to mediate with white society, had no more influence within the group than their individual attributes would call for; and matrilocality had only recently given way to patrilocal postmarital residence. As markedly different as Montagnais-Naskapi culture continued to be from Western culture, the ethnographic record makes clear that it had been constantly restructuring itself to fit new situations and that the status of women, although still relatively high, has clearly changed.

5. Matrilocality Among the Montagnais-Naskapi

The northeastern Algonkians have usually been characterized as having a patrilineal band organization, with patrilocal residence and patrilineal "inheritance" of land rights. However, it has been recognized for some time that postmarital residence in this area is far from exclusively patrilocal, and inheritance by no means exclusively patrilineal. Speck, who was perhaps the most familiar with Algonkian social organization, wrote:

[Although the patrilineal family band] seems to be the ideal family grouping where a large family band can maintain itself in comfort on one inherited plot . . . ordinarily . . . in the inhospitable north country such ideals are futile and we find the most common practice to be for the other sons to join the family band of their father-in-law and raise their families as members of the wife’s band. (Speck 1917: 97–98)*

In the case of the Mistassini band in the Labrador Peninsula, Speck found that although "the hunting territories are inherited paternally, . . . here again it is stated as common for a man to join his wife’s family and hunt with her father and brothers" (Speck 1917: 91). At the time of his visit to this band, there were "six definite instances of hunters residing on their paternally inherited"

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*Elserwhere Speck wrote, "It will be noticed how frequently the hunters deviate from the usual practice—in which the inheritance of the hunting territories passes down from father to sons,—by joining the family unit of the father-in-law. Acquisition of territories in this manner, is of high relative frequency." (1927: 392).