

***Cannibal Wihtiko***

**Finding Native-Newcomer Common Ground**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Cannibal *Wihtiko*: Finding Native-Newcomer Common Ground**

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Two prominent historians, David Cannadine and Brad Gregory, have recently contended that history is distorted by overemphasis on human difference and division across time and space. This problem has been acute in studies of Native-Newcomer relations, where exaggeration of Native pre-contact stability and post-contact change further emphasized Native-Newcomer difference. Although questioned in economic, social and political spheres, emphasis on *cultural* difference persists.

To investigate the problem, this study examined the Algonquian *wihtiko* (windigo), an apparent exemplar of Native-Newcomer difference and division. With a focus on the James Bay Cree, this study first probed the *wihtiko* phenomenon's Native origins and meanings. It then examined post-1635 Newcomer encounters with this phenomenon: from the bush to public opinion and law, especially between 1815 and 1914, and in post-1820 academia. Diverse archives, ethnographies, oral traditions, and academic texts were consulted.

The cannibal *wihtiko* evolved from Algonquian attempts to understand and control rare but extreme mental and moral failures in famine contexts. It attained mythical proportions, but fears of *wihtiko* possession, transformation and violence remained real enough to provoke pre-emptive killings even of family members. *Wihtiko* beliefs also influenced Algonquian manifestations and interpretations of generic mental and moral failures. Consciously or not, others used it to scapegoat, manipulate, or kill.

Newcomers threatened by moral and mental failures attributed to the *wihtiko* often took Algonquian beliefs and practices seriously, even espousing them. Yet Algonquian *wihtiko* behaviours, beliefs and practices sometimes presented Newcomers with another layer of questions about mental and moral incompetence. Collisions arose when they discounted, misconstrued or asserted control over Algonquian beliefs and practices. For post-colonial critics, this has raised a third layer of questions about intellectual and moral incompetence. Yet some critics have also misconstrued earlier attempts to understand and control the *wihtiko*, or attributed an apparent lack of scholarly consensus to Western cultural incompetence or inability to grasp the *wihtiko*.

In contrast, this study of *wihtiko* phenomena reveals deeper commonalities and continuities. They are obscured by the complex evolution of Natives' and Newcomers' struggles to understand and control the *wihtiko*. Yet hidden in these very struggles and the *wihtiko* itself is a persistent shared conviction that reducing others to objects of power signals mental and moral failure. The *wihtiko* reveals cultural differences, changes and divisions, but exemplifies more fundamental commonalities and continuities.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1661, Jesuit missionaries based in the St. Lawrence valley reported on their attempt to respond to an invitation from the Cree of James Bay. Having travelled up the Saguenay River to Lake Saint-Jean, they were informed on arrival by their Montagnais guide that the men due to guide them further north “had met their death ... [that] Winter in a very strange manner ... seized with an ailment unknown to us, but [said to be] not very unusual among the people we were seeking.”<sup>1</sup> The Jesuits recorded their guide’s description of the alleged ailment:

They are afflicted with neither lunacy, hypochondria, nor frenzy; but have a combination of all these species of disease, which affects their imaginations and causes them a more than canine hunger. This makes them so ravenous for human flesh that they pounce upon women, children, and even upon men, like veritable werewolves, and devour them voraciously, without being able to appease or glut their appetite – ever seeking fresh prey, and the more greedily the more they eat. This ailment attacked our deputies; and, as death is the sole remedy among those simple people for checking such acts of murder, they were slain in order to stay the course of their madness.<sup>2</sup>

Although not named as such, this appears to be one of the earliest European descriptions of the Algonquian *wihtiko*, a cannibalistic monster with a heart of ice that attained mythical proportions in Cree and other subarctic Algonquian traditions, where it originated and served to explain extreme mental or moral incompetence, especially starvation-induced madness and violent cannibalism.

Since the seventeenth century, the *wihtiko* has repeatedly appeared as a paragon of Native-Newcomer difference and division. In the late nineteenth-century, the *wihtiko* was frequently depicted as evidence of peculiar Native mental and moral failings. Conversely, in the early twentieth-first century, the *wihtiko* is more often associated with European mental and moral

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriel Druilletes and Claude Dablon, Nekouba to Jérôme Lalement, July 2, 1661,” in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791, the Original French, Latin, and Italian Texts, with English Translations and Notes*, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Burrows, 1896-1901), vol. 46: 261-263.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

failings. Preston highlighted this shift in his mid-twentieth century critique, *Wiitiko: Algonquian Knowledge and Whiteman Interest*:

Are we erecting a myth of inhuman savagery in order to rationalize colonial dominance over ‘our’ natives? ... Cannibals have been particularly apt subjects for this interpretation of natives. But this century has produced strong counter-interpretations, and we are more likely to find self-castigation for introducing savage conditions to the native populations, whereby the Wiitiko, for instance, would really be Our Fault ... instead of an indigenous beast.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis explores the reasons for this shift in emphasis and questions whether the *wihtiko* is indeed an exemplar of Native-Newcomer difference and division.

The early modern “mutual discovery”<sup>4</sup> of two very old and different worlds had such a profound impact on both that it eventually created “new worlds for all.”<sup>5</sup> For American Natives and European Newcomers alike, their mutual discovery – or collision – enflamed debates about human difference and change later intensified by nineteenth-century Darwinism.<sup>6</sup> Between these old and new worlds, however, there were also profound continuities and commonalities. Debates about difference and change, moreover, were never only about understanding. They were also about power.

The present study of European encounters with the *wihtiko* demonstrates not only cultural difference, change and conflict but also cross-cultural continuities and similarities between

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Preston, “The Wiitiko: Algonquian Knowledge and Whiteman Interest,” in *Papers of the Eighth Algonquin Conference*, ed. William Cowan, 101-106 (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1977), 101.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth S. Coates, “Mutual Discovery: Tribal Peoples and the First Wave of Globalization,” chapter 3 in *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples: Struggle and Survival* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). James Axtell insists on the “mutuality of discovery and acculturation” in *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>5</sup> Colin G. Calloway, *New Worlds for All: Indians, Europeans, and the Remaking of Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 196-198. See also Alfred G. Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700* (Saint John, NB: New Brunswick Museum, 1937). Calloway and Bailey were referring to Euroamerican society, but European society was also changed by this mutual discovery. Although Native Americans did not migrate en masse to the Old World of Europe, they nonetheless had a powerful impact as ‘newcomers’ to the world of European ideas and imagination, and through the influence they and their world had on Euroamericans, as well as through other direct impacts.

<sup>6</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ix; Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France, c. 1500-c.1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 21-22; Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers*, 18-24; Bruce G. Trigger, “Early Native North American Responses to European Contact,” *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 4 (March 1991): 1200-1202.

peoples often assumed to be profoundly different. These continuities and similarities have been obscured by the complex evolution of Natives' and Newcomers' struggles to understand and control the *wihtiko*, and by broader cross-cultural conflict paradigms. Yet emerging from these struggles and the *wihtiko* itself is a persistent shared conviction that reducing others to an object of power is a sign of moral or mental failure.

In initial cross-cultural encounters, differences are often more apparent than affinities, and can lead to misunderstanding. Ignorance of differences hidden beneath superficial affinities may generate even greater misunderstanding. These differences and superficial affinities, however, may hide far deeper affinities that are further obscured when cross-cultural misunderstandings generate or intensify conflict. Yet many conflicts described as cross-cultural are, in fact, rooted in commonalities: competing claims to the same territory or resource. Girard argues that conflicts are more likely to occur *because* of such commonalities.<sup>7</sup> Cultural differences, in these situations, simply mark divisions between competing groups. They may be exaggerated or denied in an attempt to assimilate or exclude individuals from a group, or to resist such attempts. Yet they are sources of conflict only insofar as they become sites or justifications for assertions of control over competing but similar interests.

Once cross-cultural conflict paradigms germinate, they can be used to assert interpretive control over contemporary and historical contexts. As their roots extend deeper and wider, it can become difficult to name or discuss such conflict without reinforcing the sense of polarization. The subtler the conflict paradigm the deeper it can penetrate and the more difficult it is to identify and uproot.

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<sup>7</sup> See Vern N. Redekop's discussion of René Girard's notion of mimetic desire and its transformation into mimetic rivalry in *From Violence to Blessing: How an Understanding of Deep-rooted Conflict can open Paths to Reconciliation* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2002), 65-73. In contrast, where different neighbouring peoples have complementary relationships to land and resources, conflict is often far less likely to occur. See R.A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research* (New York: Random House, 1970), 68.

Stated in the abstract, these points may appear self-evident, but in specific historical settings, they are far less so. It is precisely in such contexts, argues Cannadine, that paradigms of historical difference and division “stir the powerful passions ... of many engaged academics” as much as “politicians, pundits, and the public.” This problem is aggravated by the fact that “[m]ost academics are trained to look for divergences and disparities rather than for similarities and affinities.”<sup>8</sup>

According to Gregory, a Reformation historian, overemphasis on historical change is no less of a problem:

Rejections rather than refutations – as well as selective appropriations – of ideas, commitments, norms, and aspirations have been common in the past half millennium. Inherited truth claims and values were often denounced without being disproven, just as worldviews and institutions were often *not* left behind. Rather, they frequently persisted in complex ways, in interaction with rival claims and new historical realities that differentially drew from them and influenced them in turn. Negligence of these facts yields supersessionist history that distorts our understanding of the present, perhaps most conspicuously with respect to religion ...<sup>9</sup>

Gregory readily acknowledges that his study, *Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (2012), questions not only the past, but also the origin and basis of “some of the basic assumptions that frame contemporary intellectual life.”<sup>10</sup> The same is true of Cannadine’s *The Undivided Past: Humanity Beyond Our Differences* (2013), which concludes as follows:

To write about the past no less than to live in the present, we need to see beyond our differences, our sectional interests, our identity politics, and our parochial concerns to

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<sup>8</sup> David Cannadine, *The Undivided Past: Humanity Beyond our Differences* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 12-13. James Muldoon makes a similar but less developed argument in *Empire and Order: The Concept of Empire, 800-1800* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 24.

embrace and to celebrate the common humanity that has always bound us together, that still binds us together today, and that will continue to bind us together in the future.<sup>11</sup>

Debates about historical change and difference have always been entangled in contests for understanding and control of the present. When human differences were used to justify slavery, critics emphasized common humanity. Conversely, when imperialism helped generate the modern “rise of global *uniformities*” it also provoked what Bayly calls a “heighten[ed] ... sense of difference,” even if “differences were increasingly expressed in similar ways.”<sup>12</sup>

In post-colonial contexts, emphasis on difference and particularity remains strong, but primarily in cultural and religious spheres. “Postcolonialism,” writes Young, “claims the right of all people on this earth to the same material and cultural well-being.”<sup>13</sup> Quests for material well-being tend to emphasize economic, political and social compatibility. Yet these quests frequently rely on continuity of cultural difference to assert self-determination. This is especially true in nation-states like Canada where the rights of colonized minorities tend to be framed as special rights rather than universal rights requiring special protection.

This emphasis on historical continuity of cultural difference is compounded by the tendency to equate cultural well-being with cultural diversity and distinctiveness. In this respect, Gregory’s critique of European intellectual, cultural and especially religious historiography is insightful. Colonized religious traditions are seeking a place and voice in academic and public spheres amidst long-standing European debates about the legitimate place of religion in both. Colonized peoples are also aware that their post-contact culture and religion are, to apply Gregory’s terms, often shaped by “rejections rather than refutations” of pre-contact traditions –

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<sup>11</sup> Cannadine, *Undivided Past*, 264.

<sup>12</sup> C.A. Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World: 1780-1914* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1-2. See also: Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, 200.

<sup>13</sup> Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

as well as “selective appropriations – of ideas, commitments, norms, and aspirations.”<sup>14</sup> For colonized peoples, cultural renewal often begins with an attempt to recover the differences between pre-contact cultures and the colonialist cultures that have influenced them.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, for post-colonial Europeans, cultural renewal is often grounded in a quest for differentiation from earlier expressions of European culture, or for a scapegoat that can be sacrificed to this end. According to Girard, summarized here by Redekop,

Scapegoats must be seen as *different* to be subject to a violence of differentiation. Moreover, they should be *powerful* enough to have an impact on the crisis. They must be *illegitimate* for some reason so that the scapegoat action can be justified. Finally, they must be *vulnerable*, not able to counterattack with enough force to make the scapegoat action ineffective.<sup>16</sup>

Gregory points to another related reason for emphases on cultural difference and change: simultaneous claims that we are the authors of our own moral authenticity, but that some actions are wrong because they violate moral authenticity. This “incoheren[t] ... sensibility,” argues Gregory,

derives from unawareness of the historical genealogy of two desires that are contradictorily combined. The first seeks to maximize individual autonomy to determine the good according to one’s preferences (hence the advocacy for arbitrariness). But the second endeavors to uphold human rights as a safeguard against the horrific things human beings can do to one another depending on their preferences (hence the insistence on nonarbitrariness). The first desire is the long-term product of a rejection of teleological virtue ethics, the second is a residue of the belief that human beings are created in God’s image and likeness. Their combination depends for its appeal on a skepticism that goes only so far but no further.<sup>17</sup>

From this perspective, emphasizing cultural difference can be a means of defending or asserting moral autonomy or power. Alternatively, contrasting the morals of different cultures can be a means of critiquing those that are dominant or demarcating those that can serve as a scapegoat for more general moral failures.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 12-13.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “Imperialism, History, Writing, and Theory,” in *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair, 94-116 (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 98.

<sup>16</sup> Redekop, *From Violence to Blessing*, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 225-226.

These issues are particularly acute in the history and historiography of Native-Newcomer relations, which remain entangled in the legacy of Euro-exceptionalist and imperialist meta-narratives of human difference and universality. The dominance of these contested meta-narratives peaked amidst the new imperialism at the close of the long nineteenth century. Directly or indirectly, they often facilitated the subordination, segregation or manipulation of non-European peoples. Exaggerations of pre-contact stability and post-contact change among Native peoples further emphasized the sense of difference and the inevitability of Native assimilation or extinction. For many European Newcomers, the primary question was whether intervention could or should speed up assimilation, the option they deemed more humane.

As noted, these meta-narratives of Native-Newcomer difference and division were never unchallenged. In 1937, for example, Bailey argued that Native-Newcomer encounters led to more than conflict or Native cultural extinction: “A fusion of Indian and European elements often occurred,” resulting in “a new culture which was neither European nor Indian ... For want of a better term it may be called ‘Canadian.’”<sup>18</sup> Only after 1970, however, were meta-narratives of Native-Newcomer difference and division subjected to sustained critique. Much of the leading scholarship of the last half-century has broken new ground by questioning such meta-narratives.<sup>19</sup> Scholars have shown that Natives, despite their cultural differences, were no less rational than Newcomers (Trigger), especially in their pursuit of economic self-interest in the fur trade (Ray); that their intellectual traditions were no less capable of change (Ronda); or that their vital role in early Canadian fur-trade society and Métis ethnogenesis demonstrated social and

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<sup>18</sup> Bailey, *Conflict*, ix.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin Martin drew attention for a thesis based on radical cultural difference in which he argued that the depletion of fur-bearing animals among certain eastern subarctic peoples was in revenge for epidemics that were blamed on animals. Yet his thesis immediately drew heavy criticism. See: Calvin Martin, “The War between Indians and Animals,” and responses to his thesis, in *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of Keepers of the Game*, ed. Shepard Krech III (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

ethnic compatibility and relevance (Brown and Van Kirk).<sup>20</sup> Trigger reflected some of the best of this scholarship when he argued,

Indians and Europeans rarely constituted two homogeneous interest groups, or even lined up as two opposing teams ... [B]y the very act of examining how common interests could and did unite members of different ethnic groups, an effort is made to take account of a common humanity transcending cultural difference.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, much of this work does not question cultural difference so much as insist on the common humanity and interests that transcend them. Binnema argued this explicitly in his “common and contested ground” thesis.<sup>22</sup> As with post-colonial historiography more broadly, Native-Newcomer historiography continues to emphasize cultural difference.

Persistence of a paradigm of cultural difference is evident in White’s 1991 analysis of political relations in the Upper Great Lakes between 1650 and 1815.<sup>23</sup> He showed Natives and Newcomers to be highly compatible in their political relations. This implies a common humanity, but White described the “middle ground” as something constructed between, not discovered within, Native-Newcomer cultural differences. Moreover, when a shift in the balance of power eliminated the necessity of compromise, the “middle ground” did not become hidden. Instead, it suffered a “breakdown.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Trigger, “Early Native,” 1212; Arthur Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); James Ronda, “‘We Are Well As We Are’: An Indian Critique of Seventeenth-Century Christian Missions,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (January 1977): 67; Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in the Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1976), 26.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 16. He argues that historiographical emphasis on “cultural contact, clash, change, and continuity” does not echo “the preoccupations of the historical actors themselves.”

<sup>23</sup> White saw his thesis as so radically new that he was hesitant to publish any of his early findings until he had completed all his research. White, *Middle Ground*, xv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

Nevertheless, White pointed to something that Calloway has since made more explicit: the mutually transformative impact of Native-Newcomer encounters with each other's differences continued beyond the nineteenth-century rise of European dominance. Even if "many social experiments did not endure, by the end of the colonial era, Europeans, Indians, and Africans had all created new societies," and had become much more like each other – despite reconstructions of difference and denials of similarity.<sup>25</sup> Calloway elsewhere argues that histories of "cultural endurance, ... resistance, and community reconstruction in the face ... of man's inhumanity to man" exist on both sides of the Atlantic. In contexts of cultural imperialism, it is little surprise that a historian might emphasize the regeneration of cultural diversity and autonomy as "about the best we can draw from the past, real or imagined."<sup>26</sup>

Others have also taken up the theme of mutually transformative cross-cultural encounters. Saul, for example, recently argued for reconceiving Canada as a "people of Aboriginal inspiration ... a Métis civilization." His argument opens, however, with an emphatic moral judgement of Native-Newcomer cultural differences: "When I dig around in the roots of how we [Canadians] imagine ourselves, how we govern, how we live together in communities – how we treat one another when we are not being stupid – what I find is deeply Aboriginal."<sup>27</sup> This raises the question: if Canadians are Métis, what heritage are they drawing from when they *are* being stupid? Ultimately, the possibility seems left out that *métissage* may involve the creative discovery and re-articulation of deeply shared ideals – enriched by diverse experiences of the

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<sup>25</sup> Calloway, *New Worlds for All*, 194-198.

<sup>26</sup> Calloway, *White People, Indians and Highlanders: Tribal Peoples and Colonial Encounters in Scotland and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 272. For a similar view see Emma Anderson, *Betrayal of Faith: The Tragic Journey of a Colonial Native Convert* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 232-234.

<sup>27</sup> John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (Toronto: Penguin, 2008), xvi, 1.

challenges of living up to them.<sup>28</sup> Instead, emphasis is placed on the creation of something new from very different cultural sources.

Saul's argument shows that emphasis on cultural difference persists in part because it allows the Native cultures to serve as a tool of the moral critique of Newcomer cultures, at least those aspects deemed best left behind. Saul might readily point out that he overstated his case for rhetorical purposes, but this is precisely what Sheehan warned against forty years earlier. "A history of Indian-white relations," wrote Sheehan in 1969, "... can gain nothing, and it might well lose everything, by proposing a mythic natural innocence and proceeding to direct thunderbolts at those who supposedly despoiled it."<sup>29</sup>

The ongoing impacts of Euro-exceptionalist and imperialistic meta-narratives need further scrutiny. Yet repeated warnings and admissions of the problem identified by Sheehan suggest that the "culture of criticism" – to use Coates' term – also needs continued scrutiny.<sup>30</sup> A critical reading of Newcomer cultures is too often juxtaposed with a non-critical or minimally critical reading of Native cultures. Alternatively, the worst failings of Newcomer cultures are juxtaposed with the highest ideals of Indigenous cultures. No single historian need articulate this for the cumulative effect to occur. It can occur, in fact, despite many individual historians' very balanced treatment of Natives and Newcomers. No evidence needs invention. Evidence for the

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<sup>28</sup> The challenges of creating a just society are different depending on the size of the population. Saul comments that Louis-Hyppolite Lafontaine's egalitarianism was different from French *égalité* or equality: "His idea of social equality was a concept that expressed the Aboriginal idea of a permanent tension between individual and group rights. That tension or balance remains central to our approach to egalitarianism." Saul, *A Fair Country*, 133. Saul implies that since it did not come from the French, that it was of Aboriginal influence. At most, however, it was a concept that resonated with Indigenous egalitarian ideals.

<sup>29</sup> Bernard W. Sheehan, "Indian-White Relations in Early America: A Review Essay," *William and Mary Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1969): 267-268, 274.

<sup>30</sup> Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic*, 9, 19; James A. Axtell, "The Ethnohistory of Early America: A Review Essay," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (January 1978): 136; Axtell, "A Moral History of Indian-White Relations Revisited," *The History Teacher* 16, No. 2 (February 1983): 169-190; and, Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 56. Kenneth S. Coates, "Writing First Nations into Canadian History: A Review of Recent Scholarly Works," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 1 (March 2000): 112-113. Coates points out that "coercive consensus ... is ... far too strong to describe the current state of affairs, but the absence of healthy and rigorous debate about the major historiographical issues is a cause for concern." *Ibid.*, 110.

flaws of the one and the ideals of the other are readily available. The result is often a compelling exposé of real injustices suffered by Indigenous peoples juxtaposed with an equally compelling indictment of Western cultures, especially those people, institutions and ideas that are scrutinized for their involvement or entanglement in imperialism.

In the end, Euro-exceptionalist meta-narratives of superior difference are often not corrected but substituted by Euro-exceptionalist meta-narratives of morally inferior difference. These meta-narratives express themselves subtly and unintentionally even in some of the best historical scholarship: “Europeans *intruded* [moral judgement] in North America” long after “indigenous peoples had *entered and diffused* [neutral terms] into many parts of the continent.”<sup>31</sup> Simultaneously, emphasis on revolutionary or “supercessionist” European cultural change provides a means of distancing from the past or from a designated scapegoat on the ‘wrong side of history.’<sup>32</sup> Finally, some scholars, activists, and students of Native-Newcomer relations make a leap of logic. A scrutiny proportionate to power and influence is sometimes assumed to be proportionate, instead, to an allegedly inherent propensity to abuse power.

These problems and their impact on perceptions of Native-Newcomer cultural difference are evident in scholarship on the *wihtiko*. The most obvious example is found in Forbes, who describes the propensity to abuse power as the “Wétiko [*wihtiko*] disease of exploitation,

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<sup>31</sup> J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991): 4, 14. Emphasis added. The problem is with the blanket characterization of one *series* of population movements as intrusion and another *series* as mere diffusion, as if there were no conflict or intrusion involved in the second. I cite this example because Miller is usually careful to avoid binaries or uneven criticism.

<sup>32</sup> In an otherwise insightful chapter on academic freedom J.R. Miller somewhat jarringly asserts that faculty in schools of Christian theology are adverse or indifferent to the free pursuit of truth because they already “get it from God.” Miller, *Reflections on Native-Newcomer Relations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press Publishing, 2004), 77. It is an inversion of earlier dismissals of heathen Indigenous as blinded by superstition and myth, which are now superseded by efforts to create more space in the Academy for traditional Indigenous knowledge and holistic, spiritual ways of knowing. Such efforts, however, are inevitably entangled in debates about the place of religion, Christianity especially, in the public sphere. The only way to foster a greater place for Indigenous religion while restricting the place of Christianity is to argue or imply that there are radical differences between them.

imperialism and terrorism”: the tendency to dehumanize, exploit and consume the lives and livelihoods of other human persons.<sup>33</sup> Forbes succinctly and briefly describes the *wihtiko* as “a cannibal or ... an evil person or spirit who terrorizes other creatures by means of terrible evil acts, including cannibalism. *Wétikowatisewin*, an abstract noun, refers to ‘diabolical wickedness or cannibalism.’”<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Forbes describes Satan as an “anthropomorphic evil force theoretically opposed to God,” a concept that “introduces a decidedly unsavoury element into the European Christian’s world, especially since Satan is historically often closely identified with all deviations from cultural ‘normalcy.’” In this inconsistent critique, “an evil ... spirit” in Native culture is a powerful concept for identifying evil, while in Newcomer culture it is “unsavoury.” And yet, Forbes borrows the latter’s concept of “diabolical” to help define *wétikowatisewin*.<sup>35</sup> “Columbus and his fellow European exploiters,” continues Forbes, carried “*a terribly contagious psychological disease, the wétiko psychosis*. The Native people they met, in contrast, were all “sane people with a healthy state of mind.” Yet any Native person who embraces “European culture ... also enters the realm of the wétiko psychosis. (... [N]ot ... all Europeans are wétikos, but ... expansionistic European cultures have been among the major carriers of modern times.)”<sup>36</sup> This description of *wihtiko* psychosis as a disease largely confined to European culture was a reaction to depictions of the *wihtiko* as a culture-bound psychosis of Native peoples.

The political and moralistic nature of Forbes’ 1979 tract, republished in 2008, is not representative of most scholarship on the *wihtiko*. For different reasons, neither is Morrison’s

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<sup>33</sup> Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wetiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008; first published as *A World Ruled by Cannibals: The Wétiko Disease of Aggression, Violence, and Imperialism* [Davis, California: D-Q University Press, 1979]), 89 and 24. Note that Forbes did not say that Europeans were more prone because of race, but because of culture.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 75. The wording has not changed in any substantial way from the original 1979 edition.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 89. “On the whole,” he writes elsewhere, “the history of the Americas (prior to European conquest) reveals a land where most human groups followed, or tried to follow, the ‘pollen path’ ... living life in a sacred manner.” *Ibid.*, 22.

more scholarly 1979 study, republished in 2002. He found that *wihtiko* stories highlighted values that were shared by a majority of Natives and only a minority of Newcomers: Jesuit missionaries.<sup>37</sup> In her 2009 comparison of “Christian concepts ... with Cree wittikow stories,” McIntyre observed that any such comparison could be very contentious given Christian churches’ involvement in colonialism.<sup>38</sup> As Smallman astutely remarked more recently, “an imperial context shaped both the discursive and practical responses of non-Algonquians to the windigo.”<sup>39</sup> This echoes an observation made by Morrison about “a primary tension that the study of Native American tradition and history must resolve, the core relationship in non-Indian settings between abstract knowledge and manipulative power, both of which proceed in disrespectful ways.”<sup>40</sup> Both are right, but neither the “imperial context,” nor the problem of “abstract knowledge and manipulative power” are limited to “non-Indian settings” or to the past.

In ongoing debates about the relationship between knowledge and power, the French historian of ideas, Michel Foucault, has been central and influential, as shown by the sustained debate his work continues to generate after his death.<sup>41</sup> As Joseph Rouse points out, the core of Foucault’s scholarship sought

to make sense of how the observation, documentation, and classification of individuals and populations contributed to newly emerging strategies of domination, which themselves were

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<sup>37</sup> Kenneth M. Morrison, “Towards a History of Intimate Encounters: Algonkian Folklore, Jesuit Missionaries, and Kiwakwe, the Cannibal Giant,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 3, no. 4 (1979): 51-58. This was republished in 2002 as a chapter in Morrison’s *The Solidarity of Kin: Ethnohistory, Religious Studies, and the Algonkian-French Religious Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). Morrison used the *chenoo* or *kiwakwe* (*wihtiko* variants) to illustrate the ethics that informed Eastern Algonquians’ 17<sup>th</sup> century encounter with early European missionaries, explorers and settlers. As he noted in 2002, he discovered that these stories “captured indigenous insights about sociability, insights that proved to be uniform from the Mi’kmaq in Nova Scotia to the Anishnaabe (Ojibwa) of Lake Superior. Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 59.

<sup>38</sup> Erin McIntyre, “Evil and Hope in Cree Wittikow Stories” (M.Div. Thesis: University of Saskatchewan, 2009), 4, 49-50. She did not list Morrison or Forbes in her bibliography so she had other examples in mind.

<sup>39</sup> Shawn Smallman, “Spirit Beings, Mental Illness, and Murder: Fur Traders and the Windigo in Canada’s Boreal Forest, 1774 to 1935,” *Ethnohistory* 57, no. 4 (fall 2010): 571-572.

<sup>40</sup> Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 7.

<sup>41</sup> See Gary Gutting, *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

part of the complex social field within which those techniques and their applications came to constitute knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

This problem is particularly relevant to Newcomer attempts to observe, document and classify the *wihtiko* phenomenon.

One of the principal purposes of anthropology (or any other social science) notes Teicher in introducing his 1956 study of “Windigo Psychosis,” is to “achieve some understanding of the variability and stability of human nature ... to identify the laws governing human behavior.” With this objective in mind, Teicher poses the following question: “Does a morality code ... determine ethical and unethical behaviour, or is the code a justification and affirmation of conduct, providing a stamp of approval, as it were? Which has primacy – the world of concepts or the world of action?”<sup>43</sup> To rephrase Teicher’s question, which has primacy: quests for knowledge (adequate concepts) or quests for power (to act or empower and justify action)?

One could ask the same question of any inquiry into the *wihtiko*. For Foucault, explains Rouse,

conflict and struggle are always present and inescapable. To make truth-claims is to try to strengthen some epistemic alignments, and to challenge, undermine, or evade others. To criticize power is to participate in counter alignments to resist or evade its effects. The question Foucault’s critics insistently raise is, Why engage in these struggles rather than others? Why take *this* side rather than an opposing one?

Foucault, continues Rouse, “was perfectly prepared” to give reasons for his choices but refused to see such choices or reasons “as more than a situated response to a particular political and epistemic configuration.” Foucault, in his own words, was

not looking for an alternative. ... what I want to do is not the history of solutions, and that’s the reason why I don’t accept the word “alternative.” I would like to do genealogy of problems, of *problematiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is

<sup>42</sup> Joseph Rouse, “Power/Knowledge,” chapter 4 in Gutting, *Companion to Foucault*, 111.

<sup>43</sup> Morton I. Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis: A Study of a Relationship between Belief and Behavior among the Indians of Northeastern Canada,” in *Proceedings of the 1960 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society*, ed. Verne F. Ray, vi-129 (Seattle: American Ethnological Society, University of Washington, 1960), 1-2. His PhD thesis, by the same title, was completed at the University of Toronto in 1956.

dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism. I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger.<sup>44</sup>

The ethico-political choices and constraints that shape Newcomers' attempts to understand or control the *wihtiko* have changed significantly since Teicher's study of "Windigo Psychosis."

In 1982, Marano published an influential critique of Western academic interpretations of the *wihtiko* as a culture-bound psychosis, arguing that the "'windigo psychosis' had achieved such a reified status in anthropology that ... the inertia of [such] received wisdom" became something of a belief and a determinant of scholars' research behaviour.<sup>45</sup> In one of many responses to Marano's article, Brown acknowledged that the Western notion of "'windigo psychosis' has been an overused and under-analyzed concept," but "a sympathetic study, in historicist terms that eschews adversary rhetoric ... of how and why it became so is needed."<sup>46</sup> Marano, in other words, had not achieved this. Carlson attested to the continued need for such a study in 2009: "continual references to Marano's hypothesis ... are the result of incomplete literature reviews (by unintentionally ignoring or deliberately excluding Brightman's [1988] foundational article on the subject)."<sup>47</sup> In another 2009 study, Friedland, cited an observation by Brightman to argue that "a historical transformation of the *wetiko* concept ... [in Algonquian culture also] 'remains to be addressed.'"<sup>48</sup> Neither Carlson nor Friedland's studies fill these gaps because their focus was elsewhere.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cited in Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," in Gutting, *Cambridge Companion*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Lou Marano, "Windigo Psychosis: The Anatomy of an Emic-Etic Confusion [and Comments and Reply]," *Current Anthropology* 23, no. 4 (August 1982): 385-386.

<sup>46</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, in Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 399. Also commenting on this same article, M. Jean Black (Mary Black-Rogers) wrote "I would like to have seen some additional discussion of why this belief was so attractive to our ethnographic forefathers." *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>47</sup> Nathan D. Carlson, "Reviving Witiko (Windigo): An Ethnohistory of 'Cannibal Monsters' in the Athabasca District of Northern Alberta, 1878-1910," *Ethnohistory* 56, no. 3 (summer 2009): 383-384, endnote 2.

<sup>48</sup> Hadley Louise Friedland, "The Wetiko (Windigo) Legal Principles: Responding to Harmful People in Cree, Anishinabek and Saulteaux Societies - Past, Present and Future Uses, with a Focus on Contemporary Violence

There is clearly a need for a fuller history of the *wihtiko* concept in both Native and Newcomer cultures and their encounter with each other.<sup>50</sup> This history, moreover, must take account of the “ethico-political” choices and constraints that Natives and Newcomers alike have faced. Many seem doubtful, however, that such a cross-cultural history is possible, at least not without a significant “cognitive reorganization,” to use Trigger’s term.<sup>51</sup> Some, like Kuper, suggest that the best “cognitive reorganization” might be to avoid the vague concept of culture altogether, given its tendency to lump together other processes, to claim explanatory power without being first explained, and to detract from common ground “instead of encouraging us to communicate across national, ethnic and religious boundaries, and to venture beyond them.”<sup>52</sup> Some, like Trigger, suggest such a “cognitive reorganization” would consist of the displacement

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and Child Victimization Concerns” (Master’s thesis, University of Alberta, 2009), 30. She briefly reviews and critiques the arguments of three of the most significant *wihtiko* studies, by Morton I. Teicher (1956 and 1960), Marano (1981 and 1982) and Robert Brightman (1988).

<sup>49</sup> Friedland evokes the “diversity and complexity of the *wetiko* concept through time,” as well as contemporary *wihtiko* accounts, to show its “continued salience and complexity.” Her objective, however, is not to examine the evolution of the *wihtiko* concept, but to show the applicability of the “legal principles that emerge from a legal analysis of *wetiko* stories and accounts” to contemporary problems such as child victimization: “How do we protect those who we love, *from* those we love.” *Ibid.*, 30, v. Carlson’s article challenges the notion that “windigo is a discredited artifact of cultural anthropology,” but he does this, not through a review of the *wihtiko* literature, but more effectively by means of an insightful and important historical study of previously unexamined but well-documented nineteenth and early twentieth-century cases. *Ibid.*, 383.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Bishop’s 1975 article on “Northern Algonkian Cannibalism and Windigo Psychosis” attempts to bring a historical perspective to the question of the *wihtiko*, but it focuses on the ecological history and its material impact on culture and, as Preston pointed out in 1980, “fails to consider the ecology of *mind*.” In short, it is not an intellectual history of the Algonquian cultural notion. See: Charles A. Bishop, “Northern Algonkian cannibalism and Windigo psychosis,” in *Psychological Anthropology*, ed. Thomas R. Williams, 237-248, in *World Anthropology*, ed. Sol Tax (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), 237; Richard J. Preston, “The Witiko: Algonkian Knowledge and Whiteman Knowledge,” in *Manlike Monsters on Trial*, ed. Michael M. Ames and Marjorie M. Halpin, 111-131 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980), 117.

<sup>51</sup> Trigger, “Early Native,” 1212. Trigger refers to a “‘cognitive reorganization’ in which the rational component inherent in the mental processes of every human being began to play the dominant role in guiding native relations with Europeans, while religious beliefs ceased to play the important part that in many cases they had done in the early stages of the encounter. The key factor in bringing about this transformation was the Indians’ observation and rational evaluation of European behavior. This development accords with the general principle that whenever culturally transmitted beliefs are employed to guide human behavior, they are subject to rational scrutiny on the basis of the resulting performance; where those beliefs encourage counterproductive behavior, the evaluation may result in their being rejected, revised, or judged inapplicable.”

<sup>52</sup> Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists’ Account* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999), x-xi, 247.

of particular myths and religious beliefs in favour of universal reason and science.<sup>53</sup> Others warn against this very outcome.<sup>54</sup> Still others suggest that an opposing but equally significant “cognitive reorganization” is required. In her recent article on the *wihtiko*, Dillon observes, “Indigenous scholars emphasize that Western perspectives are incapable of accounting for the Windigo phenomenon.”<sup>55</sup> Western reason and science, in this view, are not so universal. Regardless, Western scholarship has been criticized for its failure to grasp the *wihtiko*. Preston commented in 1977 that “Algonquian-speaking Indians have considerable knowledge of the Wiitiko, but ... Whitemen have not yet been successful in making coherent sense, in their own terms, of this phenomenon.”<sup>56</sup> Little seems to have changed. “Despite the substantial volume of treatment on this subject,” writes Carlson in 2009, “no single hypothesis, as of yet, consistently accounts for this phenomenon within an internally coherent non-indigenous theory.”<sup>57</sup>

As discussed, Cannadine and Gregory contend that history is distorted by overemphasis on human difference across time and space. This problem has been particularly acute in studies of Native-Newcomer relations, where exaggerations of economic, social and political differences have been corrected, but emphasis on cultural difference and division persists. European encounters with the Algonquian *wihtiko* appear to be an exemplar of such difference and division. On the other hand, academic literature on the *wihtiko* also points to the need for a fuller

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<sup>53</sup> Trigger, “Early Native,” 1212.

<sup>54</sup> They express concern that attempts to fully integrate Indigenous oral traditions and ways of knowing with Western knowledge would only lead to an undermining of Indigenous cultural integrity. Toby Morantz, “Plunder or Harmony? On Merging European and Native Views of Early Contact.” In *Decentering the Renaissance: Canada and Europe in Multidisciplinary Perspective, 1500-1700*, eds. Germaine Warkentin and Carolyn Podruchny, 48-67. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001. Sylvie Vincent, “Compatibilité apparente, incompatibilité réelle des versions autochtones et des versions occidentales de l’histoire: l’exemple innu.” *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* 32, no. 2 (2002): 99-106. I have discussed this question and other issues relating to oral history and tradition at greater length in “Reconciling Amerindian and Euroamerican (Mis)Understandings of a Shared Past: Lessons for Conflict Historiography from the 1832 Hannah Bay ‘Massacre,’” *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 30, no. 2 (2010): 229-265.

<sup>55</sup> Grace L. Dillon, “Windigo,” *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014). The citation is from a final draft of the entry, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Preston, “Wiitiko” (1977), 101.

<sup>57</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 355.

history of Natives' and Newcomers' attempts to understand and control the *wihtiko*, as well as the ethico-political choices and constraints that have shaped these attempts.

It is for these reasons that Native and Newcomer encounters with the Algonquian *wihtiko* provide an ideal context in which to examine political, popular and, above all, “scholarly preoccupations with difference.”<sup>58</sup> This context is also ideal because it complements Cannadine’s quest for “humanity beyond our differences” in ways that are perhaps less susceptible to the criticisms he suspected his book might elicit: that he was too global and ambitious or insufficiently global and too Euro-centric. This project, however, is not a mere echo of Cannadine’s findings. Although it draws from his work, this thesis is not a response to Cannadine’s “attempt to open up the subject, if only to encourage (or provoke) others to do it better.”<sup>59</sup> Rather, it is indebted in its origins and findings to anthropologists and elders like Preston and Blackned.<sup>60</sup>

The first two chapters examine the nature and evolution of the *wihtiko* as revealed in Algonquian oral tradition and early Newcomer records. Emphasis is placed on the James and Hudson Bay Cree, where some of the earliest and most recent accounts can be found. The first chapter addresses the methodological and epistemological challenges of tracing Cree and Algonquian cultural history while mapping the ecological, socio-economic and cultural context of the *wihtiko* phenomenon. It also proposes a working definition of culture and analyzes the relationship between the constitutive elements of culture: experience, understanding and action.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cannadine, *Undivided Past*, 9. He was referring to a general “scholarly preoccupation,” not one limited to scholars of the *wihtiko* or Native-Newcomer relations.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> John Blackned was Preston’s principal Cree mentor in his research. See Richard J. Preston, *Cree Narrative: Expressing the Personal Meaning of Events*, 2nd edition (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002; first published in 1975), 20.

<sup>61</sup> My objective is not to engage in debates about culture, but to be clear about how I define a term that remains contested.

This is essential to the larger questions of cultural change, difference and division. It also helps explain the nature and evolution of oral tradition and the *wihtiko* itself.

Subsequent chapters focus on Newcomer encounters with the *wihtiko* phenomenon from the bush (Chapter Three) to courts of public opinion and law (Chapter Four) between 1800 and 1930, and in courts of academia before 1970 (Chapter Five) and after 1970 (Chapter Six). In these chapters, the term “court” evokes both meanings of the word: locus of activity and locus of judgment. This highlights the fact that public opinion, law and academia were all spheres of deliberation and judgment and were tremendously connected in European contexts as much as Native contexts, where the point seems more obvious. These chapters also provide additional historical evidence for the findings of Chapters One and Two. All these chapters rely on recordings and transcriptions of Algonquian oral tradition, but also a wide range of archival records, ethnographic data, and academic literature. Relevant archives were too vast to be systemically combed for evidence of the *wihtiko*. Instead, I began with known *wihtiko* stories, archival references and academic literature, and then made more targeted archival and database searches, as well as other inquiries.

“Some say that people who are cannibals go mad,” observe two Cree elders, “others that they go thoroughly wicked.”<sup>62</sup> Analysis of Algonquian oral tradition and European records suggests that the *wihtiko* concept evolved from Algonquian attempts to explain rare but extreme mental and moral failures, primarily in contexts of severe deprivation and starvation. It attained

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<sup>62</sup> Samuel Iserhoff and Willie Frenchman, “Nanusk’s Stone,” in “Told by the Indian: ns, Stories & Legends of the Cree and Ojibway Indians,” compiler unknown, DAUL (Division des Archives de l’Université Laval), Fonds Jacques Rousseau, P174/D3, folder 51 – “Mythes, histoires et légendes des indiens Cris et Ojibways.” This collection of stories was compiled by an unnamed eye doctor. It does not appear to have ever been published, but a copy of the manuscript ended up in an obscure file, archived among the papers of botanist and ethnologist, Jacques Rousseau.

mythical proportions,<sup>63</sup> but fears of *wihtiko* possession, transformation and violence remained real enough to provoke pre-emptive killings even of family members. *Wihtiko* beliefs also influenced Algonquian manifestations and understandings of more generic mental and moral failures. Others also used it to scapegoat, manipulate, or kill.

European records show that when the Newcomers were threatened by the moral and mental failures attributed to the *wihtiko*, they often took Algonquian beliefs and remedies seriously, even espousing them. For other European Newcomers, *wihtiko* behaviours, beliefs and responses raised another layer of questions about mental and moral failure. Cultural collisions became inevitable, however, when Newcomers discounted Algonquian views, the “ethico-political” choices and constraints they faced, or asserted control over them and the *wihtiko*. This was a particular problem in the early twentieth century, when the Canadian state began to prosecute Algonquians for killing alleged *wihtikowak* (plural form). It was also a problem in academia, especially when Algonquians were reduced from thoughtful co-creators of their culture to prisoners of it.

Detailed analysis of the academic literature shows, however, that some post-colonial critics have often been too quick to discount earlier Newcomer views and “ethico-political” choices and constraints they faced. They also downplay benefits gained by Algonquians from European understandings of mental illnesses once explained by the *wihtiko*. Some even suggest that an apparent lack of scholarly consensus stems from an inherent cultural inability to comprehend the *wihtiko*. At the same time, the *wihtiko* is more and more frequently used as a tool of cross-cultural post-colonial critique, which suggests that its core meaning is not quite so culture-bound after all.

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<sup>63</sup> Although the term “myth” has acquired a negative connotation of falsehood in some contexts, a meaning employed by many cited in this thesis, it is also used, by others cited in this thesis and by myself, as a synonym of sacred stories and truths.

Native and Newcomer encounters with the *wihtiko* reveal great similarities across cultural time and space. These similarities have been obscured by the complex evolution of Natives' and Newcomers' struggles for understanding and control of the *wihtiko*. The problem of the knowledge-power matrix is clearly a common human problem, but there are more important similarities that emerge from these struggles and from the *wihtiko* concept itself. This thesis shows a persistent shared conviction that reducing others to an object of power – even to secure one's survival – is a sign of moral or mental failure. Ultimately, Native and Newcomer encounters with the *wihtiko* demonstrate cultural difference, change and conflict, but also persistent cross-cultural similarities.

## CHAPTER 1

### *WIHTIKO* IN CHANGING CULTURAL CONTEXTS

#### CHALLENGE OF CULTURAL CHANGE & DIFFERENCE

Cree elder Marie Merasty, of Northern Saskatchewan, tells of a family that was starving one winter near the northwestern boundary of the Hudson Bay watershed:

The father and son had gone out on the trail but had not returned, so the three girls and their mother set out on foot to find them. They found the body of a young man on the road.

“Now we’ll be able to eat,” exclaimed the old lady. “Here’s a young bull moose!” In her hunger, she was hallucinating. The girls seized their mother, their eyes streaming with tears.

“Mother, don’t say that,” one of them urged. “That’s my brother!” As if jolted by a startling force, the mother suddenly came back to her senses. She wept for a moment and then they continued on their way, leaving the youth as they had found him. Further on, they trudged past the body of the father who had also met with disaster.

Eventually they arrived at Matseispimewinek (Stanley Mission, in present-day Northeastern Saskatchewan) where they recovered from the effects of near starvation. The title of this story gives a name to the fear that resonated in the daughter’s plea to her mother, who – for a brief moment – was “Almost a Wetiko.” This incident occurred in the mid-1800s, when Christianity and Newcomer culture were both confronting the *wihtiko* and penetrating into its world.<sup>1</sup>

The *wihtiko* is a cannibalistic being that appears in traditional narratives of Cree and other Algonquians, especially those of the central and eastern subarctic. *Wihtiko* is one term among many across Algonquian territories. Windigo, the sole variant found in the Oxford English Dictionary, is of Anishinabe origin. *Wihtiko*, *kokodjeo*, *atoosh*, and *atchen* are Cree terms.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Marie Merasty, “Almost a Wetiko,” in *The World of the Wetiko: Tales from the Woodland Cree*, edit. by Candace Savage, trans. by Bill Merasty (1974) 1.

<sup>2</sup> Howard Norman says that “windigo” is also used among the northern Swampy Cree (neighbours of the Northern Ojibwa). Norman, *Where the Chill Came From: Cree Windigo Tales and Journeys* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), 27, footnote 1. John M. Cooper, “Cree Witiko Psychosis,” *Primitive Man* 6, no. 1 (January 1933), 21; Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 2.

*Chenoo* and *kiwakwe* are of Mi'kmaw and eastern Algonquian origin. Algonquian-speaking peoples who inhabit more hospitable environments do not have a *wihtiko* tradition. Nor do non-Algonquian subarctic peoples.<sup>3</sup> This suggests the *wihtiko* evolved as a distinct cultural response to experience grounded in a particular environment.<sup>4</sup>

The next two chapters present an ethnohistorical analysis of the *wihtiko* phenomenon within an evolving Algonquian ecological, socio-economic and cultural context. Drawing examples primarily from the James Bay Cree, I explore how the *wihtiko* developed as a means of explaining particular experiences and how, once developed, it defined and gave shape to subsequent experiences and actions. This analysis prepares the ground for the comparison of Algonquian and European encounters with the *wihtiko* that forms the heart of the thesis. It shows that Natives and Newcomers alike have struggled to both understand and control a highly complex phenomenon that has changed over time, and helps explain the apparent lack of consensus in *wihtiko* scholarship. This scholarship, these struggles and the *wihtiko* itself reveal a persistent intercultural conviction that reducing others to objects of power, even for self-preservation, signals mental and moral failure.

Although it originated with the Algonquians, the *wihtiko* was terrifying enough to pique non-Algonquian interest. Marano described it in 1982 as “the most celebrated culture trait of the Northern Algonkian peoples for almost half a century.”<sup>5</sup> If it “inhabits the forests of eastern subarctic Canada ... [and] the pages of the Algonquianist literature,” as Preston remarked in

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<sup>3</sup> James G.E. Smith, “Economic Uncertainty in an ‘Original Affluent Society’: Caribou and Caribou Eater Chipewyan Adaptive Strategies,” *Arctic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (1978): 68 and 82.

<sup>4</sup> As Christopher Dawson argues, “environment conditions a culture, it does not cause it.” Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), 61.

<sup>5</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 385-386.

1977,<sup>6</sup> it also inhabits non-Algonquian popular culture.<sup>7</sup> However, popular culture's emphasis on *wihtiko*'s monstrous proportions often obscures its origins in very real human experiences.

The *wihtiko* evolved as an Algonquian response to a knot of mysteries – free will, moral responsibility, madness and evil – with which philosophers, theologians, neurobiologists, criminal psychiatrists, anthropologists and others continue to grapple.<sup>8</sup> It embodied an antithesis of mental and moral competence, if not of humanity itself.<sup>9</sup> Algonquians' views of the *wihtiko* were diverse, ambiguous and sometimes rigid, with some seeing it primarily as a means or object of control rather than understanding. In all these respects, European responses to the *wihtiko* were remarkably similar. In fact, despite changes and differences, *wihtiko* concepts and encounters reveal ideas and ideals that resonate across time and space in Native and Newcomer cultures alike.

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<sup>6</sup> Preston, "Wiitiko" (1977), 101.

<sup>7</sup> John R. Colombo's anthology cites eight pre-nineteenth century published references to, or accounts of, the *wihtiko*, though not always with the use of this term; four others from the 1800 to 1850; and thirteen more from 1851 to 1910, including four works of Euroamerican poetry or fiction, and one published missionary text. Colombo's anthology is by no means exhaustive. Colombo *Windigo: An Anthology of Fact and Fantastic Fiction*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1982. A search for "windigo" turns up an additional 11 references, not including place names, in the Early Canadiana Online database, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://eco.canadiana.ca>. Windigo is listed in Sylva Clapin's *Dictionnaire canadien-français ou Lexique-glossaire des mots, expressions et locutions ne se trouvant pas dans les dictionnaires courants et dont l'usage appartient surtout aux Canadiens-français* (Montreal: C. Beauchemin, [1894?]), 337: "Wendigo, Windigo, s.m., Géant fabuleux, parmi les sauvages." A July 21, 1901 article by the Toronto *Globe* (p. 10), entitled "The Windigo's Home" states that "Neither the Indian nor the habitant cares particularly to visit Trembling Mountain [Mont Tremblant], for it is of evil repute. ... This according to folk-lore, is the true home, perhaps the last abiding place, of the 'Windigo'." See also: Carolyn Podruchny, "Werewolves and Windigos: Narratives of Cannibal Monsters in French-Canadian Voyageur Oral Tradition," *Ethnohistory* 51, no. 4 (fall 2004); Dillon, "Windigo"; Teicher, "Windigo Psychosis" (1960), 4.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example: Juan José Sanguinetti, Ariberto Acerbi, and José Angel Lombo, eds., *Moral Behavior and Free Will: A Neurobiological and Philosophical Approach* (Morolo, Italy: If Press, 2011); Chris Richardson, "Monster or Clown: Bad or Crazy: Who can tell the difference?" in *Creating Humanity, Discovering Monstrosity: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. by Elizabeth Nelson, Jillian Burcar and Hannah Priest (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), 181-191.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth M. Morrison used the *chenoo* or *kiwakwe* (*wihtiko* variants) to illustrate the ethics that informed Eastern Algonquians' 17<sup>th</sup> century encounter with early European missionaries, explorers and settlers. As he noted in 2002, he discovered that these stories "captured indigenous insights about sociability, insights that proved to be uniform from the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia to the Anishnaabe (Ojibwa) of Lake Superior. Morrison, *The Solidarity of Kin: Ethnohistory, Religious Studies, and the Algonkian-French Religious Encounter* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 59.

Demonstrating that intercultural resonance is not merely a result of intercultural contact and change, however, is a difficult task, especially in the context of Algonquian cultural history. This first chapter illustrates this difficulty while mapping the changing context in which the *wihtiko* developed. It also clarifies a working model of culture and cultural change. The purpose is not to engage in debates about the concept of culture, but to clarify a contested concept that Kuper argues is too often used to explain without first being explained.<sup>10</sup> Defining culture is crucial not only to the core question of cultural change and difference, but also to the nature of the *wihtiko* itself.

The earliest, richest and most recent *wihtiko* narratives and evidence are found among the James Bay Cree. They also have one of the longest historically documented and *balanced* relationships with the subarctic environment, where the *wihtiko* originated, and with Europeans. Finally, their central position in a web of subarctic Algonquian relationships provides for representative case studies or examples.

For the James Bay Cree, contact with Europeans began after the French entered the Laurentian watershed in the 16th century and intensified with French and English exploration of Hudson and James Bay. The first Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) outpost was established in James Bay in 1668. It was not long before HBC-Cree relations extended beyond trade to social and conjugal relations, including mutual recourse in times of hardship and famine. To a lesser extent, the same was true for early missionaries and officials who trickled in after 1840. More general European immigration remained limited to the watershed's southern interior well into the mid-1900s, and still remains limited.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, James Bay Cree did not escape the

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<sup>10</sup> Kuper, *Culture*, x-xi.

<sup>11</sup> See Douglas Francis and Toby Morantz, *Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay, 1600-1870* (McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston), 1985; Harvey Feit, "Dreaming of Animals: The Waswanipi Cree Shaking Tent Ceremony in Relation to Environment, Hunting and Missionization,"

declining political, economic and social interdependence that followed European expansion across North America, the new imperialism of the long nineteenth-century and what Newhouse calls “the long assault.”<sup>12</sup>

A growing power imbalance diminished the necessity of Native-Newcomer interculturality and fostered what Calloway refers to as mutual “reconstructions of difference.”<sup>13</sup> The twentieth-century resurgence of Native peoples has fostered renewed emphasis on common ground, but metanarratives of cultural difference persist, often to invert the judgments of mental and moral competence once associated with such metanarratives. Overemphasizing these dominant trends, however, hides deep interculturalities that persisted in places like James Bay.

Willie Frenchman, a Cree elder, illustrates this interculturality with a narrative of a *wihtiko* incident that transpired in Moose Factory, probably not long before his birth there in 1882.<sup>14</sup> At the time, Moose Factory was the most important HBC post in James Bay and headquarters of the Anglican Diocese of Moosonee. To this day, on the southern mainland shore, lies a large red rock, known as “Nanusk’s Stone,” where a *wihtiko*’s heart is said to be buried. This is the title of Frenchman’s narrative. Merged with a version given by Samuel Iserhoff, a

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in *Circumpolar Religion and Ecology: An Anthropology of the North*, eds. Takashi Irimoto and Takako Yamada, 289-316 (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1994): 305; Toby Morantz, *The White Man’s Gonna Getcha: The Colonial Challenge to the Crees in Quebec* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 75; Hans Carlson, *Home is the Hunter: The James Bay Cree and Their Land* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 105-106. Soeur Paul-Émile, s.g.c., *Amiskwaski - La terre du castor. La Baie James. Trois cents ans d’histoire militaire, économique, missionnaire* (Ottawa: Éditions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1952), 93, 179; John S. Long “‘Shaganash’: early protestant missionaries and the adoption of Christianity by the western James Bay Cree, 1840-1892” (PhD thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, 1986); John J. Honigmann, “Attawapiskat—Blend of traditions,” *Anthropologica*, no. 6 (1958): 57-67; Richard J. Preston, “Catholicism at Attawapiskat: A Case of Culture Change,” *Papers of the 18th Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa, Carleton University, 1987), 271-287.

<sup>12</sup> David Newhouse, personal communication, June 30, 2015. This did not have the same degree of impact everywhere at the same time.

<sup>13</sup> Calloway, *New Worlds for All*, 194-198.

<sup>14</sup> William Frenchman, attestation paper, LAC, RG 150, Ministry of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3310 – 49. Frenchman passed away in June 1971 in Moose Factory. C. Douglas Ellis, ed. *Atalohkana nesta tipachimowina: Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1995), p. xvii.

Cree Anglican clergyman,<sup>15</sup> it was recorded in Moose Factory, most likely between 1956 and 1966.<sup>16</sup>

This is a true story which happened about seventy years ago. It has happened before, that when men are hungry they turn cannibals, and this was the case with people who got lost in the bush. Some say that people who are cannibals go mad, others that they go thoroughly wicked.

A little before this time a family of Indians from Moose Factory disappeared in the bush. Then a series of extraordinary events occurred. Firstly on the bank of the river, to the west<sup>17</sup> of Moose Factory, there is a large stone and on this someone hung furs. The Hudson Bay Company heard of these furs, which increased from day to day, so they took them and laid stores of sugar, tea, etc., on the stone in return payment. These would disappear and more furs would appear, and the rumour spread that these were left by a person so wicked that he daren't meet his fellow men. The people remembered the family who had disappeared, and they reckoned that one had eaten the others, and was afraid to be seen by men as he knew that the penalty was death. Or perhaps he had become mad. He could not live without certain foods, and he trapped his animals and laid the furs on the stone hoping for an exchange of goods.

... Then a nasty incident occurred. [A woman who was fishing up the river narrowly escaped a strange man's attempt on her life.] She arrived back at Moose Factory in a state of terror; then the people<sup>18</sup> began to talk, they remembered the stories of those who had never returned from solitary hunts, and the rumour ran round the village that there was a cannibal abroad. The children were kept from straying on the river bank, and the wives implored their men not to hunt alone in this region. ... [The] Hudson Bay Manager ... took a large canoe in which four men with rifles crouched in the bottom, whilst he sat openly with an Indian paddling the canoe. ... he had told the men that he would try and reason with this man; if he was mad they must restrain him, but if really bad and dangerous they must shoot him. When they came

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<sup>15</sup> Rev. Canon Samuel Iserhoff was born in Waswanipi, Quebec in 1885. His parents both spoke English and Cree. He worked for the Hudson's Bay Company most of his life, and met his wife Sarah (born in Waskaganish in 1895) while working at Eastmain. They moved from there to Neawsqwayskow, Nemaska, Fort George and back to Eastmain, and then to Old Factory. It was during their time here, in the early 1950s, that he was made a Canon in the Anglican Church. In 1956, however, they moved to Moose Factory on account of his declining health, so he could follow medical advice that he "stay near a hospital." He passed away in 1966. Story told by Sarah Iserhoff, recorded by Lillian Small, compiler, *Indian Stories from James Bay* (Cobalt and Moose Factory, Ontario: Highway Bookshop and Angus Mowat Library, 1972), 14-15. See also J.W. Anderson, *Fur Trader's Story* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1961), 118-122.

<sup>16</sup> Frenchman and Iserhoff, "The Nanusk Stone," DAUL, Fonds Jacques Rousseau, P174/D3, folder 51. As the previous footnote points out, 1956 to 1966 was the period that both Iserhoff and Frenchman were in Moose Factory. The Moose Factory Indian Hospital was established in 1949. See *Our Hospital: A History of Hope and Healing* (Moose Factory, Ontario: Weeneebayko General Hospital, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> The Moose River flows northeast into the southwest point of James Bay. The reference to 'west' does not here mean the northwest side of the river, but upriver (or southwest). Relative to Moose Factory, Nanask's stone is on the southeastern bank of the river, directly south of the old HBC post on Moose Factory Island. For the first 18 years of my life, I lived in Moose Factory, directly across the river from this stone, which I heard many times referred to as Nanusk's Stone.

<sup>18</sup> At this time, most of Moose Factory's resident population was of mixed European and Cree descent. See Carol Judd, "Mixed Bloods of Moose Factory, 1730-1981: A Socio-Economic Study," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 6, no. 2 (1982): 65-88.

near the shore and the stone, he stood up in the canoe holding a bag of sand in each hand shouting, “Nanusk (which was the name of the lost family) here is your shot and powder, come and get them.” After he had shouted several times ... he waited, then cautiously, stepping round the tree trunk, the unkempt figure of a ragged, gaunt man appeared. His matted hair hung on his shoulders, he had a long straggly grey beard, his eyes were bloodshot and protruding, foam flecked the edges of his mouth, and the only clothes he had were the remains of ragged buckskin trousers. He stepped forward cautiously, stopped and then said, “There are men hiding in the boat, I will come no further.”

“Come on,” said the Hudson Bay Manager, and stepped on shore holding up the bags. The man’s eyes glistened with desire, and he wet his lips with his tongue, but slowly, cautiously with his eyes on the boat, he began to step back into the bush. The Hudson Bay Manager gave a signal to the men waiting in the boat, who also had a couple of dogs with them, and they sprang ashore. Then, this is what Willy told me, they shot him many times in the head and body, but he ran on pressing bits of leaves into his wounds. The dogs ran after, clawing bits out of him, but still he ran on, although he should have been dead many times over. Finally he fell to the ground, and they finished him off with their knives, but he took a long time to die. By now they were convinced he was really wicked, and therefore he must not be buried, otherwise he would come to life again. So they burnt him, and even then his heart would not burn, and, “Do you know why?” said Willy, “It was because it was surrounded by ice.”

And there the Nanusk stone stands to this day, and the people are afraid to go near it for they buried Nanusk’s evil heart near the stone.<sup>19</sup>

Another account of this event, told by Cree elder and devout Anglican Nellie Faries, confirms what was lost in the translation of this one: Nanusk had “gone” *wihtiko*.<sup>20</sup>

According to Iserhoff and Frenchman, to go *wihtiko* is to “go mad” or “go thoroughly wicked.” This story may reflect the influence of European concepts of madness, but it also shows that cultural transformation did not start with religious or secular missions of conversion. Nor was it limited to the Cree. Early contact, in fact, likely impacted Native Crees less than European Newcomers, who were immersed in a new environment and a culture intimately related to it. Some Newcomers visited only on annual supply-ships or worked but a few years in the fur trade.

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<sup>19</sup> Frenchman and Iserhoff, “The Nanusk Stone,” DAUL, Fonds Jacques Rousseau, P174/D3, folder 51. The bracketed comments are mine. The parenthetical comments are the anonymous author’s.

<sup>20</sup> Nellie Faries, a former neighbour and friend, was a Cree elder and Moose Cree First Nation’s first woman chief (she was an elected councillor who stepped in as interim chief). She told me a much shorter but consistent version of this same story, in which she used the term *wihtiko*. In other stories of cannibalism, told to C. Douglas Ellis, Willie Frenchman used the Cree term *wihtiko*. Frenchman, in Ellis, ed. *Atalohkana*, xvii, 324-335.

Others stayed longer or for life, returning home rarely, if at all. Through intermarriage with Cree families, some ceased to be Newcomers as they were integrated into Cree society.

While Newcomers were transformed by immersion in Cree networks, they also influenced the Cree and what it meant to be Cree. Some children of ‘mixed’ marriages were integrated into Euroamerican social networks. Some, like Harold Utgardeen, an HBC employee of Norwegian, English and Cree ancestry, were co-creative participants in Cree cultural tradition.<sup>21</sup> Many others moved back and forth along these interconnected networks, adopting and adapting cultural understandings and modes of action and experience. This interculturality included a dialogue of explicitly articulated understandings as well as a mutual influence based on cooperation and shared experience. To expect otherwise, says Dawson, “is irreconcilable with the whole course of human history, which is nothing but a vast system of intercultural relations.”<sup>22</sup>

Not all cultural commonalities, however, stem from cultural contact and diffusion. Commenting on the “belief in and fear of Windagoos or man-eaters” in his 1892 collection of *Stories from Indian Wigwams and Northern Camp-Fires*, Methodist missionary Egerton Ryerson Young pointed out that many Cree and Ojibwa had “a most remarkable tradition of a great deluge, in which the world was overwhelmed, and the whole human race perished except one family who escaped either in a big canoe or on a great raft.” Young found the mutually validating resonances between these allegedly independent traditions instructive, but did not see resonance between other Algonquian and Judeo-Christian traditions: “Among the many errors

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<sup>21</sup> Utgardeen, who was fluent in Cree, had moved to Whapmagoostui (Great Whale River) from Moose Factory, his birthplace. John Kawapit, a Whapmagoostui elder recounted a story of first contact to anthropologist Pierre Trudel, a story he had heard from Utgardeen. Trudel, “On découvre toujours l’Amérique : l’arrivée de Européens selon les récits cris recueillis à Whapmagoostui.” *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* 22, no. 2-3 (1994), 64.

<sup>22</sup> Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, 42.

and superstitions into which they have fallen is the belief in ... windagoos ... half satanic and half human, whom they represent as being of great size and dwelling in the dark, dreary forests.”<sup>23</sup> Young might not have so readily characterized the “windagoo” belief as mere “error and superstition” had he been immersed in Cree and Anishinabe experience and traditions to the same extent as his son, Eddie. “To a remarkable extent,” writes Brown, “Eddie was brought up Cree (and Ojibwe) under his parents’ noses, so to speak.”<sup>24</sup>

The multi-directional conversion and assimilation of people, stories, ideas and ideals makes it very difficult to distinguish between pre-contact similarities and those resulting from contact. “The Indian Deluge” story recorded at Waskaganish in the late 1800s is particularly instructive.<sup>25</sup> According to this account, a great deluge resulted after a man killed too many fish – a transgression Bird describes as “sinning against animals” or *maahchihew*.<sup>26</sup> A man and woman took refuge on a raft with pairs of every species of animal-person. Eventually, some of these animal-persons dove under water, recovered a clump of earth and used it to reconstitute the land.

Is this a Cree story that has assimilated Biblical and other themes, a Biblical story reframed in Cree terms, or a distinct tradition that merely resembles another? The answer is by no means evident, especially in light of Skinner’s impression – following his inaugural fieldwork in James Bay in 1908-09 – that the Cree culture was “so thickly veneered ... with Christianity

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<sup>23</sup> Egerton Ryerson Young, *Stories from Indian Wigwams and Northern Camp-Fires* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 83-84. This chapter section was described in the table of contents as “Marvelous similarity between many Indian and ancient Jewish customs”, and the next one as “Belief in and fear of Windagoos or man-eaters.” *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, “Growing up Algonquian: A Missionary’s Son in Cree-Ojibwe Country, 1869-1876,” *Papers of the Thirty-Ninth Algonquian Conference*, ed. Karl S. Hele and Regna Darnell, 72-93 (London: University of Western Ontario, 2008), 75-76.

<sup>25</sup> LAC, MG 29, B 15 (Robert Bell Fonds), folder 54, file 12, “Indians. Legends - Charles H.M. Gordon,” “The Indian Deluge,” 1.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Bird, *The Spirit Lives in the Mind: Omushkego Stories, Lives, and Dreams*, compiled and edited by Susan Elaine Gray (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 76.

that it ... [was] well nigh impossible to obtain any information in regard to their old beliefs.”<sup>27</sup> Morrison argues that understanding of Native American traditions will elude Euroamericans and Europeans until they understand their own fundamental commitments to Judeo-Christian and secular ideas and ideals.<sup>28</sup> Such understanding will also remain elusive without an assessment of Native American conversations with these same ideas and ideals. Fur trade records seldom speak of Cree religion or culture, especially from a Cree perspective. Most recordings of Cree oral tradition and ethnographic data date from the late 1800s, when Cree conversations with European culture were already well underway. Similar challenges exist for other Algonquian histories. Discerning what is of Algonquian origin in their *wihtiko* concepts and cultural contexts requires a fuller intellectual history of their conversations with religious and secular Western cultures. While relevant to the larger question of cultural difference and change, a full history is beyond the scope of a study focused on the example of the *wihtiko*. On the other hand, this fuller history, with all its methodological challenges, is precisely where the development of the Algonquian *wihtiko* phenomenon must be situated and understood.

Morantz writes that Trigger perceived among Native peoples a significant cultural change or “cognitive reorganization ... whereby traditional (religious) beliefs give way to a more rationalistic perspective” in their relations with European Newcomers.<sup>29</sup> “In the case of James Bay,” continues Morantz, early contact “must have led to some form of cognitive reorganization,

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<sup>27</sup> Alanson Skinner, *Notes on the eastern Cree and northern Sauleaux*, Anthropological papers of the American Museum of Natural History Vol. IX, part I (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1911), 59. According to Preston, Skinner had little academic training (his James Bay fieldwork was completed before he turned 25), and, in 1911, Skinner himself commented that due to “the roughness of the country [and climate] ... the scarcity of food, the lack of good interpreters, and other causes there is still much to be desired in the fullness and condition of these papers.” Cited in Richard Preston, “A survey of ethnographic approaches to Eastern Cree-Montagnais-Naskapi,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology/Revue canadienne de sociologie et d’anthropologie* 12, no. 3 (1975): 267-268.

<sup>28</sup> Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 6.

<sup>29</sup> Toby Morantz, “In the Land of the Lions: The Ethnohistory of Bruce G. Trigger,” chapter in *The Archaeology of Bruce Trigger: Theoretical Empiricism*, ed. Ronald Williamson and Michael S. Bisson, 142-173 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 156. Morantz was citing Trigger, “Early Native,” 1212.

although I am unable to identify it.”<sup>30</sup> A more “rationalistic” reframing of their pre-Christian religious culture is a “cognitive reorganization” that can be readily identified in Cree and other Algonquian cultures, including their explanations of the *wihtiko*.<sup>31</sup>

More “rationalistic,” however, does not necessarily mean more “rational.” One must be careful to avoid a problematic dichotomy between religion and reason. As Preston and others argue, understanding the evolution of Cree cultural history requires broadening the meaning of “spirit” and suspending “secular humanist disbelief.”<sup>32</sup> This is also crucial for understanding the earliest substantial post-contact “cognitive reorganization” identified by Morantz and other scholars of Cree cultural history: the integration of Christianity.<sup>33</sup>

The contested nature of this “integration” weighs heavily on attempts to contextualize the *wihtiko* and discern its relevance to the larger question of Native-Newcomer cultural change and difference. Carlson argues that the *wihtiko* can only be understood if “analyzed *from within* northern Algonquian cosmologies.” Yet these cosmologies had incorporated elements of

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<sup>30</sup> Morantz, “In the Land of the Lions,” 156.

<sup>31</sup> Adrian Tanner cautions against assuming that the “modern Cree accept at face value the existence” of what he calls a “second” or “cultural” level of reality, where “animals and their actions are ‘reinterpreted’ in more or less anthropomorphic terms ... as if they had social relationships between themselves, and between them and anthropomorphized natural forces, and ... with the hunters.” According to Tanner, this second level of reality is anchored and defined in Cree myths, which reveal the way things were in a distant past. Tanner, *Bringing Home Animals: Religious Ideology and Mode of Production of the Mistassini Cree Hunters*. (Saint John's: Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979), 7 & 137-138. Speaking of this mythical past, Louis Bird says: “these animals speak as humans, think like humans, experience life as humans and plan as humans.” Bird, *Telling Our Stories: Omushkego Legends & Histories from Hudson Bay*, edited by Jennifer S.H. Brown et al. (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005), 78.

<sup>32</sup> Richard J. Preston, “James Bay Cree Syncretism: Persistence and Replacement,” *Papers of the 19th Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan, 147-155 (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1989), 148. See also: A.I. Hallowell, “Psychic Stresses and Culture Patterns,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 92, no. 6 (May 1936): 1295; Colin Scott, “Spirit and Practical Knowledge in the Person of the Bear among Wemindji Cree Hunters,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 71, no. 1 (2006): 52; Colin Scott, “Science for the West, Myth for the Rest? The Case of James Bay Cree Knowledge Construction,” chapter 3 in *Naked Science: Anthropological Inquiries into Boundaries, Power and Knowledge*, ed. Laura Nader, 69-86 (London: Routledge, 1996), 71.

<sup>33</sup> Morantz, *White Man's*, 72 & 96.

Christian belief and practice by the early twentieth century. According to Carlson, in fact, the *wihtiko* disappeared largely *because* of the adherence to Christian ideas and ideals.<sup>34</sup>

In an article on the eastern James Bay Cree *Manitu*, Long, Oberholtzer and Preston argue that missionaries mistranslated the *wihtiko* or *atoosh* concept, using it interchangeably with *matchii-manitu* to refer to the biblical concept of Satan. They echo Forbes problematic view, however, in their assertion that “Atush ... refers to the terrifying cannibal spirit *whose characteristics have nothing in common with biblical Lucifer or Satan.*”<sup>35</sup> This assertion of absolute cultural difference seems to flow from a lament that “missionaries discredited a complex religious world which was once central to the Crees and provided them with identity and meaning.”<sup>36</sup> “It is the inner aspect of a culture which constitutes its most distinctive forms,” writes Dawson, and the “unity of a culture” flows “above all, from a community of thought.”<sup>37</sup> Ratzinger concurs, adding that it is difficult to “see how a culture that is interwoven with religion, that lives in it and intertwines with it, could be transplanted into a different religion, so to speak, without both being destroyed in the process.”<sup>38</sup>

Even critics of missions of conversion, however, acknowledge that there is more at play. “However much we non-Crees may objectively regret the loss of indigenous spirituality,” Long, Oberholtzer and Preston point out, “contemporary Crees seem far less troubled by this, and more

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<sup>34</sup> Emphasis added. Carlson, “Reviving Wetiko,” 355 (citation) & 381.

<sup>35</sup> Emphasis added. John S. Long, Cath Oberholtzer & Richard J. Preston, “Manitu Concepts of the Eastern James Bay Cree,” in “Essays in Tribute to Regina Flannery,” ed. Toby Morantz, in *Papers of the 37<sup>th</sup> Algonquian Conference*, ed. by H.C. Wolfart, 451-92 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 471. This appears to reflect less input from Preston who points out in a paper on the *wihtiko* that the “Witiko is more certainly terrifying than he is a known figure with specifiable characteristics; in this regard he is roughly similar to our notion of the Christian Devil (a common English gloss for Witigo).” Preston, “Ethnographic Reconstruction of Witigo,” in *Papers of the Ninth Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Carleton University, Ottawa, 1978): 63-64.

<sup>36</sup> Long et al., “Manitu Concepts,” 452-453.

<sup>37</sup> Dawson, *Progress and Religion*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, translated by Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004; first published in 2003 as *Glaube—Wahrheit—Toleranz: Das Christentum und die Weltreligionem* [Verlag Herder, Freiburg im Breisgau]), 59.

attuned to issues of continuity and contemporary relevance.”<sup>39</sup> In a separate article, Preston observes that the “Christian vision was incorporated with great seriousness by most of the James Bay Crees.”<sup>40</sup> Long, too, points out elsewhere that “the church was both a positive and a destructive influence on the western James Bay Cree,” and that “Christianity has now become a James Bay Cree tradition.”<sup>41</sup> Their views are much closer to those of Morantz, Hans Carlson, Honigmann and Feit. For Carlson, “something more sophisticated than an argument about cultural hegemony is required” to explain why the Cree “have internalized Christianity” to the point that it “has become,” in Morantz’ words, “the bedrock of [James Bay] Cree society today.”<sup>42</sup>

“Interculturality,” observes Ratzinger, only makes sense if the relationship between cultures “is not one of absolute foreignness, if there is, rather, a certain inner openness, each to the other, within them.”<sup>43</sup> This point of view “assumes the potential universality of any culture,”<sup>44</sup> echoing elder Raphael Wabano’s recommendation, in the 1970s, that intercultural dialogue could help address his community’s challenges.<sup>45</sup> Like Wabano, most Cree do not see cultural continuity as absence of change, but adaptation with a focus on contemporary or perennial relevance. Some Cree, however, look to pre-contact culture to find contemporary relevance or they are less convinced that their ancestors were completely free in their conversation with Christianity. Bird argues, for example, that they “did not have a chance to

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<sup>39</sup> Long et al., “Manitu Concepts,” 484.

<sup>40</sup> Preston, “Syncretism,” 154.

<sup>41</sup> Long, “Shaganash,” 225-226; John S. Long, “Manitu, Power, Books and Wiihtikow: Some Factors in the Adoption of Christianity by Nineteenth-Century Western James Bay Cree,” *Native Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1987): 22.

<sup>42</sup> Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 100; Morantz, *White Man’s Gonna Getcha*, 96; Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 306. They have focused on the eastern James Bay Cree, but John Honigmann expressed a similar viewpoint with regard to the western James Bay Cree. Honigmann, “Attawapiskat,” 57-67.

<sup>43</sup> Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 59. In this particular discussion he uses the term “inculturation,” but goes on to say that this is a flawed term, and we should use the term “interculturality.” *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Bay Cree Society, “Wetamakwin: ‘To Inform.’” (Moose Factory, Ontario: submission to the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment, April 1979), 18-19.

study Christianity ... they just forced our forefathers to convert,” even if he acknowledges elsewhere that there was more to Christianity and Christian mission than an exercise of hegemony.<sup>46</sup> Many recognize that post-contact Cree culture is also shaped by “rejections rather than refutations” of pre-contact traditions – to borrow Gregory’s terms again – and “selective appropriations.”<sup>47</sup> This is why, as Morantz points out, “conversion is – even today, with live informants – an elusive and difficult subject” for the historian.<sup>48</sup>

Discerning the Cree and Algonquian cultural contexts in which the *wihtiko* concept evolved is complicated by binary readings of the relationship between religion and reason and by the contentious and elusive nature of both secular and religious conversion. Overemphasizing controversial external factors of cultural change, however, downplays the central role of internal factors. As Feit observes, most studies of sub-arctic Algonquian religious cultures emphasize either the “transformation or abandonment of ‘traditional’ practices,” induced by religious or secular missions of conversion, or historical continuities maintained through syncretic adaptation or cultural persistence beneath a façade of acculturation. These perspectives often fail to consider that constant change is inherent to any culture and its environment.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, “indigenous responses to ecological and social changes play a more important role than do the intentions of outsiders.”<sup>50</sup>

Discerning the internal process of change is difficult in an oral culture, unless the oral tradition is recorded periodically over time. Because human memory is limited, narratives with contemporary relevance are retained rather than those that track historical change. Historical narratives (*tipachimowina* in Cree) give understanding to particular experiences; whereas

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<sup>46</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 4-5 and 62.

<sup>47</sup> Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> Morantz, “In the Land of the Lions,” 147. See also Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 289.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

literary, religious or mythic narratives (*atalohkana* in Cree) give experience to particular understandings. There is a continuum between them. Few historical narratives retain their full relevance over multiple generations; most are forgotten or integrated into literary or mythic narratives that more succinctly convey essential understandings. Non-Cree historical sources, moreover, emphasize non-Cree influences and perspectives, making internal processes of change difficult to distinguish from external ones, especially for newcomers to a particular oral culture.<sup>51</sup>

Overemphasizing external factors of change downplays Native agency, including the malevolent form that Forbes attributes to the *wihtiko* disease. Many James Bay Cree might appreciate Forbes' critique of imperialism (religious or secular) as a form of *wihtiko* cannibalism, but they might also debate his claim that adopting Christianity or Western culture can increase susceptibility to the disease.<sup>52</sup> Brown gives an example of a syncretic Indigenous movement from the 1840s that blended Cree religion and Christianity, and ended with the execution of its leader, deemed a *wihtiko*, but this example does not support Forbes' more general conclusion about the impact of Western culture and Christianity.<sup>53</sup> More recently, in a 2007 study of "the tragic journey of a colonial Native convert," Anderson speculatively suggests or implies that Innu who became Christian may have summoned the "grisly specter of the windigo," by their protracted Lenten fasting and "anti-social" abstention from certain traditional feasts.<sup>54</sup>

The oral tradition and ethnographic evidence, however, suggests that Christianity was far more likely to be seen as a source of protection or rehabilitation with regard to the *wihtiko*. Morrison, Cuthand, Vincent, Armitage and Smith report how Christian missionaries and

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<sup>51</sup> For a fuller assessment of these methodological challenges, see Chabot, "Reconciling."

<sup>52</sup> Jack D. Forbes, *Columbus and other Cannibals*, 89 & 24. He explains that "a Christianized Indian tends also to be a Europeanized Indian and as he enters the door of European culture, he also enters the realm of the *wétiko* psychosis."

<sup>53</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, "The Wasitay Religion: Prophecy, Oral Literacy, and Belief on Hudson Bay," Chapter 4 in *Reassessing Revitalization Movements: Perspectives from North America and the Pacific Islands*, ed. by Michael Eugene Harkin, 104-123 (University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Anderson, *Betrayal of Faith*, 185.

Christianity were looked to as a means of combatting the threat of the *wihtiko*.<sup>55</sup> Although he does not cite the *wihtiko*, Honigmann echoes this in his observation that the Attawapiskat Cree believed that “the coming of the Church drove the ‘devil’ from the area, broke the power of sorcerers, and promoted psychological security.” “Devil” was evidently synonymous with the *wihtiko* for the Cree, since it existed before the arrival of the Church.<sup>56</sup> Long is more specific; referring to the *wihtiko*, he argues that Christianity was attractive, in part, because it “promised power over this threat.”<sup>57</sup>

Bird, while critical of missionaries for discounting Cree spirituality, makes it clear that the *wihtiko* disease pre-existed European contact, and remained a problem afterwards.<sup>58</sup> This is well illustrated by the story of Grand Sophia, Bird’s own grandmother. She was nearly killed by a shaman who claimed that her discrete Christian prayers (said in the privacy of her own tent) interfered with his conjuring. Referring to this shaman, Bird concludes the story with a striking interpretation that is not merely a report of the shaman’s view: “He has a right to think that way

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<sup>55</sup> Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 68-71. He cites evidence from 1680 as well as Mi’kmaq oral tradition, recorded in the mid-1800s. Stan Cuthand, “On Nelson’s Text,” in Jennifer S.H. Brown and Robert A. Brightman, eds., *The Orders of the Dreamed”: George Nelson on Cree and Northern Ojibwa Religion and Myth, 1823* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 192-193. Sylvie Vincent, “La présence des gens du large dans la version montagnaise de l’histoire,” *Anthropologie et Sociétés* 15, no. 1 (1991): 135-136. She cites two stories told of a priest who sent away an *atshen*, but was ineffective, in contrast to the shaking tent, in securing food. Peter Armitage, “Religious Ideology Among the Innu of Eastern Quebec and Labrador,” *Religiologiques* 6 (1992): 63-110. Armitage draws on Vincent’s article to suggest that there was both dualism and syncretism at play. On one hand, the “role of missionaries in ridding the earth of cannibal monsters is ... [an] example of syncretism.” On the other hand, it appears that for a period, some Innu “assigned responsibility for protecting them against exterior forces (e.g. cannibal monsters) to Christianity and missionaries whereas responsibility for satisfying their needs for wild game ... [was] assigned to the non-Christian religion.” *Ibid.*, 66-67. Armitage touches on the theme of the *Atshen* (*wihtiko*) elsewhere in this article, but only very briefly. Vecsey notes that: “Although not central to the host of Ojibwa manitos and possibly not of precontact origin, the Windigo played an influential role in traditional Ojibwa life and thought.” It was one of the “most powerful and important manitos ... [that] directly influenced hunting success” and ultimately survival. Vecsey also addresses the influence of Christianity on Windigo and other Anishinabe beliefs. Christopher Vecsey, *Traditional Ojibwa Religion and Its Historical Changes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983), 73, 77-78, 82, 104, 106. James G.E. Smith, “Notes on Witiko,” in *Papers of the Seventh Algonquian Conference, 1975*, ed. William Cowan, 18-38 (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1976), 23.

<sup>56</sup> John J. Honigmann, “Interpersonal Relations and Ideology in a Northern Canadian Community,” *Social Forces* 35, no. 4 (May 1957): 367.

<sup>57</sup> Long, “Manitu,” 15.

<sup>58</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 61.

according to our culture. Grand Sophia was the one to intrude in his domain according to him – he has a right to kill her because it interfered with his spiritual practice and belief.” This interpretation, however, contradicts what the shaman’s own wife thought. She was not Christian, but warned Grand Sophia’s husband to leave with his family: “My husband to kill a person and also to force you to take my daughter is not right.” It also contradicts Bird’s own assessment of such abuse of power. Ultimately, behind an apparent quest for autonomy, the shaman was hiding, rather poorly in this case, a quest for power. He simply wanted to eliminate Sophia as part of a plan to gain a good hunter as a son-in-law.<sup>59</sup> This story and its interpretations demonstrate how quests for understanding can become deeply entangled in struggles for control.

In her comparison of “Evil and Hope in Cree Wittikow Stories” with “Christian concepts,” McIntyre concludes that “evil is universal; hopeful responses to it are contextual,” and that “a multi-faith dialogue around [such] topics ... is required.”<sup>60</sup> The evidence above confirms that Cree and Christian cultures are already deep in dialogue. In more ways than one, the applicability of the *wihtiko* to the problem of evil in Native and Newcomer cultures confirms its potential universality, but also evokes, once again, the obstacles to distinguishing pre-contact commonalities from post-contact confluences.

Like the raft in the “Indian Deluge,” historical assessments of pre- and early post-contact Algonquian cultural difference and change drift on waters of unknown depth. Yet some ground for historical assessment can be reconstituted by probing the dark nature of the only being on the raft that did not assist the others and had no mate: the *wihtiko*. Although allowed onto the raft,

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<sup>59</sup> Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 209-224. Bird explains elsewhere that anyone who “used his shamanic power aggressively ... to subdue his fellow man” was “very bad” and such a person was “feared, and even despised.” Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 116.

<sup>60</sup> McIntyre, “Evil and Hope,” 4, 49-50.

the *wihtiko* was made to “sit in one corner and always face the north.”<sup>61</sup> Associated with the north, the *wihtiko*’s heart of ice was seen as more frigid and perdurable than the ice that forms seasonally over the James Bay watershed or once lay ponderously over the entire region.

Every spring, southern melt-waters swell the north-flowing Moose River and its tributaries, sometimes breaking winter ice six feet thick. If a barrage of ice descends to James Bay, the river often threatens to overflow its banks or gauge a new path. The channels of this river can be carved anew by rapid thaws and early break-ups, but the most tumultuous of these are dwarfed by the break-up and thaw that ended the last ice age. This thaw, in fact, may be the source of “The Indian deluge” story, a point that further illustrates the difficulty of determining what is pre-contact in Cree culture.<sup>62</sup> As the lowlands continue to rebound from the glacial burden they once bore, the mouth of the Moose River inches into the receding shallows of James Bay.<sup>63</sup>

Situating the *wihtiko* in the framework of Cree cultural history is like consulting old documents and maps to locate the HBC’s second-oldest outpost, established on the Moose River in 1673, captured by the French and destroyed by the English.<sup>64</sup> Descriptions of this post exist, but only in archival records and maps that provide incomplete and often inaccurate glimpses of the river’s evolution.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, the location of a newer HBC post, established in 1730

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<sup>61</sup> LAC, MG 29, B 15 (Robert Bell Fonds), folder 54, file 12, “Indians. Legends - Charles H.M. Gordon,” “The Indian Deluge,” 1.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques and Madeleine Rousseau suggest that this story could also be a reference to “la submersion terrestre témoigne sans doute de la grande période pluviale post-glaciaire.” Rousseau and Rousseau, “Le Dualisme religieux des peuplades de la forêt boréale.” *Acculturation in the Americas*, ed. Sol Tax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 125.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Bell, “Proofs of the Rising of the Land around Hudson Bay,” *The American Journal of Science* 1 (1896): 219-228; Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 4-5.

<sup>64</sup> Victor Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck Athinuwick: Original People of the Great Swampy Land* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 127.

<sup>65</sup> See: Richard Luegar, “Archeological Survey of Moose Factory,” chapter 3 in “Moose Factory Final Report,” “Part Two: Survey Reports,” edited by Arthur J. Ray and Carol Judd (Report prepared for Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, Amisk Heritage Planning and Research, 1982), 184; Carol Judd “The Changing Faces of Moose Factory: A Landuse History,” “Appendix A: The Dawson Report Reconsidered,” in “Moose Factory Final

on present-day Moose Factory Island, provides a reference point for nearly three centuries of change in the landscape. In a more profound manner than this metaphor suggests, the *wihtiko* also provides a reference point for Cree cultural history. The *wihtiko* is a Cree cultural concept for which we have some of the oldest evidence – evidence that suggests it has evolved less than other concepts in Cree cosmology. One reason for this is that fears and threats tend to foster rigidity more than innovation. Writing in 1933, Cooper observed that the *wihtiko* “is greatly dreaded by the Cree, even today and among those who are in other respects much Europeanized.”<sup>66</sup> As Stymeist points out, monsters like the *wihtiko* are “so exceedingly common in cultural history” that they seem “necessary so as to highlight, by means of their inversions, hybridizations and transgressions, all that is good, right, necessary and proper.”<sup>67</sup> Similarly, just as most of the “ten commandments [and stories] of the Jewish people tell the things *not* to do,” says Bird, so too do most Cree stories “teach us the negative side of life ... stories that actually happened – and in listening to it, we learn to avoid it.”<sup>68</sup>

The necessity and nature of monsters, inversions and negative lessons point to another reason to expect greater consistency over time. The Christian contention that it is easier to say what God *is not* than to say what God *is* applies to most cultures’ understandings of divinity and goodness, especially those that define the ultimate good as infinite being and the ultimate evil as loss or negation of being.<sup>69</sup> Despite differences discussed below, the Algonquian *Manitu* and the Christian God are defined by profound mystery and logos (reason or story). They point to, or are,

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Report,” 129-133; K.C.A. Dawson, “An Archaeological Reconnaissance of the Moose Fort Fur Trade Post of 1673 at the Moose or Prince Rupert West River, James Bay, Ontario” (Report prepared for the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board and for the Ontario Department of Public Records and Archives), 35 pages.

<sup>66</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko Psychosis,” 21.

<sup>67</sup> Stymeist in “Myth and the Monster Cinema,” *Anthropologica* 51, no. 2 (2009): 403.

<sup>68</sup> Louis Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 4-5.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, part 1, question 3, prologue; Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, book 1, paragraph 6. See also: Preston, “Life in Translation,” 427. He points out that the Cree left larger questions open to debate, but set limits in a negative direction (lines that could not be crossed).

the ultimate story and author of stories, full of meaning and purpose beyond human capacity to understand let alone articulate. The *wihtiko*, in contrast, is “by nature ... not one to tell a story.”<sup>70</sup> It destroys stories, cultures and the relationships that give them meaning.

Nevertheless, the stories about the *wihtiko* speak to its nature as an anti-story of fundamental ideas and ideals in Algonquian culture. Unlike the *wihtiko* on the raft, it unwittingly helps reconstitute the ground for its own contextualization, and for an inquiry into deeper continuities and commonalities. As Forbes’ definition of the *wihtiko* implies, it has more in common with the Christian devil than he, Young and others have been able to see or willing to concede. The *wihtiko* also reveals common ground with Foucault’s view, “not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous.”<sup>71</sup>

If this monstrous antithesis of all that is good and proper resonates beyond Algonquian culture it is nevertheless culture-bound in other respects. For this reason, it is necessary to first sketch the ecological, socio-economic and cultural contexts in which the *wihtiko* phenomenon developed, and to articulate the understanding of culture that is central to this thesis and its explanation of the *wihtiko*.

## CHANGING CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE WIHTIKO

### *Subarctic Ecological & Socio-Economic Context*

Society – what we reduce for simplicity’s sake to individuals and groups – consists of persons-in-relation. Thus, to speak of the James Bay Cree is not to delineate a collective boundary. Rather, it defines one focal point in a broader network of persons-in-relation that

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<sup>70</sup> Bill Merasty, in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 10.

<sup>71</sup> Foucault, cited in Rouse, “Power/Knowledge,” in Gutting, *Cambridge Companion*, 112.

includes other Algonquians and non-Algonquians. The perception of James Bay as a unified region stems largely from the organization of HBC structures, which influenced subsequent missionary and governmental structures. Even before the arrival of fur-traders by sea, however, the James Bay watershed connected its inhabitants to each other and to peoples beyond the height of land. James Bay's subarctic ecology also imposed demographic constraints and mobility on its inhabitants, who migrated seasonally to sustain themselves and the many relationships on which they depended.

The primary networks of these relations are partly reflected in the different James Bay Cree dialects. Three similar ones are spoken among the Mushkegowuk dwellers of the northwestern to southwestern James Bay muskeg. The other two dialects, spoken on the Bay's eastern watershed, are more closely related to Montagnais, Atikamekw and Naskapi languages further east and southeast. In southern James Bay, western and eastern Cree populations blend into each other. Elsewhere, they blend into other Algonquian neighbours. In addition to the eastern ones mentioned already, these neighbours include the Anishinabe (Ojibwa and Algonquin) to the west and south, and the Cree and Oji-Cree of the Hudson Bay lowlands and northwestern interior.

The James Bay watershed is mainly muskeg and boreal forest, with tundra on the northern coasts and deciduous forest in its southern headwaters. This predominantly subarctic ecosystem sustains diverse mammal, bird and fish populations, many of which undergo cyclical fluctuation. Combined with limited edible plants and berries, they have sustained a population in James Bay for at least 5000 years.<sup>72</sup> Until the twentieth century, however, the population was

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<sup>72</sup> Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 15.

limited, dispersed and migratory. Historical population density is estimated at an average of one person per 100 square kilometres.<sup>73</sup>

This population consisted of nuclear and extended family units that migrated seasonally throughout the year between well-frequented sites in order to maximize their resource use, coalescing as small bands in the summer. Membership in these bands was based on family ties and shared occupation of specific watersheds but was flexible, shifting and sometimes overlapping.<sup>74</sup> Winter conditions required the dispersal of the population most commonly into two to four families. Boundaries of hunting territories were respected but suspended in famine conditions, where it was understood that everyone would help each other.<sup>75</sup> As one Waswanipi woman explains: “When we have food, and we are living with others, we give them half our food, and it seems like we find more to replace it.”<sup>76</sup> In summer, more abundant resources supported the largest gatherings of the seasonal round and facilitated trade with neighbours, an opportunity that Europeans expanded greatly.<sup>77</sup>

Social organisation and resource use were stable but flexible, reflecting the need for maintaining “a balance between group size and natural resources.”<sup>78</sup> “Periodically, the ecological support for human life was sharply reduced” in ways that could not be remedied by further

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<sup>73</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 219.

<sup>74</sup> Richard J. Preston, “James Bay Cree Respect Relations within the Great Community of Persons: Who Should Be Killed and How,” in *Nonkilling Societies*, edited by Joam Evans Pim (Honolulu: Centre for Global Nonkilling, 2010): 276-277 & 283.

<sup>75</sup> “In times of famine, boundaries are suspended for the sake of survival, and people would be expected to move constantly and for as great a distance as necessary to find food, and with the expectation that no one would oppose them in this search, and the more successful families would take in the needy.” Preston, “Respect Relations,” 277.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 297.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Preston, “Eastern Cree Community in Relation to the Fur Trade Post in the 1830s: the Background of the Posting Process,” *Papers of the Sixth Algonquian Conference*, William Cowan, ed. (Ottawa, Carlton University, 1974): 325-356; Lytwyn, *Muskekowuck*, 268-271, 277-280.

<sup>78</sup> Ira Chaikin & Toby Morantz, “Report of the Ontario Land Claims Research Project, Phase I” (Prepared for the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, March 31, 1985), 15-18 (citation from p. 18). To the northeast, migratory patterns were less stable because they followed caribou herds.

population dispersal. This was a greater risk in winter,<sup>79</sup> but *ahshiiuhtahnuuch* (“the starving time”) is a term that refers to early spring.<sup>80</sup> One had to prepare well for this period, because mobility – so crucial to the hunt – was often very limited. Temperature fluctuations in fall or winter, however, could create unexpected *ahshiiuhtahnuuch* conditions that were succeeded by harsh cold rather than the warmth of spring. Many of the *wihtiko* incidents examined in subsequent chapters occurred in such conditions or in the midst of epidemics. Whatever their cause, these conditions allowed no escape from human dependency, the threat of imminent death or “deprivation and hardship ... [of] extreme proportions.” As Preston observes, “many people died from the combination of starvation and exposure.”<sup>81</sup> Cree narratives indicate that *wihtiko* threats increased in such dire circumstances, but they consistently condemn the reduction of others to an object of power, even for the sake of self-preservation. They also indicate that the *wihtiko* threat could only be countered by a social control grounded in self-control: a high level of mental and moral competence.

### ***Social & Self-Control: Mental & Moral Competence***

The nature of this mental and moral competence is well illustrated by the story of a young Cree hunter who left Moose Factory with his wife and two children one fall, heading southward to their winter hunting grounds. Laut records what happened:

To save the daily allowance of a fish for each dog, they did not take the dog teams. When chopping, the hunter injured his leg. The wound proved stubborn. Game was scarce, and they had not enough food to remain in the lodge. Wrapping her husband in robes on the long toboggan sleigh, the squaw placed the younger child beside him and with the other began tramping through the forest drawing the sleigh behind. The drifts were not deep enough for

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<sup>79</sup> Regina Flannery, Mary Elizabeth Chambers and Patricia A. Jehle, “Witiko Accounts from the James Bay Cree,” *Arctic Anthropology* 18, no. 1 (1981): 59 & 70.

<sup>80</sup> Jim Chism, an archaeologist who has worked many years for the Quebec Cree, was told about the “starving time” by Job Bearskin of Chisasibi. Personal communication: spring 1999. Gary Chewaynish of Chisasibi confirmed this. Personal communication: October 19, 2000.

<sup>81</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 219. Commenting on interviews conducted among the Whapmagoostui Cree in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Adelson remarks that “[s]tarvation and hardship were recounted so often in the interviews that these things merit particular attention.” Naomi Adelson, *Being Alive Well: Health and the Politics of Cree Well-Being* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 85. See also: Flannery et al., “Witiko,” 70.

swift show-shoeing over under-brush ... The woman sank exhausted on the snow and the older boy, nerved with fear, pushed on to Moose Factory for help. Guided by the boy back through the forests, the fort people found the hunter dead in the sleigh, the mother crouched forward unconscious from cold, stripped of the clothing which she had wrapped round the child taken in her arms to warm with her own body. The child was alive and well. The fur traders nursed the woman back to life, though she looked more like a withered creature of eighty than a woman barely in her twenties. She explained with a simple unconsciousness of heroism that the ground had been too hard for her to bury her husband, and she was afraid to leave the body and go on to the fort lest the wolves should molest the dead.<sup>82</sup>

Bishop Horden, writing on May 8, 1886, gives a similar account of a woman named Eliza Crow, who had just passed away at Moose Factory, where she “was held in honour by all.” One winter, some twenty-five years previously, she and her husband had encountered great hardship while hunting on Akimiski Island (in James Bay):

Food was very scarce, and became more so every day, until their two youngest children succumbed to starvation; they were upwards of seventy miles from Albany, the nearest point at which assistance was obtainable; this must be reached or all would starve; Eliza tied her two remaining children, a boy and girl, well wrapped up, on her sledge, and preceded by her husband, now in a state of great exhaustion, began the weary tramp; bravely they toiled onward, until the husband's strength was spent. She then made up a small tent, lit a fire, and made him as comfortable as possible. She then pushed on with her load, reached the Albany establishment, and fainted away; nature had held out longer than could have been anticipated. Kind and busy hands were, without a moment's delay, engaged in ministering to the wants of the famished ones; as soon as she could speak, Eliza evinced her anxiety for her husband, stating the condition in which she had left him, and beseeching that help might be sent to him at once.<sup>83</sup>

The subarctic provided many such reminders that survival could be completely within one's purview one moment and utterly contingent the next.<sup>84</sup> Maintaining practical or technical

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<sup>82</sup> Agnes C. Laut, “The Greatest Fur Company of the World,” *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* 55, no. 1 (November 1902): 10.

<sup>83</sup> Bishop John Horden to unspecified recipient, May 8, 1886, General Synod Archives (GSA), Moosonee Collection, Box 1, Horden Letterbook, pp. 875-881. The husband did not survive. A.R. Buckland cited this letter in his biography of Horden, but added the following comment: “There are people sitting quietly at home in England, who sometimes doubt the value of Christianity to such as these Indians. The contrast between the heathen who in time of death saved himself by cannibalism, and the Christian who showed the courage and faith of Eliza and Amelia, is worth their consideration.” Buckland, *John Horden, Missionary Bishop: A Life on the Shores of Hudson's Bay* (London: Sunday School Union, 1900), 94-95. This was not a comment made by Horden. Elsewhere, Buckland also commented: “The more he knew of the people the more he saw how sadly they needed the gospel he had come to preach. Crime of the grossest character abounded. Men made little of murdering their aged parents or their young children, and cannibalism resulted in the times of famine.” *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>84</sup> For more recent examples, see: Boyce Richardson, *Strangers Devour the Land: A Chronicle of the Assault upon the Last Coherent Hunting Culture in North America, the Cree Indians of Northern Quebec, and their Vast Primeval Homelands* (New York: Knopf, 1975), 6-8.

competence was crucial, but mental-moral competence was paramount: the capacity to discern things as they were and as they should be, and to act accordingly.

As Preston observes, “much if not all of Cree knowledge has to do with the practise of right conduct, and lessons learned from past conduct.”<sup>85</sup> This moral knowledge constituted a form of customary law communicated in Cree stories. Social sanctions could be imposed for breach of these laws, but a lack of centralized authority meant that social control was “rarely effected through physical force or threat of physical force.”<sup>86</sup> Instead, the Cree fostered a culture of personal competence and self-sanction. Writing about the Montagnais neighbours of the Cree in the 1600s, Le Jeune puzzled over their extension of assistance to even hated enemies.<sup>87</sup> Three centuries later, commenting on both the Montagnais and Cree, Lips explained this ethos: “if a case should become known where an Indian maliciously disregarded a signal erected in extreme need, he would likewise be disregarded in case of his own need.”<sup>88</sup> Cree ideals in this regard were articulated in more positive terms by one Waswanipi woman: “‘When we have food, and we are living with others, we give them half our food, and it seems like we find more to replace it.’”<sup>89</sup> As Preston explains:

Cree social control is effected essentially through a mental force. ... one must be free to control himself. This freedom is of paramount importance to Cree individuals and is very proudly held. But this does not lead to individualistic anarchy; it is the locus of the manner, agency, and sequencing of social control.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Preston, “Towards a General Statement on the Eastern Cree Structure of Knowledge,” *Papers of the Thirteenth Algonquian Conference*, ed. William Cowan (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1982), 299. Cuthand concurs: “There is a very strong relationship between Cree myths and Cree society. The stories of the mythical beings reinforced socially beneficial behaviour.” Cuthand, “On Nelson’s Text,” in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 195.

<sup>86</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 72-78 (citation from 78).

<sup>87</sup> Cited in A.I. Hallowell, *Culture and Experience* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 277.

<sup>88</sup> Julius E. Lips, “Public Opinion and Mutual Assistance among the Montagnais-Naskapi,” *American Anthropologist* 39, no. 2 (April-June 1937): 227.

<sup>89</sup> Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 297.

<sup>90</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 78-79.

In harmony with this ethos, governance was decentralised, with each family or group arriving at decisions under the guidance of one or more *okimawak*.<sup>91</sup> *Okimaw* (singular form) can be translated as “leader,” “elder” or “teacher.”<sup>92</sup> Often the eldest able hunter, an *okimaw* was recognised for experience as well as mental and moral competence.<sup>93</sup> Those who governed themselves to serve others were respected, but those who sought control over others to serve themselves were feared and shunned. Writing in the 1940s, Honigmann observed that Attawapiskat Cree “regard firm leadership as desirable. Yet no pleasure comes from exercising power. Too great evidence of power is resented and feared by those whom it affects.”<sup>94</sup> As Bird points out, Cree stories, including *wihtiko* stories, frequently describe the consequences of seeking power over others for malevolent or selfish purposes. A benevolent *okimaw* or shaman had power, but quests for power could end in *wihtiko* transformation or possession. The difference between the two forms of power was mental and moral competence in discerning what it meant to be and stay human in a contingent world.

### ***Human & Other-Than-Human Power in a Contingent World***

Being and remaining human meant discerning and accepting the meaning of this contingent world, and cultivating self-control so as to relate competently, above all at a moral level, to all living beings, including animal and “other-than-human” persons. “The sense of controlled human competence in a contingent world,” writes Preston, “is fundamental to the

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<sup>91</sup> Chaikin & Morantz, “Ontario Land Claims,” 12; Colin Scott and James Morrison, “The Quebec Cree Claim in the Hannah Bay/Harricanaw River Drainage in Ontario: Report of the Ontario Claim Research” (Report prepared for the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, June 1993), 30; Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 27; Preston, “Eastern Cree Community,” 329.

<sup>92</sup> In *Okimah*, a 1998 National Film Board production directed by Paul Rickard of the Moose Cree First Nation, the *okimah* is described as he who looks out for everyone, who teaches, who guides.

<sup>93</sup> Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck*, 20-23. He cites an observation by Zachariah Gillam, captain of the very first English trade expeditions into James Bay, that “As to their government, they have some chief men above ye rest, yet working as ye rest.”

<sup>94</sup> Honigmann, “Interpersonal Relations,” 370. See also Scott and Morrison, “Quebec Cree Claim,” 26-27. Note that a Band Chief is referred to as an *okimahkan* (“surrogate chief”), not as an *okimaw*. C. Douglas Ellis, “A Note on Okimahkan,” *Anthropological Linguistics* 2, no. 3 (March 1960), 1.

ethos of Cree culture.”<sup>95</sup> If the sense of contingent being and relationship was profound, so also was the sense of contingent and limited knowledge. Only tentative answers could be given to the question, “contingent upon what or whom?” A full account of Cree and Algonquian answers and their variation across time and space is beyond the scope of this study, but a brief outline is crucial because the *wihtiko* is the antithesis of how the Cree thought they should relate to this contingent world.

In the first place, being human entailed a contingent relationship with a simultaneously immanent and transcendent vitality. For the Cree, writes Scott,

the world is a place of deep vitality, sometimes restful, sometimes dynamic; pregnant with possibility; a place of emergent, often orderly, sometimes surprising phenomena. Life in this sense, *pimaatsiwin*, was translated to me as ‘the continuous birthing of the world.’<sup>96</sup>

Everything that could be named had an *ačahkw*. Often translated as “soul,” this life principle is sometimes better translated as “form” in the metaphysical (Aristotelian) sense of the word, for some *ačahkw* were animate and others inanimate.<sup>97</sup> Algonquian languages, for this reason, separate all nouns into animate and inanimate categories. The “animacy of the lifeworld,” observes Ingold, “is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence.” It is a “condition of being alive to the world, ... to an environment that is always in flux,”<sup>98</sup> – full of mystery or *manitu*.

Anishinabe scholar Johnston points out that *manitu*, often translated as spirit, “bears other meanings even more fundamental ... a substance, character, essence, quiddity beyond

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<sup>95</sup> Preston, “Eastern Cree Structure,” 299; Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 72-77, 237 (citation).

<sup>96</sup> Scott, “Spirit and Practical Knowledge,” 61.

<sup>97</sup> Ake Hultkrantz, *Conceptions of the Soul Among North American Indians: A Study in Religious Ethnology* (Stockholm: Ethnographical Museum of Sweden, 1953), 488-489. He was writing about the general soul concept in northeastern Algonquian cultures.

<sup>98</sup> Tim Ingold, “Rethinking the Animate, Re-Animating Thought,” *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 71, no. 1 (2006): 3.

comprehension and therefore beyond explanation, a *mystery*.” By Johnston’s description, it also connotes the source of vitality, of *piimaatsiwin*. It is:

a vital substance or essence that imparted life, form, growth, healing, and strength in all things, beings, and places. ... the expression ‘manitouwan’ meant that an object possessed or was infused with an element or a feature that was beyond human ken ... ‘w’manitouwih’ meant that he or she was endowed with extraordinary talents.<sup>99</sup>

Spence concurs with Johnston’s explanation, adding that *Kitchi-Manitu* (Great Spirit) “means God in Cree.”<sup>100</sup> As Bird elaborates, “there is a certain level that cannot be reached [by anyone but] ... the Great Spirit ... who has the mind power to create anything.”<sup>101</sup> In this view, *Kitchi-Manitu* is the ultimate answer to the question of contingent being, relationship and knowledge. Studies of historical Cree and Algonquian *manitu* concepts, by Cooper, Long, Oberholtzer, Preston, and Schenck pointed to the lack of pre-Christian belief in a single omnipotent Creator.<sup>102</sup> The concept of *Kitchi-Manitu* is of Christian origin and first appeared in André’s 1671 *Dictionnaire Algonquin* translated as “*un grand dieu*, ‘a great god,’ that is, one of many.”<sup>103</sup> Among the James Bay Cree, it only came into use in the nineteenth century.<sup>104</sup>

The historical meaning of *manitu* among Algonquians is unclear.<sup>105</sup> For James Bay Cree, *Manitu* seems to have commonly connoted a superior benevolent spirit-person of great power,

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<sup>99</sup> Emphasis added. Basil Johnston, “One Generation From Extinction,” in *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*, edited by Daniel David Moses and Terry Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 100-101.

<sup>100</sup> Greg Spence, personal communication, February 9, 2012. Spence is a Ojibwe Cree culture and language expert. Long et al. point out that it may have been “a more generic term for a quality of ‘spiritual power ... that could occur in almost any form.’” Long et al. “Manitu Concepts,” 456.

<sup>101</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 94-95.

<sup>102</sup> John M. Cooper, “The Northern Algonquian Supreme Being,” *Primitive Man* 6, no. 3/4 (July-October 1933): 74-78; Long et al., “Manitu concepts,” 451. Theresa Schenck makes the same point with regard to the Ojibwa, “Gizhe-Manidoo, Missionaries, and the Anishinaabeg,” *Anishinaabewin Niizh: Culture Movements, Critical Moments*, ed. Alan Corbiere, Deborah McGregor and Crystal Migwans, 39-47 (M’Chigeeng, Ontario: Ojibwe Cultural Foundation, 2011), 40.

<sup>103</sup> Schneck, “Gizhe-Manidoo,” 43.

<sup>104</sup> Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 46-47.

<sup>105</sup> Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 81. According to Schenck, Samuel de Champlain observed in 1615 that this Algonquian term “encompassed several meanings which were often difficult to determine.” Manitu “might be applied to someone who did something extraordinary, such as healing the sick or predicting future events, or even to someone ‘infuriated as if out of his mind.’” Schenck, “Gizhe-Manidoo,” 41.

though not necessarily creator. For the Anishinabe, *manitu* seems to have been a plurality of superior other-than-human persons or “powers, which could help and sustain, or harm and destroy.”<sup>106</sup> At the same time, as Johnston and Spence confirm, *manitu* sometimes connoted a mysterious force or essence that manifests itself in persons, human and other-than-human. If the historical meaning of *manitu* is a mystery, it is not only because of the limitation of the historical record. *Mystery* may simply be the most fundamental meaning of *manitu*. Nevertheless, the nature of *manitu* was crucial because it shaped the nature of power and contingency as well as human mental and moral competence. A contingent world in which *manitu* was impersonal mystery-power could easily become a world in which individuals sought to control that power, through magic and sorcery, whether to help or to harm. “Adept shamans,” writes Landes of the Ojibwa, “were believed to manipulate the manito Supernaturals as we do electricity.”<sup>107</sup>

Such a belief may explain why concerns about sorcery appear to have been more prevalent among the Ojibwa than among the Cree.<sup>108</sup> Adoption of the Christian belief in *Kitchi-Manitu* was deemed to protect a person from sorcery,<sup>109</sup> and even the pre-Christian *manitu*, conceived as a benevolent and singularly superior spirit-person, was not subject to manipulation by adept shamans. Hope or belief in such a *manitu*, moreover, may have discouraged quests for manipulative power. It also made hope, in some ways, more important than power, or to put it

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<sup>106</sup> Schenck, “Gizhe-Manidoo,” 41.

<sup>107</sup> Ruth Landes, *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin* (Madison, Milwaukee & London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 3.

<sup>108</sup> Preston comments that Sam Iserhoff, an Anglican Cree catechist, “continued to cherish the values expressed in the *atiukanak* [legends, myths or sacred stories], but commented [to Preston] that in those [traditional] days, every man was afraid of every other man.” Preston, “Syncretism,” 151. Preston also comments elsewhere: “I find rather less interpersonal anxiety, fear, and animosity than Hallowell describes for the Ojibwa, though the patterns are similar.” Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 222. See also: Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 303; Edward S. Rogers, “Northern Algonquians and the Hudson’s Bay Company, 1821-1890,” in *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations*, ed. Rogers and Donald B. Smith, 307-343 (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1994), 330-331; Edward S. Rogers, *Natural Environment, Social Organization, Witchcraft: Cree versus Ojibwa, A Test Case*, National Museums of Canada Bulletin 230, Contributions to Anthropology: Ecological Essays, Paper no. 3 (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1969), 35-37; Hallowell, *Culture and Experience*, 181, 282; Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 94-95.

<sup>109</sup> Long, “Manitu,” 21.

differently, it made hope the appropriate manifestation of power for human persons. According to Flannery, the eastern James Bay Cree did not use the term *manitu*, but “*pakuseyimakan* (‘the one we hope from’).”<sup>110</sup> Elder Patrick Steven says prayers to *manitu* in western James Bay were also expressions of hope more than direct requests.<sup>111</sup>

Ultimately, however, *Manitu*, the superior being, “was somewhere up there, ‘a mystery’, ‘a given’, and was omniscient only in the sense that he knew without being asked what human-persons’ needs were for their livelihood.”<sup>112</sup> The evidence collected by Cooper suggests that, historically, *Manitu*’s “relationship to the socio-moral law was either extremely indirect and tenuous or else nil.”<sup>113</sup> A benevolent but limited *manitu* was more easily reconciled with a world that included malevolence and suffering, but someone else had to account for evil. This may explain the religious dualism apparent in the seventeenth-century description of *Manitu* and *Wihtiko*,<sup>114</sup> as well as the presence of origin but not necessarily creation stories in Cree oral tradition.

The origin story told among the western James Bay Cree speaks of a sky world long ago, where only a man and his wife lived.<sup>115</sup> Walking together one day, they heard a voice that told

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<sup>110</sup> Long et al., “Manitu concepts,” 481; Flannery, cited in *ibid.*, 470-472.

<sup>111</sup> Patrick Steven, cited in Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 53.

<sup>112</sup> Flannery, cited and paraphrased in Long et al., “Manitu Concepts,” 471-472.

<sup>113</sup> Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 77.

<sup>114</sup> Religious dualism refers to a belief in two equal but opposing cosmic powers: one good and the other evil. Thomas Gorst’s manuscript journal of 1670-75 speaks of the southeastern James Bay peoples’ belief in “two Monetoos or Spirits, the one sends all the good things they have, and the other all the bad.” Cited in Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 42. Cooper cites other evidence of this dualism among the Hudson Bay Cree, who identify these beings as *Manitu* and *Wihtiko*. Cooper, however, also points out that among the James Bay Cree, there was “no supreme evil spirit.” *Wihtiko* was not supreme. *Ibid.*, 76, 89-94.

<sup>115</sup> Louis Bird dedicates an entire chapter (chapter 2, with an introduction by Paul W. DePasquale) to this and other Cree creation or origin stories in *Telling Our Stories*, 59-86 (especially page 81-86, where two versions of the story are retold). He comments that the story is “not rigid, it’s very flexible.” *Ibid.*, 82, footnote 25. He records another version in *Spirit Lives*, 15-17. This version given here is condensed from Bird’s accounts as well as several other versions recorded in the last 50 years. The citations, except those in single quotations, are from Simeon Scott’s versions, in Simon Scott et al., *atalôhkâna nêsta tipâcimôwina: Cree Legends and Narratives from the West Coast of James Bay*, compiled, edited and introduced by C. Douglas Ellis (Winnipeg: Algonquian Text Society and University of Manitoba Press, 1995), 2-13. Another version is found in: Ojibway-Cree Cultural Centre (OCCC),

them of a very different and vast land below, and directed them towards someone who could help them get there. Setting off, they eventually caught sight of what appeared to be a small animal. Approaching it, they discovered it was Ehep, the Great Spider, standing at the edge of the land. The Great Spider knew why they had come, and pointed to the world below: ‘The land below is very different, but you will find someone there who will teach you how to survive. I will make a line and basket and lower you.’ Because they ignored strict instructions from Ehep not to look over the side of the basket, the man and woman got caught in a very tall tree that had no branches with which to climb down. They called for help to animals walking below. Caribou passed by but were unable to climb. A lynx feigned inability and ignored their pleas. Finally, a wolverine and a bear climbed the tree and carried the man and woman down. “And the bear ... guided them in everything, as to how life went on in this land ... And that is the reason the bear came to be considered, as it were, as a wise person.”<sup>116</sup> In time, the couple bore children, and their children had children. The people grew in numbers and spread over the land.<sup>117</sup>

*Ehbebukdaet*, the eastern James Bay Cree term for “hope,” Preston points out, “translates literally into English as untying something, like a knot – plus the quality of a revealing insight or perception, expressing some new knowledge.”<sup>118</sup> In the origin story, the rope woven by the spider Ehep is a metaphor for mystery.<sup>119</sup> *Ehbebukdaet* is a mental or spiritual strength or virtue. It enables a person to endure great hardship not just by accepting human contingency but also by penetrating deeper into it, by untying knots in the rope of *manitu*-mystery. Yet it is also directed to *manitu*-person, to “*pakuseyimakan* (‘the one we hope from’).”<sup>120</sup> Moreover, “if it is

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*Nishnawbe-Aski Nation: A History of the Cree and Ojibway of Northern Ontario* (Timmins, Ontario: Ojibway-Cree Cultural Centre, 1986), 1-3.

<sup>116</sup> Simeon Scott, *átalóhkána*, 13.

<sup>117</sup> OCCC, *Nishnawbe-Aski Nation*, 3.

<sup>118</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 208.

<sup>119</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 16.

<sup>120</sup> Long et al., “Manitu Concepts,” 481.

successful,” writes Preston, it “is transmitted to external phenomena and influences them ... a kind of hunting power.”<sup>121</sup> As such, *ehbebukdaet* is something more akin to the spiritual “virtue of hope” in Christian theological understanding than it is to a secular notion of hope as optimism.

In the hierarchy of Cree cosmology, *Manitu* was “the superior being ... the apex,” but animal persons were the primary other-than-human objects of Cree hope as they were “directly related to the over-riding concern of the Cree – the food quest.”<sup>122</sup> In the origin story, they are present before the first man and woman arrive; they “speak as humans, think like humans, experience life as humans and plan as humans.”<sup>123</sup> Human beings are integrated into the world, not as lords of the animals, but by “moving into the existing social structure.”<sup>124</sup> It is with the help of animal-persons, moreover, that they arrive safely and learn to survive. According to one story, “it was agreed ... that all animals will have to contribute for the sake of ... the human [who] can only be alive in the world by using the animals’ help – their body, their furs, their feathers and everything.”<sup>125</sup>

Wojtyla argues that animals and even plants should be respected and not reduced to “things.” Nevertheless, “no-one can speak with any conviction about an animal as a person,” but we can “speak of individual animals.” In contrast, “a man cannot be wholly contained within the concept ‘individual member of the species’ ... there is something more to him ... which can only be brought out by the use of the word ‘person.’”<sup>126</sup> Wojtyla was clearly addressing a Western audience for, as Tanner observes, the Cree view “game animals” as “persons” that “must be

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<sup>121</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 191.

<sup>122</sup> Long et al, “Manitu Concepts,” 472; Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 223.

<sup>123</sup> Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 78.

<sup>124</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 209. See also: Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 295.

<sup>125</sup> Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 63, 78-80.

<sup>126</sup> Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. William Collins (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993; first published in Polish in 1960) 21-22.

respected.”<sup>127</sup> Preston concurs: the Cree hunter “feels himself to be related on an essentially personal basis to the animals that he kills to make his living.”<sup>128</sup> There was, moreover, a profound “consistent, socially shared understanding that this relationship ... parallel[led] ... the love expected from human persons.”<sup>129</sup> In the Cree “hierarchy of beings,” observes Feit, humans are “somewhere in the middle ... not radically separated from those ranked above or below.”<sup>130</sup>

In the 1960s, Preston was told the story of a deceased hunter named George Mianscum, who “enjoyed hunting so much that he felt the animals enjoyed his hunting.” On one occasion, recounts Mianscum’s nephew, the starving family was moving about in search for food. Mianscum was so weak he kept falling down.

One night, he concentrated deeply about hunting. He dreamed that his daughter was returning home from a hunt. Finally he started to sing (in his sleep), “My daughter is running home.” From his singing, he woke himself up. The meaning of his song was about a group of caribou, telling him he will see them. In the morning, the caribou could be clearly seen, heading toward the camp. ... He was able to kill all of them.

Preston explains that the purpose of the animals, at least in part, is to give themselves to the hunter and his family so they can live. The hunter exercises reciprocity by taking care to show gratitude and respect for the animals, with specific rituals and gestures. This Cree view that animals are persons was a fundamental expression of hope that their survival in a contingent world, and the success of their hunt, was not by mere chance. Their hope translated into a faith that their survival could be ensured by entering into loving relationship with animal-persons who would give themselves freely if human-persons respected their gift.<sup>131</sup>

There were limits, however, to the relationship and parity between animal-persons and human-persons. As Preston puts it: “considerable importance [is] attached to defining and

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<sup>127</sup> Tanner, *Bringing Home*, 130.

<sup>128</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 199. See also: Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 295-296.

<sup>129</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 206.

<sup>130</sup> Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 300- 301.

<sup>131</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 200-206. See also Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 297-298.

maintaining the distinction between human and other persons. Perhaps their very closeness makes the difference more crucial.”<sup>132</sup> Flannery found it “‘highly significant’ that the superior being was described [by Cree in the 1930s] as ‘owning everything, every sort of meat and birds, everything on the earth, but not humans.’”<sup>133</sup> “Several Cree myths,” writes Scott, use “human sexuality as a metaphor for the killing and eating of game, and vice versa. When humans get the terms of their metaphors confused and begin marrying animals or eating other humans ... the results are impossibly comic or tragic.”<sup>134</sup> These tragic results included transformation into an *atuush* or *wihtiko*.<sup>135</sup> Scott elaborates: a “fundamental separation and asymmetry between human community and animal community” existed, a separation that translated into a fundamentally different reciprocity among human persons and among animal persons.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, an ethic of power through reciprocity rather than manipulation or coercion held for relations with food-animals as much as for human relations.<sup>137</sup>

In the mythic sphere animal-persons sometimes acted improperly or malevolently, and there were malevolent or ambivalent animal-persons or categories of animals. Food-animals, however, were seen as fundamentally benevolent, even if potentially dangerous. Regardless, in the non-mythic sphere, onus was on human-persons, not animal-persons, to exercise self-control and act responsibly.<sup>138</sup> As Bird explains, “*maahchihew* ... means that ... [if] you do something wrong or out of the ordinary to an animal, it will stop being available to you.”<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 210. See also Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 63, 78-80.

<sup>133</sup> Flannery, letter to John Long, 1984, cited in Long et al., “Manitu concepts,” 21.

<sup>134</sup> Scott, “Science,” 75. See also Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 210-211.

<sup>135</sup> Richard Preston, “A Life in Translation,” *Born in the Blood: On Native American Translation*, ed. Brian Swann, 419-445 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 438.

<sup>136</sup> Scott, “Science,” 75.

<sup>137</sup> Regina Flannery and Mary Elizabeth Chambers, “Each Man has his own Friends: the Role of Dream Visitors in Traditional East Cree Belief and Practice,” *Arctic Anthropology* 22, 1 (1985), 9-10.

<sup>138</sup> Hallowell, *Culture and Experience*, 252-253; Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 153-167, 222; Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 94-95.

<sup>139</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 76-77. See also Flannery and Chambers, “Each Man,” 7-8.

Animal-persons were the most immediately relevant non-human persons in the contingent world of the Cree and other Algonquians. Closely related to them were animal guardian spirits or animal masters. An animal master was one variety of *powatakan* (*powagan* in Ojibwa). Translated as “dream-visitor,” “guardian spirit,” or “supernatural friend” these were other-than-human or superhuman beings with whom the Cree cultivated relationships, usually through dreams. Some Cree applied this term exclusively or primarily to dream-visitors that were benevolent in nature, but other dream-visitors could be dangerous, ambivalent or even malevolent. Other Cree, like the Ojibwa, applied the term to dream-visitors more generally. Cree and Ojibwa alike believed that malevolent beings, such as the *wihtiko*, might approach them in dreams, but were to be resisted as guardian spirits.<sup>140</sup>

The soul (*ačahkw*) of an individual animal was another common *powatakan*. Others included giant animals and the culture heroes of the *atalohkana* (legends), such as the trickster *Weesakechahk*, a superhuman being.<sup>141</sup> They also included the wind spirit-persons, each one associated with a season and its prevalent weather patterns, who were believed to impact the weather, travel, the hunt, and ultimately, one’s survival.<sup>142</sup>

Another key and unique figure in Cree cosmology was the *Mistabeo*, literally “big man,” but also translated as the “helper.”<sup>143</sup> Preston writes that the *Mistabeo* “involves the intuitions and perceptions, on the part of the Cree man, of an essentially spiritual person and power that is at once outside of himself and intimately related to himself.”<sup>144</sup> Flannery and Chambers suggest

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<sup>140</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 92; Bird, *Telling our Stories*, 93-95; Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 76; Flannery and Chambers, “Each Man,” 3-4, 7-8, 14, 17; Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 292, 297; Hallowell, *Culture and Experience*, 181; Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 221; Landes, *Ojibwa Religion*, 11.

<sup>141</sup> Flannery and Chambers, “Each Man,” 3.

<sup>142</sup> Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 296-297.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 293-294.

<sup>144</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 237. His chapter on “The Mistabeo Concept” constitutes one of the best and most current analyses. Flannery and Chambers concur: “Each Man,” 11.

an identity between the *Mistabeo* and a man's outer soul or *ačahkw* (human persons were uniquely believed to have two souls, one that could move independently from a person).<sup>145</sup> Nevertheless, the *Mistabeo* had an "autonomy and personality of his own" and could "manifest himself by influence on other persons, food-animals, or objects."<sup>146</sup> According to Speck, the *Mistabeo* usually "requires that the individual tell no lies, practice no deception upon others. In particular he is pleased with generosity, kindness, and help to others. Besides these ethical precepts, there are others directed ... towards animals."<sup>147</sup> Every adult man could potentially develop a relationship with a *Mistabeo*, but only some did, and not always to the same extent, for a *Mistabeo* was fallible and not always reliable, much like the human persons to whom they were intimately linked.<sup>148</sup>

### *Changing Ideas & Continuing Ideals in Algonquian Cosmology*

The mobile hunting way of life evolved relatively little for the James Bay Cree beyond the "forces of production" until the mid-twentieth century, when it began to be displaced by permanent settlement and participation in an industrialized economy.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, the Cree's dialogue with Christianity was well underway by the time ethnographic work began in earnest in the early twentieth century. Speaking in Cree (through translator Willie McLeod), elder Frank Richard referred to this dialogue in a 1933 interview with Cooper, repeating what his own grandmother, born between 1820 and 1840, had told him:

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<sup>145</sup> Flannery and Chambers, "Each Man," 16-18. Speck thought the *Mistabeo* was – as paraphrased by Preston – the "active state of the soul, a source of guidance. Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 116. See also: Hultkrantz, *Conceptions*, 374-386.

<sup>146</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 126.

<sup>147</sup> Frank Speck, *Naskapi: The Savage Hunters of the Labrador Peninsula*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977; first published in 1935), 36.

<sup>148</sup> While it lasted, a man's relationship with a *Mistabeo* was exclusive, but it could also be transferred to someone else, lost, or abandoned. Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 125-127, 153-154, 167. Flannery and Chambers, "Each Man," 11-12.

<sup>149</sup> Charles A. Bishop, "The First Century: Adaptive Changes among the Western James Bay Cree," *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*, ed. Shepart Krech III, 21-53 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 24.

When Christianity was first introduced the Indians thought it very strange that it was so much like what they had previously had, and that the Christian God was so much like the old Manitu they had known in pre-Christian days. ... instead of calling him Manitu they called him thereafter *Kicê'manitû* ('Old Manitu') or else *Kistci'manitû* ('Great Manitu'). ... They did not know much about the Manitu but they knew that he was *icpemik* ('above') and that there was only one Manitu.<sup>150</sup>

The new understanding, it seems, was an intellectually and emotionally attractive insight or unbinding of the mystery about the little-known superior benevolent being the Cree already believed in,<sup>151</sup> about which they held only "des notions imprécises."<sup>152</sup> The *kitchi manitu* (great mystery) of *pimaatisiwin* and the Cree's contingent world was clarified, but if *manitu* became less mysterious and more intimate as loving, personal *Notawinan* ("our Father"),<sup>153</sup> the Supreme Being also became a greater and more powerful mystery: the singular, omniscient and omnipotent Creator-God. The sense of *manitu* as mystery, however, found continuity for many Cree in the Christian conviction that "truth is both revealed and yet beyond us. We cannot master it or simply take possession of it."<sup>154</sup>

The Cree saw this dialogue with Christianity as meaningful because it resonated with pre-existing aspirations about their contingent existence: their hope and belief that the ultimate mystery that defined their lives was more than chaos and indifference, and their aspiration for love or reciprocity. Long writes, speaking of those Cree who eventually accepted more uniquely Christian teachings about *Kitchi-Manitu*:

Manitu, once perhaps a vague notion or apprehension, became Kitchiimantu, with whom people could now communicate; he now had a son and absolute power. Power – over illness, wiihtikows, the food quest, the perils of travel and threatening shamans – became democratized, available to all through prayer, Christian rites, Sabbath observance, and faith in books.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Frank Rickard (translated from Cree), cited in Cooper, "Northern Algonquian," 46-47.

<sup>151</sup> Long, "Manitu," 21.

<sup>152</sup> Rousseau & Rousseau, "Le dualisme religieux," 124-125.

<sup>153</sup> Cooper, "Northern Algonquian," 58.

<sup>154</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, *I Call You Friends* (Toronto: Novalis, 2001), 81.

<sup>155</sup> Long, "Manitu," 21.

The dialogue of Cree *ehbebukdaet* (hope) with Christianity led to a transformation of *Manitu* into *Kitchi-Manitu*, followed by a transposition of the primary object of Cree hope, faith and love from animal-persons and their guardians to *Kitchi-Manitu* as the ultimate guardian spirit of these animal-persons: “the one who owns all the animals.”<sup>156</sup> “Active and effective hope within an indeterminate hunting world,” writes Carlson, “is the key to the environmental and historical significance of Christianity in James Bay.” He elaborates:

The Cree symbolic world continued to be supported by and concerned with the hunting of food on the land, and hunters and their families fit Christianity within that matrix. Christianity did not replace Cree beliefs any more than the fur trade replaced the hunt for food, but both affected Cree culture and were affected by it.<sup>157</sup>

Animal-persons remained central to Cree bush-life, but *Kitchi-Manitu* displaced or replaced intermediary guardian spirits.<sup>158</sup> Flannery and Chambers found that *powataganak* (plural) had greater importance to the Waskaganish Cree in the 1930s than they did by the time of Preston’s work there in the 1960s, when greater emphasis was placed on the *mistabeo*, as an optional individual guardian spirit. A decade or two later, *mistabeo* was becoming a generic term for any traditional other-than-human non-theistic spirit, the most common meaning it has now.<sup>159</sup>

These major shifts also fostered or coincided with an adoption by many Cree of more explicitly Christian religious beliefs and rituals, but not necessarily always or immediately as a replacement of Cree beliefs and rituals. Varying degrees of dualism and syncretism were more central to the process than mere replacement. These transformations may have occurred at different times throughout James Bay, but the general pattern appears to have been relatively similar.

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<sup>156</sup> Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 300; Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 77; Long et al., “Manitu Concepts,” 451; Long, “Manitu,” 1-30.

<sup>157</sup> Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 129-130.

<sup>158</sup> Morantz, *White Man’s*, 92.

<sup>159</sup> Flannery and Chambers, “Each Man,” 21.

Amidst these changes, the hunting way of life continued to expose and elicit fundamental choices between self-control and control of others, perception of reality and manipulation of reality, egotism and reciprocity, alienation and relationship. The proper approach to power remained grounded in acceptance rather than rejection of one's contingent and limited being and knowledge, in humility rather than arrogance. Human power remained defined by self-control rather than "the ability to control others, although it may be used to that end on occasion." It was "based on active participation" and reciprocity with human and other-than-human persons rather than manipulation of them.<sup>160</sup> It was benevolent rather than malevolent. It sought to unbind the rope of mystery rather than manipulate it. In this respect, Cree ideals of mental and moral competence, the antithesis of the *wihtiko*, remained consistent. Changes in Cree perceptions of their contingent world were not so profound as they may at first appear. Moreover, there appears to have been continuity in their ideals of how one should relate to this contingent world, a continuity that was largely in confluence with many of the core Christian ideas and ideals that they made their own.

Cultural continuity, at a deeper level, is not opposed to change, but may in fact embrace it. The cultural model implicit in the forgoing pages suggests, in fact, that such cultural continuity or integrity is intimately linked to mental and moral competence. Both depend on an ongoing quest for unity between the constitutive elements of culture: understanding, experience, and action. This unity, moreover, depends upon change as much as constancy. Given the larger question of this thesis, and the nature of the *wihtiko* as the antithesis of mental and moral

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<sup>160</sup> Feit, "Dreaming of Animals," 303.

competence, it is worth closing this chapter by explicitly articulating this model of culture and cultural change.<sup>161</sup>

### DEFINING CULTURAL CHANGE & DIFFERENCE

Differences between cultures cannot be understood independently of differences within cultures. In every culture, there are varying degrees of unity and tension between experience, understanding and action – the constitutive elements of culture – and objective extra-mental reality. As Salzman writes, “culture is [and needs to be, I would add,] integrated into a whole that tends toward consistency.” Conversely, Rieff writes that the “death of a culture begins when its normative institutions fail to communicate ideals in ways that remain inwardly compelling.”<sup>162</sup> We and our cultures suffer if our understanding of reality conflicts with our experience of it, if we consistently fail to act as we understand we should, or if we rarely experience the results realized or intended by our actions. In other words, mental and moral competence is largely dependent on an ability, freedom and willingness to seek unity between: a) understanding of reality and experience of it, b) experience of reality and action on it, and c) action on reality and understanding of it.

A competent relationship between understanding, experience and action must revolve around reality. It must be immersed in conversation with “the grandeur of reason incarnate in existence which, in its depths, is inaccessible” even if the “eternal mystery of the world is its

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<sup>161</sup> The definition proposed here stems from grappling with historical problems of cultural difference and change, and only secondarily from engaging in theoretical literature.

<sup>162</sup> Philip Salzman, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction to Anthropological Theory* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2001), 69; Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 18.

comprehensibility.”<sup>163</sup> It is through imperfect understandings that incomplete experiences continue to inform and reform what remain imperfect understandings. Culture is like an iceberg: only a small part of it is explicitly articulated. Much of it is incomplete and implicit, below the surface of our actions and modes of experience, where many contradictions may remain undiscovered and unresolved. Culture is also embedded in the limitations and particularities of language and ideology. Ideology, to draw on its etymology rather than its Marxist definition, is a reasoning (λογος – logos) of forms (ιδεα – ideai) without which we cannot form reasons. Because no human person can engage with the fullness of reality, we are constantly faced with understandings, experiences and actions that challenge our own.

Our actions, experiences and understandings are not formed in isolation from, or in complete unity with, others or our environment.<sup>164</sup> Contact and contingency are at the origin of our being and remain a part of it. These words 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. Insofar as we “bathe together” with others in the same river of reality, we form a common culture: shared understandings (from how to use a fork to the nature of divinity) grounded and expressed in shared experience and action.

Nevertheless, the “‘culture’ of a group as a whole is not a true reality. ... the individual is the bearer of culture” writes Edward Sapir.<sup>165</sup> We are “individuals-in-culture,” as Preston puts it,

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<sup>163</sup> Albert Einstein, “Personal God Concept Causes Science-Religion Conflict,” *The Science News-Letter*, 38, no. 12 (September 21, 1940): 182.

<sup>164</sup> Richard Preston, “Reflections on Culture, History and Authenticity,” in *Theorizing the Americanist Tradition*, ed. Lisa Phillips Valentine and Regna Darnell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 159.

<sup>165</sup> Edward Sapir, *The Collected Works of Edward Sapir*, Volume 3: Culture, ed. Regna Darnell, Judith T. Irvine and Richard Handler (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 545.

or distinct cultural persons-in-relation.<sup>166</sup> We may bathe together in the same river of reality, but we are distinctly cultured – formed and informed. We cannot *separate*, but we must *distinguish* everyone from the cultural contexts they participate in through their relationships. Among cultural persons-in-relation there are varying degrees of tension and unity, both within generations and between them.<sup>167</sup> Likewise, shared understandings may hide, as suggested earlier, behind apparent differences, language barriers, political polarization, racial constructs, etc.; conversely, deeper cultural differences may hide behind apparent similarities.

To speak of cultures as independent entities, therefore, is to speak of clusters of shared understandings that are held and renegotiated by persons-in-relation. These clusters constitute a cultural mass or a cultural centre of gravity. Within a cultural centre of gravity, some understandings are closer to the core and others are more peripheral. Our cultural centres of gravity include fundamental cosmological, ontological, epistemological and moral intuitions, ideas and ideals. Although we can participate in numerous cultural centres of gravity simultaneously, some of them take precedence, defining the terms of intercultural dialogue and intracultural change.

Cultural change may be evolutionary or revolutionary. Cultural evolution involves changes that have only minimal or gradual impact on our cultural centre of gravity. Cultural revolution, in contrast, involves significant paradigm shifts that change or displace our cultural centre of gravity. To echo Kuhn's theory of scientific revolution, two cultural centres of gravity or fundamental paradigms can sometimes only be bridged by simultaneously deconstructing one while constructing or adopting the other.<sup>168</sup> It is a risk that few may venture to take unless the new paradigm promises a greater unity of experience, understanding and action than the old

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<sup>166</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 76.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>168</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

paradigm. If the promise of the new can be perceived from the perspective of the old, however, it suggests a more fundamental commonality or continuity.

Cultural commonality or continuity, at its most basic, may consist in the quest for unity of understanding, experience, and action. As Ratzinger observes, this quest may lead to “perceptions and values being deepened and purified,” or it “may lead to a profound reshaping of ... [a] culture’s previous form.” Yet this “does not necessarily involve any kind of violation or alienation.”<sup>169</sup> In contrast, maintaining or imposing a uniformity of culture across time – or space – may involve a profound violation of one’s deepest cultural centre of gravity. When unity between understanding and experience leads to an *internal* demand for change, for example, the refusal to do so may undermine the quest for cultural integrity, just as bending to an *external* demand for change can do the same. Both may lead to the suffering and death of a culture or an “individual-in-culture.”

Citing the *wihtiko* as an example, Green observed in 1948 that “anthropologists with a psychological bent are unanimous: that standards of normality are relevant only within a given cultural system.”<sup>170</sup> Cree standards of normality are inversely highlighted by the *wihtiko*. The next chapter confirms that these standards of normality need to be culturally contextualized. However, for standards of normality or abnormality to be relevant *only* within a given cultural system, cultures would have to be what they are not. They would have to be self-contained entities, with experiences, understandings and actions that may be logically interconnected but lack unity with any shared extra-mental reality or common humanity. As the next chapter also shows, such self-containment is precisely what defines the *wihtiko*’s inversion of Cree standards of normality.

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<sup>169</sup> Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 63.

<sup>170</sup> Arnold W. Green, “Culture, Normality, and Personality Conflict,” *American Anthropologist* 50, no. 2 (April-June 1948): 225-226.

## CHAPTER 2

### *WIHTIKO* IN CREE & OTHER ALGONQUIAN CULTURES

#### NORTH-BOUND WIHTIKO

In 1859, Louis Brooks recounted “Adventures with a Chenoo, or *Northman*,” a Mi’kmaq story told by his grandfather, Chief Samuel Paul (born 1763). It tells of a couple and their young son who “went one fall *far away toward the northwest*, ... to hunt and trap.” There, ostensibly in Montagnais, Atikamekw or Cree territory, they met a *Chenoo*:

One day, [the woman] ... observed an unusual commotion among the bushes ... and ... an object that caused her heart to thrill with horror; it seemed part human, part beast, part demon. It was of the size and form of an old man, stark naked and with a hideous countenance; his lips ... seemed to have been gnawed away ... From what she had heard of the terrible Chenoo *from the north*, she concluded he was one of that horrid tribe, a cannibal, and that he would surely kill and devour her.<sup>1</sup>

As Cooper later observed, “The Micmac Chenoo is obviously identical with the Cree Witiko. ... The very name Chenoo seems to be identical with the Montagnais and Tête-de-Boule [*Atikamekw*] (Cree) name, *Atcen*, for the Witiko.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1661, as recounted earlier, Montagnais guides informed Jesuit missionaries of a strange ailment that they alleged was not uncommon among the people of James and Hudson Bay, leading to insane and murderous cannibalism.<sup>3</sup> Just over 250 years later, Canadian officials responded to allegations of starvation and cannibalism among these same people with a report that began with reference to the *wihtiko* phenomenon:

The myths which have survived to the present day speak of a tribe of cannibals which was believed by the Chippewas and Ottawas to inhabit an island in Hudson Bay. This tribe was

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis added. This story was transcribed by Silas T. Rand, *Legends of the Micmacs* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1894), 297, 308.

<sup>2</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko Psychosis,” 23.

<sup>3</sup> Gabriel Druilletes and Claude Dablon, Nekouba to Jérôme Lalement, July 2, 1661, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 46: 261-263.

called Wendigo and this term is now used to describe an insane person who has a tendency to commit murder and to devour the flesh of his victim.<sup>4</sup>

The *wihtiko*, with its heart of ice, is usually associated with the north and is said to retreat north or weaken in warm seasons, losing its power in the south.<sup>5</sup> This association points to the increased risk of starvation in northern winters, but it may also point to the geographic origin and predominance of the *wihtiko* phenomenon itself. Cuthand, a Plains Cree scholar and Anglican minister, believes that there were many more *wihtiko* stories among the northern Cree than among his own people.<sup>6</sup> Iroquoian neighbours of the subarctic Algonquian have a tradition of “blood-thirsty cannibal giants” who come *from the north*, suggesting cross-pollination with Algonquian tradition. Although this other-than-human phenomenon does not include human possession or transformation, its physical name and description, “Stone Coats” resembles neighbouring *Atikamekw* depictions of *wihtikowak* that would cover themselves in tree resin and roll in sand and stones.<sup>7</sup> In the south, the *wihtiko* and its variants are more often depicted as other-than-human monsters of gigantic and mythic proportions. In the north, in contrast, the origins and proportions of the *wihtiko* seem to be more human.<sup>8</sup> This may reflect variation in Algonquian cosmologies or the stunted growth of northern vegetation, but it may also reflect a tendency for stories of strange and fearful human experiences to adopt more monstrous and mythic proportions as they move further from their origins. Such a tendency is evident in Euroamerican popular literature’s fascination with the *wihtiko*, and may explain the origin and scale of Iroquoian Stone-Coat cannibal giants. It may also explain Cuthand’s comment in 1988: “I knew of the mythical being, the Wihtikow, but to the northerners, the Wihtikow was not just a

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<sup>4</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG 10, vol. 3174, file 432,659.

<sup>5</sup> Teicher, “Wendigo Psychosis” (1960), 3, 56; Cooper, “Cree Witiko Psychosis,” 23-24; Morrison, “Towards a History,” 56.

<sup>6</sup> Cuthand, “On Nelson’s Text,” in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 193.

<sup>7</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 23.

<sup>8</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 58. By “mythic” proportions, I mean to say that they acquired more than a literal meaning, not that they were reduced to “mere” fiction (a more limited sense of myth).

mythical being. It was a malevolent spirit which was very much alive and sort of lying in wait all the time.”<sup>9</sup>

As Smith observes, the *wihtiko* phenomenon was sufficiently diffused among Algonquian peoples by early contact that there can be little doubt of its pre-contact origins.<sup>10</sup> The sparse historical evidence suggests that it originated in the north, among the Cree and their subarctic Algonquian neighbours, but the nature of the *wihtiko* phenomenon itself provides additional evidence of subarctic origins.

Drawing primarily on oral traditions and ethnographies, this chapter takes a somewhat ahistorical look at the *wihtiko* phenomenon, with continued emphasis on the James Bay Cree, but not to the exclusion of other subarctic Algonquians. It examines *wihtiko* types, origins, causes, traits and treatments. In the absence of adequate historical evidence, it also analyzes the nature of the *wihtiko* phenomenon in order to probe the darkness of its pre-contact development and diversification. Post-contact developments are revealed in later chapters, which draw on firmer evidence to examine changes and variations in European encounters with the *wihtiko*, as well as their attempts to both understand and control it.

## **TYPES, ORIGINS & CAUSES**

“Witiko is said to be terrifying in appearance, although there is no consensus on details,” say Flannery, Chambers and Jehle.<sup>11</sup> It is sometimes depicted as a gigantic “awesome and grotesque creature, some twenty to thirty feet tall.”<sup>12</sup> Others describe it as more human in

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<sup>9</sup> Cuthand, “On Nelson’s Text,” in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 193.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, “Notes on Witiko,” 31-34; Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 338.

<sup>11</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57.

<sup>12</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 2-3.

proportion.<sup>13</sup> It often “wears no clothes,” or may cover itself with resin and roll in sand and rocks, or be dishevelled in appearance.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes it appears as an ice skeleton.<sup>15</sup> Some *wihtikowak* have “eyes [that] are protuberant” and “roll in blood.” It is also said to have a “frightening and menacing mouth, wholly devoid of lips” – having eaten them itself in its insatiable hunger – and “tremendous, jagged teeth through which his breath flows with a sinister hissing, making a loud and eerie noise, audible for miles.” Some describe its voice as “strident and frightful, more reverberating than thunder,” making “a long, drawn-out sound, accompanied by fearful howls which cause people to flee in mortal terror” or may paralyze them. Some say its “feet are almost a yard in length, with long, pointed heels and only one toe, the great toe” and its “hands are hideous with claw-like fingers and fingernails.”<sup>16</sup> Its “enormous strength” may be so great that it “can brush aside the great pine-trees as an ordinary man does the grass of the prairies.”<sup>17</sup> Others say it is “a giant in height only ... [not] in girth and strength”; in fact, its insatiable appetite and continued growth keeps it “on the verge of starvation.” The more it eats the larger it grows and the more it wants and needs, to the point that it eats not only human flesh, but almost anything, including “rotten wood, swamp moss, mushrooms.”<sup>18</sup>

Most of these physical traits refer to a monstrous, gigantic and superhuman *Wihitiko*. Almost all *wihtiko* traditions include such a superhuman variation, the origin of which is unclear, but all also speak of more diminutive *wihtikowak* that are equally terrifying because they were clearly once human. Although Teicher does not explicitly articulate this distinction, the stories found in his seminal 1956 study make it clear.<sup>19</sup> Teicher’s extensive collection and analysis of

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<sup>13</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57; Smith, “Notes on Witiko,” 25-26.

<sup>14</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Norman, *Where the Chill*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Merasty, in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 3; Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57; Young, *Stories*, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 222-223; Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 2-3.

*wihtiko* stories, however, is a melting pot heavily weighted towards Anishinabe (Ojibwa-Saulteaux) stories. As Flannery, Chambers and Jehle point out, “analyses based on this body of material have tended to obscure ... differences between the Ojibwa and Eastern Cree Witiko belief systems.”<sup>20</sup>

Although Teicher cites several explanations for the origin of the *wihtiko*, he does not specify their precise Algonquian origins: ““God made [it] ..., like any other beings;” it was “created out of a dream by a sorcerer and sent forth into the world to perform malevolent acts;” it “represent[ed] ... all those who have died of starvation;” or it was “a human being who was transformed into his superhuman state of sorcery.”<sup>21</sup> This latter explanation is the most frequently held, writes Teicher, but Cooper’s 1933 article, referenced in support, does not cite this as an explanation of the original *Wihtiko*. Cooper distinguishes human beings who turn *wihtiko* from the original “superhuman” *Wihtiko*, but offers no assessment of the latter’s origins.<sup>22</sup> Better support for an origin in sorcery is given by Johnston, who speaks of “men and women becoming Weendigoes,” but cites one Ojibwa explanation of the first *Wihtiko* as a starving human who gained the power to transform other humans into beavers so that he could kill and eat them.<sup>23</sup> Yet Johnston also refers to the “Weendigo ... [as] a giant manitou in the form of a man or a woman,” a description consistent with the conception of *manitu* as a cosmic force embodied or manifested in a plurality of supernatural beings – some benevolent, others

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<sup>20</sup> Only six of Teicher’s 31 “folktales” are Cree and only ten of his 70 historical incidents are Cree. Of the latter, only five are from the Eastern Cree (one of them is labelled Montagnais-Naskapi, but it is from Eastmain), the rest being from “Western or Plains Cree” origin. Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57-58. See also: Bishop, “Northern Algonkian,” 237.

<sup>21</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 21.

<sup>23</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 221-224; Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*, 166-167, cited in Patrick Laflèche, “A Case Study in Anishinaabe Medicine and its History of Suppression” (unpublished paper, 2010), 11.

ambivalent or malevolent.<sup>24</sup> Overall, Anishinabe tradition appears to place more emphasis on the gigantic size of the *Wihtiko manitu*, whether originally human or not.

Ojibwa ambivalence about the origin and scale of the supernatural *Wihtiko* is paralleled in Cree tradition. Limited early European records suggest that the Northern Ojibwa's Cree neighbours, in western James and Hudson Bay, believed in a malevolent supernatural *Wihtiko*, but it was opposed to a singular benevolent *Manitu*.<sup>25</sup> Recent Cree accounts from the western woodlands and the northwestern Hudson Bay watershed emphasize the human origins and scale of the *wihtiko*, but not to the exclusion of grotesque transformations.<sup>26</sup> “Although human in form and origin,” explains Savage (referring to Saskatchewan narratives), “the Wetiko was both less and more than an ordinary person.”<sup>27</sup> Makidemewabe (of Manitoba) concurs: “Windigos were all once persons. But once they begin to go Windigo, it gets worse and worse.”<sup>28</sup> He recounts how one man grew into a giant *wihtiko*, but recovered when the giant – said to be gaining possession of him – was killed. Some elders state that the two forms can be “metamorphic counterparts” of the same person.<sup>29</sup>

Reflecting in 1981 on the *wihtiko* stories she and John Cooper collected half a century previously,<sup>30</sup> Flannery states that their James Bay Cree “informants ... made a clear distinction

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<sup>24</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, xviii-xix, 221-224.

<sup>25</sup> See discussion at the beginning of Chapter Three.

<sup>26</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57; Smith, “Notes on Witiko,” 25-26; Preston, “Ethnographic Reconstruction,” 61.

<sup>27</sup> Savage, ed., in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Makidemewabe in Norman, *Where the Chill*, 5, 129, 105. Samuel Makidemewabe was from Hayes River, Manitoba.

<sup>29</sup> Norman, *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> In their article on “Witiko Accounts from the James Bay Cree,” Flannery, Chambers and Jehle examine a number of stories collected by Flannery and Cooper between 1932 and 1938, around James Bay, in Attawapiskat, Albany, Moose Factory, Fort George, Eastmain, and Rupert's House. The only additional historical incidents that they were aware of when writing this article, besides the five Eastern Cree cases cited by Teicher, are mentioned by Bishop (two 18<sup>th</sup> century incidents recorded in HBC archival documents, one at Fort Severn on Hudson Bay, the other at Albany); by Smith (a 1741 case at Churchill, Manitoba), and a circa-1880 incident reported by Preston. “These plus our 12 historical cases from James Bay, increase the total of Cree cases to 27, of which 19 are Eastern [i.e. not Western or Plains] Cree.” Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57-58.

between Witiko, a supernatural cannibal being with anthropomorphic characteristics and witiko, a human who develops cannibalistic cravings.”<sup>31</sup> According to Flannery and her coauthors, the supernatural *Wihitiko* was more of a “folklore being.”<sup>32</sup> However prevalent it was in *atalohkana* (folklore), it was not necessarily less real or frightening.<sup>33</sup> As with the Ojibwa, it is not clear whether the supernatural *Wihitiko* was also once human – like some of the animal guardian spirits – but was subsequently so completely corrupted that only a monstrous human appearance remained. Some James Bay Cree explain that “God made them [*wihitikowak*], like any other beings.”<sup>34</sup> Other James Bay Cree accounts suggest that this is only because humans were made with a capacity to lose their humanity or “go *wihitiko*.”

In the 1930s, Cree elders Harvey Small, Patrick Stevens and Frank Rickard told Cooper three versions of a *wihitiko* origin story under two titles: “Why there are so many Witikos” (Smallboy) and “When all the Cannibals lived together” (Stevens and Rickards). They echo legends of an original “windigo” tribe, but one that quickly disintegrated. “In olden times,” says Smallboy, “two or three families always lived together. Once there were a few families living along a lake. There was a Witiko looking for human victims and he was heading to where the

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 57. This is mostly consistent with Cooper’s own observations, decades earlier, relating to the original *Wihitiko* and human *wihitikowak*. Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 21. Flannery refers to a “supernatural” *Wihitiko*, but Cooper refers to a “superhuman” *Wihitiko* suggesting human origins.

<sup>32</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57. Flannery et al. distinguish between three categories of *wihitiko* stories: “Category A, *Atalokan*, Tales of Primeval Times, and category B, *Tebatchimowin*, Long Ago Stories, are both categories of folklore. The third category, C, comprises historic witiko incidents.” They further divide the stories as follows: “AI, *atalokan*: Tales of Primeval Times about Witiko; AII, *atalokan*: Tales of Primeval Times about witikos; BI, *tebatcimowin*, Long Ago Stories about Witiko; BII, *tebatcimowin*, Long Ago Stories about witikos; CI, Historical witiko incidents; CII, Historical incidents involving “White Men.” Some stories, they point out, were difficult to categorize, which confirms that it is best to see a continuum between two categories, *atalohkana* and *tipachimowina* (plural forms), where *tipachimowina* may be more recent or more historical, but are considered literally factual as opposed to merely metaphorically valid. Regardless, write Flannery et al., the “events recorded in the *atalokan* and *tebatcimowin* are believed by the Eastern Cree to be as authentic as those in the narratives which we label historical.” *Ibid.*, 57-59.

<sup>33</sup> Flannery et al., 57. Writing in 1933, John Cooper comments that the *wihitiko* – in both its giant and more human forms – “is greatly dreaded by the [James Bay] Cree, even today and among those who are in other respects much Europeanized.” Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 21

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 3.

families were camped.” He found one Indian. Knowing he was being followed, the Indian tied brush together in the shape of a man and placed it on his own trail:

The Witiko thought the Indian was a moose and when the Witiko came to the tied-up brush he thought, “I have caught the Indian at last and he is dead.” So the Witiko put his carrying strap around the brush and carried it home. Later the Witiko came to the tents where the families were staying. The people said, “He is carrying a bundle of brush.” The Witiko said, “Brush? This is not brush. This is the moose I was after.” They went to work, opened up the bundle, and found it was only brush. So the Witiko knew that he had not killed the Indian after all. So the Witiko went off again following the same Indian’s trail.

The man continued to outwit and avoid the *wihtiko*, sometimes in rather comical ways. At one point, the *wihtiko* caught up with the man, who was now bent over from exhaustion with his bottom sticking up; after feeling the man’s bare bottom – through his breeches – the *wihtiko* exclaimed: “This is a strange looking stump. The Indian must have been rubbing on this. It is quite warm.” He then passed on, believing the man to be ahead of him. When, after nightfall, the man had to urinate and then defecate from the tree in which he had sought refuge, the *wihtiko* – now below him – thought the urine was coming from the clouds and that the ‘moose’ was in the sky. Finally, the following morning, the *wihtiko* spied the man in the tree and began to shoot arrows at him, but the man called out: “Do not fire at your moose. You will lose his blood.” The *wihtiko* listened and began to climb the tree instead, at which point, using one final trick, the man succeeded in spearing the *wihtiko* in the back of its neck with the bone spear he had been carrying. “The Witiko fell down as though he were dead, but then stood up and headed home.” The families at his camp then tried unsuccessfully to remove the spear. Finally, the oldest and ‘wisest’ among them told the others to heat the spear and drive it through rather than pull it out. They did this, and the *wihtiko* fell dead as a result. “All of the people in the tent started to weep for the Witiko.” Then the ‘wise’ person among them instructed the others to have the *Wihitiko*’s wife cook him so they could all eat him.

This was done. After they finished eating everyone started to cry and walk off from the tent in different directions. All these Witikos kept going. This was the last of them. They all turned into Witikos and that is why there are so many Witikos all around the world now.<sup>35</sup>

In this account, the *wihtiko* is identified as such right from the start, but the others in his camp, with whom he was intermarried if not also related by blood, do not go *wihtiko* until the very end. Until then, they are referred to as human persons, suggesting the first *wihtiko* was also once human. The first camp to which the *wihtiko* returned with the bundle of brush appears to be the same camp to which he later returned. Regardless, the *wihtiko* did not confuse these people with food-animals; moreover, they helped him to see that he was only carrying brush. And the narrator says that the *wihtiko* knew then that “he had not killed the *Indian* after all.” Both points suggest he was in the process of becoming a *wihtiko*. Once he was killed and eaten, however, all those in the camp were then obliged to depart in different directions. In killing and eating him, they too became *wihtikowak*, losing their capacity for relationship and their very humanity through such extreme mental and moral incompetence.

Patrick Stevens’ story is shorter, omitting the part about the bundle of brush and the first return to camp. It begins by referring to the *wihtiko* and all the members of his camp as cannibals: “They say the cannibals have a place where they all live together.”<sup>36</sup> If these cannibals started off with a “place where they all live together,” they ended up with their relationship completely disintegrated as a result of their cannibalism. The conclusion of Stevens’ account is even more explicit on this point than that of Smallboy: “The cannibals said, “The first two who

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<sup>35</sup> Harvey Smallboy, “Why There Are So Many Witikos,” in Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59-60.

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Stevens, “When all the Cannibals lived together” in *ibid.*, 60-61. Rickard’s story is practically identical to Stevens’ version, except that he uses the term *wihtikowak* instead of cannibals right from the start. This difference may only be a difference in the translation, or rather, the interpretation, which was done simultaneously in the 1930s. The Cree versions were not recorded. Frank Rickard, “When All the Cannibals Lived Together,” in *ibid.*, 61.

meet will have a fight and the one who is beaten is the one we will eat next time.”<sup>37</sup> Stevens’ account appears to begin *in media res*, in the middle of things, when the disintegration of their humanity and their community, and their transformation into *wihtikowak*, is underway but incomplete. They were what Bird calls “half-wihtigo[s],” still capable of living in community – albeit a fragile one – at least until they became full-fledged *wihtikowak*.<sup>38</sup>

Bird, who has amassed the largest collection of western James Bay Cree *wihtiko* stories in recent decades, sums up the ambiguity of these accounts: “Wihtigo. It was something that happened among humans. It means an other-than-human was created from an ordinary human [of either sex and any age] – and sometimes maybe not. There is a question there. There were many kinds.”<sup>39</sup> Most kinds of *wihtikowak* listed by Bird were once human, but he also refers to others that were never human: “Other wihtigos are not understood – it is not known where they came from. One of those is our famous friend the Sasquatch – Big Foot, you name it. These are also in the wihtigo category – they are other-than-human but they were never humans.”<sup>40</sup> This may reflect a recent expansion of the *wihtiko* category similar to the *mistabeo* category.

Despite a lack of consensus or certainty on the nature and origin of the supernatural *Wihtiko*, it is the nature and transformation of the once-human *wihtiko* that matters most. The superhuman *Wihtiko* seems to exist primarily to account for the traits that human beings acquire when either possessed by it, or transformed into it. As explained below, this difference is not insignificant. Referring to the *wihtiko manitu*, Johnston says that it “represented ... the worst that

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<sup>37</sup> Rickard’s version says the same: “When they finished eating him [the witiko] they said, “We will all have to go off different ways, no two together. After we go off,” they said, “if two meet, they will have to fight and if one murders the other, the murdered one will be eaten and will be our next feed.” *Ibid.* Teicher concurs: “they do not live together as married couples; on the contrary, each windigo is a solitary being. If two of them should happen to meet, then the Indians believe that a violent battle ensues and the one who wins eats the loser.” Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 2.

<sup>38</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 114. Both men and women are susceptible to wihtiko possession and transformation, and so are physically capable people of any age. Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 108.

<sup>39</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 112.

<sup>40</sup> Bird, *Spriti Lives*, 112.

a human can do to another human being and ultimately to himself or herself.”<sup>41</sup> If the origin of the first *wihtiko* and of evil in the world was an open question, the nature of evil itself was more clearly manifested in the causes, symptoms, traits and treatments of the *wihtiko* phenomenon.

According to Bird, the most common *wihtiko* “was created by starvation – humans starved, went crazy, and ate human flesh.”<sup>42</sup> Likewise, most of the historical *wihtiko* narratives recorded by Flannery and Cooper happened in the context of starvation.<sup>43</sup> The Cree believed, elaborates Bird, that

if a person experienced a shortage of food for some time, he lost his mind and that led him to have a delusion where he saw humans as animals to eat. To fill his stomach, he ate human flesh – he was already crazy – and he never regained his right mind. His mind was destroyed and he would always crave human flesh, even after the famine was over.<sup>44</sup>

Other stories, discussed below, clarify that going *wihtiko* was not an inevitable consequence of famine, but if it occurred, the destruction did not stop with the mind. It culminated where it originated, with the body. As Merasty elaborates,

Becoming a Wetiko involved a change of appetite: once a person had eaten human flesh, he found other foods distasteful. His appearance changed, until one glimpse could terrify a victim into helplessness. In the first place, a Wetiko lost the instinct to keep clean: its hair was long, shaggy, matted and full of dirt or whatever else would stick to it; its body went unwashed; its teeth discolored; its finger- and toe-nails grew long and broke off. Its clothes were dirty, smelly and sometimes so tattered the Wetiko roamed almost naked through the wilderness.<sup>45</sup>

The complete loss of one’s mind, a dishevelled appearance and erratic behaviour were symptoms of late or final stages of *wihtiko* possession or transformation. It was best to detect the

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<sup>41</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 222.

<sup>42</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 115; Cooper “Cree Witiko,” 21; Merasty, in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 1; Laflèche, “Case Study,” 12.

<sup>43</sup> “Of the 12 individuals who were the subjects of our ‘true’ witiko accounts, eight were known to have actually been cannibals.” Only two of these eight individuals are described as extremely malicious individuals who were not under pressure of starvation. Three of these eight cases involved starvation cannibalism where the victims were not killed, but died of natural causes. In these cases the cannibalism was “apparently a one-time event with no subsequent craving for human flesh.” In one case, a man was cured. The remaining four individuals (of the initial twelve mentioned above) “were feared to be on the verge of killing in order to survive.” In only one case was a craving developed and then actualized. Flannery, et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 58.

<sup>44</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 115. See also Ahenakew, cited in Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 123.

<sup>45</sup> Merasty, in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 3.

*wihtiko* threat in advance so one could flee, treat, or destroy the *wihtiko*, especially since it most often occurred in family contexts. As Regina Flannery points out about the *wihtiko* stories she and John Cooper collected in James Bay in the 1930s, “the victims and cannibals are most frequently family members.”<sup>46</sup> Teicher made the same point about the stories he collected from across North America a few decades later: “Of the forty-four cases where [non-violent or violent] cannibalism occurred, members of the immediate family were eaten in thirty-six cases.”<sup>47</sup> Caution was heightened in wintertime, when isolation and the threat of starvation were more acute, and the *wihtiko* was deemed more powerful.<sup>48</sup> When someone was only a “half-wihtiko” or less, one could detect symptoms of a *wihtiko* threat, such as despondency, loss of hope, social withdrawal, delirium, or refusal to eat normal food.<sup>49</sup> Some of the worst *wihtikowak* were more difficult to detect, for they also ate normal food, appeared to be in control of their mental faculties and capable of social interaction, and were a threat outside famine contexts.<sup>50</sup>

Starvation and cannibalism were seen as the primary but not exclusive catalysts of the *wihtiko* phenomenon. Teicher argues that the evidence he collected points to cannibalism as an important component that *follows* an individual’s identification – by himself or others – as a case of “windigo psychosis.”<sup>51</sup> It is significant that fears, threats, apprehensions, allegations or acts of cannibalism almost invariably precede or follow the diagnosis of *wihtiko* possession or

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<sup>46</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59.

<sup>47</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 109. The victims in all but one of the other cases, where a “friend” was the victim, were not identified by the narrators.

<sup>48</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59; Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 56.

<sup>49</sup> Sarah John of Fort George tells of one story: “He had a bundle on his back and they took it from him and they found that he had the fingers of all those he had been killing. They took him back to their camp. They were boiling the beaver they had killed in a big kettle. . . . The people gave the young man something to eat and he did not eat it. They gave him something to drink and he did not drink it. They called him Atuc.” John, “Atuc Carries Fingers of Victims,” in Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 68. Robert Bell, “The ‘Medicine-Man’; Or Indian and Eskimo Notions of Medicine,” *Canada Medical and Surgical Journal* 14, no. 9 (March-April, 1886; reprinted, Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1886), 1; Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 56-61.

<sup>50</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 62.

<sup>51</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 109. He points out that in 26 of the 70 *wihtiko* cases he identified, no actual cannibalism was said to have occurred.

transformation. It suggests that the *wihtiko* originated to explain violent cannibalism that occurred in times of starvation, as well as the repercussions on the mental and moral competence of those who resorted to even non-violent cannibalism.<sup>52</sup>

Fears associated with the consequences of even non-violent famine cannibalism were grounded in a belief that it predisposed people towards violent *wihtiko* cannibalism. It is said that those who had engaged in non-violent famine cannibalism often “had a ‘strange look’ in their eyes and had to be watched.”<sup>53</sup> If starvation threatened them again, it may have been difficult to reject the temptation to see human flesh as edible or to kill to make it available. It is also possible that the trauma of resorting to repulsive means of self-preservation weakened their mental and emotional stability, especially when the threat of starvation loomed again. If the *wihtiko* belief clearly strengthened the resolve of someone to avoid even non-violent starvation cannibalism, it also exacerbated the stress of those who had already bent the taboo in this way, for they faced a heightened threat of *wihtiko* possession or transformation. If again faced with starvation, they did not only have to resist the temptation to procure human flesh by violent means; they also had to resist a malevolent being that many believed now had greater power over them.<sup>54</sup> This stress could be compounded if they were subject to suspicion or ostracization on account of past behaviour and heightened symptoms of stress.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 224. Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 112-115; John J. Honigmann, *Personality in Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 399.

<sup>53</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 70-71. This is what Flannery and Cooper’s Cree “informants frequently stated” about those who resorted to cannibalism. See also Ahenakew, cited in Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 123.

<sup>54</sup> See Johann Georg Kohl, *Kitchi-gami: Wanderings Round Lake Superior*, trans. Lascelles Wraxall (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1985; first published in English in 1860; first published in German in 1859), 357 & 364. See Chapter Five for more details of this example.

<sup>55</sup> See the case reported by Chrestien Le Clerq in 1680, cited in Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 70-71 (quoted in Chapter Three). See also Kohl, *Kitchi-gami*, 356-357 (quoted in Chapter Five), and Hearne, cited in Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 388 (quoted in Chapter Six).

As Lombo points out, those who face a struggle of the will sometimes give in rather than cope with the anxiety of an uncertain result or an ongoing struggle.<sup>56</sup> This is precisely the sort of fatalism and loss of hope – according to Brightman, Carlson and Carlson – that helps explain the *wihtiko* phenomenon.<sup>57</sup> Under increasing duress, those who gave up hope of resisting the *wihtiko* might adopt – consciously or not – the identity and behaviour of the monster they most feared becoming, even if they did not “go all the way.” Such fatalism might hide a plea for treatment or a mercy killing that seemed the last hope of preventing the double harm of *wihtiko* possession and attack. Alternatively, it might be an attempt to lessen, or pre-emptively overcome, the guilt associated with breaking a severe moral injunction against violent cannibalism or another deviant act.<sup>58</sup>

The *wihtiko* appears to have originated to explain the severe loss of mental and moral competence that preceded, accompanied or followed violent cannibalism. Nevertheless, the stories suggest the *wihtiko* concept was subsequently adopted to account for other deviant behaviours involving similarly extreme examples of mental and moral incompetence, even if cannibalism was not at their origin. It was sometimes used to account for a wide array of symptoms associated with the beginnings of *wihtiko* possession or transformation, including forms of delirium, despondency, mania, and depression. “In the old days, the elders say, the Indians knew no serious illnesses. But at times something else appeared amongst the people and killed them. ... The Wetiko was the only sickness.”<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, because it was the most

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<sup>56</sup> Jose Angel Lombo, personal communication, summer 2011. Lombo is a philosophical anthropologist who specializes in the relationship between neuroscience and moral philosophy.

<sup>57</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 337, 354, 363, 372; Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 57; Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 378.

<sup>58</sup> See Cooper, “Windigo Psychosis,” 21.

<sup>59</sup> Merasty, in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 1.

common catalyst and manifestation of the *wihtiko* sickness, violent cannibalism was feared as the culmination of almost all *wihtiko* phenomena, regardless of their diverse origins and natures.

As Hallowell and Teicher point out, the *wihtiko* belief coloured the manifestation and interpretation of more generic failures of mental and moral competence. This mutually reinforcing pattern of experience, understanding and action would have grown stronger as its origins faded from memory and legend.<sup>60</sup> If *wihtiko* symptoms were no longer limited to famine contexts, neither were *wihtiko* fears. This could conceivably lead to fatalistic role-play of the *wihtiko* for the reasons outlined above.<sup>61</sup> Even if there is little evidence that it ever resulted in violent non-starvation cannibalism, such role-play would have involved expression or fear of cannibalistic desires associated with the *wihtiko*.

Similarly, if *wihtiko* symptoms or behaviour could manifest themselves outside contexts of famine or acts of cannibalism, then other explanations had to be found for these cases. Even when starvation remained a catalyst, it was sometimes attributed to abandonment by an offended spirit-helper or the machinations of a malevolent power. An evil shaman, for example, could interfere with another's hunt or create a famine to drive a victim to cannibalism, turning him

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<sup>60</sup> Although Teicher refers to the windigo psychosis as culturally specific, he elsewhere makes it clear that a wide variety of issues found among people of any culture were simply channelled through the cultural understanding of the *wihtiko*. Teicher, "Windigo Psychosis" (1960), 380-383. Speaking of the impact of belief on behaviour with regard to the *wihtiko*, Teicher emphasizes underlying "conditions of mental instability." Teicher, "Windigo Psychosis" (1960), 1; A.I. Hallowell "Culture and Mental Disorder," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 29 (1934): 2-8; A.I. Hallowell, "Fear and Anxiety as Cultural and Individual Variables in a Primitive Society," *Journal of Social Psychology* 9, no. 1 (February 1938): 1309.

<sup>61</sup> A newspaper article about Anglican Bishop George Holmes describes how, as a younger missionary, he once "took charge of a Weetigo or Weendigo Indian, in order to protect him from relatives who sought to take his life. The man believed himself to be a cannibal, for in some strange way the idea had been suggested to him. After a time the hallucination passed away and the man returned to the camp." "The Hero Priests of the North," *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 25, 2011, 8, cited in Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 364, and endnote 44 (note the typographical error regarding the date). See also Vandersteene's first-hand account of convincing a woman she was not 'going *wihtiko*.' Roger Vandersteene, "Some Woodland Cree Traditions and Legends," ed. Thelma Habgood, *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, 1 (1969): 53-58 (quoted in Chapter Five). These stories confirm Hay's point that a confident person could help stabilize a person who feared going *wihtiko*. Thomas H. Hay, "The Windigo Psychosis: Psychodynamic, Cultural, and Social Factors in Aberrant Behavior," *American Anthropologist* 73, no. 1 (February 1971): 14.

*wihtiko*.<sup>62</sup> Such a sorcerer could even send a *wihtiko* into the dreams of a victim in order to possess them or become their “helper.”<sup>63</sup> A *wihtiko* might also try to possess people in their vision quest, or dreams – independently of shamanic influence – often attempting to trick them into eating human flesh.<sup>64</sup> Dreams and visions had great importance as the channels through which spirit helpers revealed themselves and communicated, but some dreams and spirit helpers were to be resisted and others were to be questioned.<sup>65</sup> According to elder John Blackned, the 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre,” examined in the next chapter, was partly to blame on a *mistabeo* who gave bad advice to a man who was trying to survive a food crisis. According to some interpretations, the man went *wihtiko*.<sup>66</sup> A *wihtiko*, in fact – especially if it were once human – could have its own *mistabeo*. Speck gives an account of a *wihtiko* that used his *mistabeo* in order to hunt human beings for food, often by overcoming the *mistabeo* of a weaker person.<sup>67</sup>

Whatever its cause, *wihtiko* transformation or possession was attributed to malevolent intentions, from within or without, or a mixture of malevolent intentions and weakness. As Bird explains, a vulnerable person – a child, a wife or an elderly person, for example – could be driven “extremely insane” through abuse and thus become a *wihtiko*; “such a person would want

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<sup>62</sup> Ahenakew, cited in Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 122-124; Johnston, *Manitous*, 227.

<sup>63</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 6, 58. This was not limited to the Anishinabe. Cooper recounts a story told him by an elderly Waswanipi man (pre-1930): “He had in earlier life trespassed on another man’s hunting ground. The other man conjured him and he began to eat uncooked rabbit flesh. At last he nearly turned into a Witiko. In the nick of time, his old grandfather sang and drummed to cure him, and gave him a little hot bear-grease. A short while after swallowing the grease, the conjured man vomited a lot of clear ice which was then thrown into the fire.” Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 22.

<sup>64</sup> “All males obtain a spirit helper through a dream-vision and the windigo, like other spirits, can select a person as his protégé. If the selected individual does not reject the windigo, then he comes to resemble his guardian in all respects, acquiring his cannibal cravings.” Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 6. Swift Runner apparently suffered from dreams in which the *wihtiko* was “urging him to indulge in cannibalism.” Obsessive thoughts of cannibalism “were unwelcome but tenacious. Their presence and increased domination over Swift Runner’s behaviour is explicable in terms of Cree belief; that is to say, the windigo is a “Cannibal Spirit” with great powers, including that of taking possession of a man.” *Ibid.*, 88. Witiko has the power to transform mortals into cannibals.” See also Flannery et al., “Cree Witiko,” 57.

<sup>65</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 111, 85, 105.

<sup>66</sup> See Chapter Three.

<sup>67</sup> Speck, *Naskapi*, 36-37.

to retaliate and hurt or kill someone” – they would lose control of themselves and become “very dangerous.” Such stories were meant to instill fear of the consequences of “sinning” against nature (*pastahowin*) or against animals (*maahchihew*).<sup>68</sup> Johnston concurs:

As long as men and women put the well-being of their families and communities ahead of their own self-interests ... respecting the ... animals ... offering tobacco and chants to Mother Earth and Kitchi-Manitou ... they would ... have nothing to fear of the Weendigo. ... But such is not the case. Human beings are just a little too inclined to self-indulgence, at times a shade too intemperate, for even the specter of the Weendigo to frighten them into deference. At root is selfishness, regarded by the Anishinaubae people as the worst human shortcoming.<sup>69</sup>

The previous chapter suggests that this reference to “Kitchi-Manitou” reflects a Christian-influenced modification of an older Anishinabe conception of *manitu* as a cosmic force embodied or manifested in benevolent, ambivalent and malevolent supernatural beings, among them the giant *Wihtiko*. This older conception of *manitu* also seems to have heightened the possibility and fear of sorcery and the vulnerability to human or other-than-human malevolence among the Ojibwa and their closer neighbours among the James Bay Cree.<sup>70</sup> Compared to the Cree stories collected by Flannery and Cooper, Teicher’s predominantly Ojibwa accounts contain many more examples of sorcery-induced *wihtiko* possession or transformation. Young observes that the Ojibwa, more than the Cree, lived “in dread of these imaginary monsters.”<sup>71</sup> Teicher comments that the Indians “invariably” accounted for a missing hunter by blaming a *wihtiko*.<sup>72</sup> This is likely an overstatement in the case of his predominantly Ojibwa cases, and it contrasts sharply with Flannery and Cooper’s fieldwork among the James Bay Cree in the 1930s: “Informants did not blame witikos for unexplained disappearance of hunters or others, but most

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<sup>68</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 76, 112 & 115.

<sup>69</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 223.

<sup>70</sup> Preston, “Syncretism,” 151; Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 222; Feit, “Dreaming of Animals,” 303; Rogers, “Northern Algonquians,” 330-331; Rogers, *Natural Environment*, 35-37; Hollowell, *Culture and Experience*, 181, 282; Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 94-95.

<sup>71</sup> Young, *Stories*, 84.

<sup>72</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 3.

often attributed their disappearance to starvation or accidents while on the hunt.” Moreover, lone survivors of groups that had starved might arouse suspicion, but verifications would normally be made before drawing any conclusions.<sup>73</sup>

Even if the nature and extent of *wihtiko* fears varied across time and the geo-cultural space occupied and shared by Cree and Ojibwa, both populations were equally repulsed by the cannibalism associated with the *wihtiko*. Johnston writes of the Ojibwa: “What they feared most in their desperation and the delirium induced by famine and freezing to death was to kill and eat human flesh to survive. Nothing was more reprehensible than cannibalism.”<sup>74</sup> Flannery and Cooper were impressed at the measures Cree people went through to avoid cannibalism:

One of the most striking and poignant aspects of the starvation stories is the desperate means to which individuals resorted to avoid cannibalism, for example, the consumption of human and animal excrement as well as all forms of organic materials (hides, clothing, bark and mosses) and prized hunting dogs. The strong group ethic for the sharing of food and mutual aid in times of stress is also reflected in these narratives.<sup>75</sup>

Preston also comments on “many stories of people who, in their extremity, make efforts to show that they died with full self-control, rather than resorting to cannibalism.”<sup>76</sup> The only exceptions involve *ritual* wartime cannibalism documented among some southern Algonquian peoples.<sup>77</sup> Such exceptions are unknown among the James Bay Cree, but there are starvation cannibalism cases, recorded by Flannery and Cooper, where the victims were not killed, but died of natural causes. Cannibalism, in these cases, was “apparently a one-time event with no subsequent craving for human flesh.”<sup>78</sup> Flannery, Chambers and Jehle cite two cases:

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<sup>73</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59.

<sup>74</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 224.

<sup>75</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 70. There are “many other accounts of starvation that do not involve these themes [cannibalism or *wihtikos*].”

<sup>76</sup> Preston, “James Bay Cree Respect Relations,” 273.

<sup>77</sup> Anderson, *Betrayal of Faith*, 39-40. There is no sign such ritual cannibalism was associated with the *wihtiko* by those who practiced it.

<sup>78</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59.

In the first a man was encountered with the heads of two of his children on his toboggan. He explained that he had eaten the remainder of their bodies. It was emphasized by the narrator that the man behaved normally thereafter and was not feared, perhaps due to the fact that he had made no attempt to conceal his actions. The second case concerns a woman and her children who consumed small bits of her dead husband over a period of time to keep alive. Later the woman was said to be “just like us.” Again, her actions were not concealed; she openly admitted having eaten her husband.<sup>79</sup>

If people retained their mental and moral competence and self-control, and did not withdraw from relationship, non-violent cannibalism did not make them *wihtikowak*. This confirms that consumption of human flesh was not what most feared.

Only a starving person who “*went crazy* and ate human flesh,” in Bird’s words, would “... become a wihtigo – and that wihtigo is very evil.”<sup>80</sup> Merasty concurs: “Usually the first step in turning into a Wetiko was the *loss of sanity* in the face of starvation.”<sup>81</sup> “Cannibalism is abhorrent to the Indians,” begins the 1913 report on the “Wendigo,” cited earlier, “as it is associated by them with a form of homicidal insanity.”<sup>82</sup> As Preston explains, *wihtiko* phenomena are a “more treacherous problem” than even the violent cannibalism through which they might be expressed. As he elaborates:

We are not here faced with a simple task of filling empty stomachs, but rather with the elaboration of an implicitly symbolic system of belief. It is implicitly symbolic because what scholars regard as symbolic phenomena ... the Algonquian-speaking Indians regard as in some sense constituting real persons and events in the environment.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 70. Jacques Rousseau: “I have known a windigo; he was my cook in the tundra. He made excellent bread, but I cared less for his meat sauces.” This was obviously a tongue-in-cheek comment. He later explained to Teicher that this individual had eaten the body of his brother who had died in a time of famine (about 300 miles north of Sept Iles, between 1935 and 1940. Teicher writes: “He (the windigo cook) was neither rejected nor feared; however, there was nevertheless a mental restriction towards him. ...” Cited in Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 80.

<sup>80</sup> Emphasis added. Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 112.

<sup>81</sup> Merasty, in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 1.

<sup>82</sup> LAC, RG 10, vol. 10020: “General Background Information, Indian Administration, c. 1612-1935,” item 12: “Wendigo or Cannibalism,” p. 35. A nearly identical copy of the report is contained in a separate file, cited at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>83</sup> Preston, “Wiiitiko” (1977), 101-102.

At the heart of what Preston describes as “cannibal-maniacs (*witiko* or *atoosh*),” is an implicitly symbolic understanding of the nature of evil, and extreme mental and moral incompetence.<sup>84</sup> For this reason, later attempts to reduce the *wihtiko* to mental illness have fallen short.

The *wihtiko* concept is sufficiently ambiguous and flexible so as to encompass a variety of phenomena and to allow for varying degrees of personal responsibility on the part of the human person who becomes, or becomes possessed by, a *wihtiko*.<sup>85</sup> Based on fieldwork from the 1960s, Preston argues that the *wihtiko* is sometimes blended with other fearsome and unknown creatures. “Witigo is, when looked at in this synthetic fashion, more a matter of attitude than he is a definable person.”<sup>86</sup> Flannery, Chambers and Jehle respond that the *wihtiko* was a definable person and that Preston’s conclusion may reflect the fact that his fieldwork was done three decades after Flannery and Cooper conducted their interviews.<sup>87</sup> The *wihtiko* was, for many, a definable person, but its attitude – its disposition of will, mind and emotion – is what defines it, and sets it apart. In Algonquian cosmology, mere physical appearances, as Black-Rogers points out, can be deceiving and are not always visible or known:

If some ghosts have appeared in the form of birds, and some birds appear in the form of people, and some people can appear in the form of bears, and no one has really described the form of a windigo (they are most often heard or felt, not seen) how does a man validate the essence of what he has encountered?<sup>88</sup>

Ultimately, the *wihtiko* is defined by three traits related not to physical appearance, but to internal qualities or attitudes: severe loss or abandonment of self-control, or the manipulative control of others; disconnect with or manipulation of reality; and abandonment, rejection or

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<sup>84</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 222.

<sup>85</sup> Preston, “Witiko” (1977), 102-103.

<sup>86</sup> Preston, “Ethnographic Reconstruction,” 65-66.

<sup>87</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 58.

<sup>88</sup> Mary Black-Rogers, “Ojibwa taxonomy and percept ambiguity,” *Ethos* 5 (1977): 103.

manipulation of relationship.<sup>89</sup> The *wihtiko*'s attitude is that truth, reality, and others can be reduced to objects of self-serving power.

## TRAITS & TREATMENTS

The first of these *wihtiko* traits can manifest itself as a severe loss or abandonment of self-control, an incapacity or unwillingness to bring one's actions into conformity with one's understanding. In the worst case, however, the focus of control is displaced from oneself to others in a quest for manipulative and self-serving power over them.<sup>90</sup> "That windigo thinks he's the strongest guy, the best guy. He can do what he likes with the other [guy]. Kill him. Even eat him up."<sup>91</sup> Smallboy tells how Sakikweo and his sons defeat a family of six *wihtikowak* (two sons and two daughters), headed by Nohteamo and his wife. This family would keep others with them to eat if their hunt failed. When Sakikweo and his sons confront them, the family has three other women with them. After killing Nohteamo and his sons in a battle, the heroes of the story turn to the three captives. Smallboy narrates:

"You women who were kept for food, stand to one side." Three of the women stood apart from the others. One of Nohteamo's daughters wanted to go with those three women, but the women drove her away saying, "You go away. It was you that got a small share of human flesh this morning and you thought your share was too small." The two sons knew that Nohteamo's daughters and widow controlled the other women so they killed the daughters and the widow. So then the three women were spared. Sakikweo and his sons then had a look at the widow's bag which had made such a noise when she threw it down. Inside the bag she had half of a woman's body.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Cecil Chabot, "Witiko Possession & Starvation Cannibalism Among the Cree of James Bay: Monstrosity or Madness?" in *Creating Humanity, Discovering Monstrosity: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, ed. by Elizabeth Nelson, Jillian Burcar and Hannah Priest (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2010), 3-16.

<sup>90</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 112; Johnston, *Manitous*, 224.

<sup>91</sup> Cited in Brightman, "Windigo in the Material," 364. This comes from his 1977-79 fieldnotes for research in Pukatawagan and Granville Lake, Manitoba, but Brightman does name the narrator in his published article. See also Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 113; Flannery et al., "Witiko Accounts," 57, 68-69.

<sup>92</sup> Harvey Smallboy, "Sakikweo Defeats Nohteamo the Cannibal Indian," Flannery et al., "Witiko Accounts," 68-69.

These cases are less common than those involving the loss of self-control. Teicher writes that an individual who believes himself possessed by the *wihtiko* “believes that he has lost permanent control over his own actions.”<sup>93</sup> This belief can manifest itself as a desperate quest for control in the face of growing powerlessness – a loss or reduction of hope in the face of starvation and death or in the face of an uncertain struggle against ‘going’ *wihtiko*. Fatalistic adoption of the *wihtiko* identity could follow, as noted before, in an attempt to overcome the reluctance to kill and eat a human person, or pre-empt the guilt; alternatively, it might be plea for help in the face of temptations or the fear of giving into them.<sup>94</sup> Loss of self-control, especially in the first case, could manifest itself as compulsive violence after a period of apparent despondency or an interior struggle to overcome either the temptation or the reticence to act.<sup>95</sup> Loss of self-control is reflected in the dishevelled and soiled appearance of many *wihtikowak*.<sup>96</sup> Borrows suggests that the Anishinabe meaning of “windigo” may be “dirty or unkempt.”<sup>97</sup> According to Johnston, the *wihtiko* has an insatiable and uncontrollable appetite for the consumption (literal or figurative) of others if not also self-consumption.<sup>98</sup> In contrast, those who resort to non-violent starvation cannibalism without “going *wihtiko*” maintain their self-control and fully acknowledge their actions. In one tragic story, a man who ate his children after they had starved to death, but who did not isolate himself or try to hide what had happened, was not deemed a *wihtiko*.<sup>99</sup>

The *wihtiko*’s loss of self-control leads to a second fundamental *wihtiko* trait: hallucinations, a loss of epistemic integrity, a break with reality, or an intentional manipulation

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<sup>93</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 5.

<sup>94</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 337, 354, 363, 372.

<sup>95</sup> To overcome a strong reluctance, the deviant action had to be done quickly.

<sup>96</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 58.

<sup>97</sup> John Borrows, personal communication, December 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 20.

<sup>99</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 70.

of reality to the point that one loses the capacity to see the manipulation of reality for what it is – a lie. This is especially true when a *wihtiko*'s lack of self-control is manifested primarily as a quest for raw power or manipulative and malicious control over others.<sup>100</sup> In such cases, as Johnston points out, the *wihtiko* “exemplifies human nature’s tendency to indulge its self-interests, which, once indulged, demand even greater indulgence.” Ultimately, this results in an “extreme ... erosion of principles and values,” and the incapacity to direct one’s actions towards an understanding of what is good.<sup>101</sup> Having abandoned or rejected the challenge of bringing actions into conformity with an understanding of what was real and good, a *wihtiko* imposed a skewed understanding or mode of experience on itself and others. In the extreme, it destroyed the capacity to escape its own distortions of what was real or good. Such a *wihtiko* was far more dangerous and sinister. Arthur Etherington tells of “an old man ... [who] would go along with other Indians during the summer. When the winter came *he would think* [suggesting intentional distortion] of the other Indians as becoming animals. He would become a cannibal.” One winter he stayed with his own daughter and son-in-law; they had a baby. While they were eating together the man fed the baby some caribou and faked that the boy was choking; he ran outside the tent with him pretending to try to stop him choking but actually choked and killed the child. He then suggested the parents leave while he took care of the body. He then roasted and ate the baby, and compared the meat with beaver meat. “In the summer he would be the same as anyone else. He wasn’t killed because he would always get ahead of the others somehow.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, 65; Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 34.

<sup>101</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 224.

<sup>102</sup> Emphasis added. Arthur Edrington, “Witiko Compares Human and Beaver Meat,” in Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 69-70. “The Wetiko Mother,” told by Marie Merasty – recounts how a mother killed and ate all but one of her children, one by one, believing them to be animals. It started with her son: “As the young man was returning, coming into view, the mother went out to meet him in hope of killing him. The youth must have sensed the danger because he threw his dagger at his mother. His aim was close but he missed. The mother seized her son and killed him. Dragging the body to the house, she said to her daughter, “Now we will be able to feast quite

The most common manifestations of this *wihtiko* trait were less sinister and intentional, usually involving hallucinations induced by desperate conditions.<sup>103</sup> *Wihitkowak* “sometimes ... see humans as having been metamorphosed into beaver or other animal forms.”<sup>104</sup> They redefine human beings as edible animals or simply as edible.<sup>105</sup> This may be a sign of being only “Almost a Witiko.” Without intervention, the consequences may be disastrous.<sup>106</sup> This trait may also manifest itself as a loss of memory or delirium. Hallowell records the case of a man from the Bloodvein River, in Manitoba, who saw his wife, covered in blood, running toward him from their tent. “He shot her and the children and ate them. For the next month his mind was a blank. Finally, when he recovered sufficiently to tell others what had occurred, he cried.”<sup>107</sup> Swift Runner, who was hung in 1879 for killing and eating his wife and children, had gone “on a moose hunt and on his return was close to camp and all he could hear were young moose, nothing but moose. That’s when it started on him.” Only when he was in court did he regain his senses. “He asked the judge why he was there. The judge told him that he had eaten up his family. ... He started to cry.”<sup>108</sup> In another story told by Edward Rae, John Doggy (John Thomas, a mixed ancestry HBC man who worked at Norway House) grew suspicious of another

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heartily. I have killed the young of a moose.” She had mistaken her son for a calf. One by one, the mother killed her children for food ...” Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 3-4.

<sup>103</sup> “Mrs. Cochran felt that she was becoming windigo: the people around her looked like beavers and she wanted to eat them.” Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 54. Bab Wesley refers to an incident involving an aunt of her mother, born near Winisk. The aunt turned witiko and, according to the story, it was suspected she had killed her husband and two sons. Two men passed near her camp, where she was with her daughter, and one of them stopped and defecated. “The other told him ‘Don’t do it here! Wait!’ But he had to sit down on the bank right there and defecate. Then they went on but they heard from far off the old woman calling to her daughter, ‘Look! There are caribou here. Here are the tracks and here is his dirt!’” Bab Wesley, “Cannibals Believe Men Are Caribou,” Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 71.

<sup>104</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 58.

<sup>105</sup> Merasty, “Almost a Wetiko,” in *World of the Wetiko*, 1; Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 115; Chabot, “Witiko Possession,” in Nelson et al., *Creating Humanity*, 10-11; Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 58; Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 54, 85-87.

<sup>106</sup> “Merasty, “Almost a Wetiko,” in *World of the Wetiko*, 2.

<sup>107</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 76.

<sup>108</sup> John J. Honigmann, “European and Other Tales from the Western Woods Cree,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 66, no. 262 (October-December 1953): 309-331.

trapper when he did not return to the main camp as expected.<sup>109</sup> Thomas took another man with him as well as rope, chains and tarps, and went looking for the trapper. They found the man and subdued him, binding him hand and foot. Then they brought him back to the main camp and, with the help of Whites, across Lake Winnipeg. “When the Windigo woke up, they asked him about his wife and kids. The Windigo replied: ‘They are still living. No. I killed them.’ Then the Windigo started crying.” They then put him on a train and brought him to a mental hospital, where

the Windigo woke up for longer periods of time. He asked for his wife and children. Then he said: ‘I believe I killed my wife and child.’ Then he started crying. He would stay awake for three hours but he would be crying all the time. The hospital thought he was getting better but he cried all the time.

Soon after, when the Windigo’s mind was clear, he was still always crying. He was sure he killed his wife and kids. He had treatment but, eventually, he just died. John Doggy stayed there until the man died, then he went home.<sup>110</sup>

These stories suggest genuine hallucinations, memory loss and, in varying degrees, a diminished or lessened responsibility.

The human *wihtiko* may lose the capacity, or refuse, to govern his action according to what he once experienced and understood to be true. Either way, the need for unity of these constitutive elements of culture does not disappear. Therefore, the *wihtiko* modifies his perception and conception of reality to fit his behaviour. The objective may be to avoid guilt, which suggests a lingering recognition that the forced unity of experience, understanding and action is a lie. Such a lie can only be maintained by additional lies: by manipulating contradictory perceptions and understandings, by insulating oneself from them, fleeing them or somehow muting or destroying them. If, as McIntyre suggests, “Wittikowok cannot be reasoned

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<sup>109</sup> Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens, *Killing the Shamen* (Moonbeam, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1985), 32.

<sup>110</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 35.

with,”<sup>111</sup> it is not necessarily because of an absence of reason or experiential capacity, but rather a completely self-referential and self-serving rationalism and empiricism. This radically individualistic and subjective epistemology, moreover, results in the destruction of people and relationships, but relationships are also shunned or destroyed simply because they expose or threaten the *wihtiko*'s circular logic. Because human relationship exposes the distortion of a human person as an edible moose, for example, the *wihtiko* retreats or withdraws from relationship, either anticipating or regretting a deviant act.<sup>112</sup>

This extreme individualism reflects the third *wihtiko* trait: withdrawal from relationship, or rejection, manipulation and destruction of relationship. Johnston says that Windigo “may be derived from *ween dagoh*, which means ‘solely for self,’ or from *weenin n'd'igooh*, which means ‘fat’ or excess.”<sup>113</sup> Cree elder, scholar and Anglican minister Ahenakew refers to the *wihtiko* as “He-who-is-alone.”<sup>114</sup> Teicher writes: “they do not live together as married couples; on the contrary, each windigo is a solitary being. If two of them should happen to meet, then the Indians believe that a violent battle ensues and the one who wins eats the loser.”<sup>115</sup> As suggested already, the exceptions to this isolation are temporary and involve what Bird calls “half-*wihtikowak*” who are not yet fully possessed or transformed.<sup>116</sup> In one story, a *wihtiko* father and two sons attack and kill others, but one son is accidentally killed in the process. At first, the father and surviving son lament his death, but they soon stop, and when they eat their victims, the murdered son is the

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<sup>111</sup> McIntyre, “Evil and Hope,” 35.

<sup>112</sup> Frenchman and Iserhoff, “The Nanusk Stone,” DAUL, Fonds Jacques Rousseau, P174/D3, folder 51; Bird, “Spirit Lives,” 113-114; Kohl, *Kitchi-gami*, 356-357; Johnstone, *Manitous*, 222; Preston, “Ethnographic Reconstruction,” 61; McIntyre, “Evil and Hope,” 38.

<sup>113</sup> Johnstone, *Manitous*, 222.

<sup>114</sup> Preston, “Ethnographic Reconstruction,” 61.

<sup>115</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 2, 77, 119.

<sup>116</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 113. Cuthand refers to accounts of communities of cannibals. See Cuthand, “On Nelson’s Text,” in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 192.

first to be consumed.<sup>117</sup> In another version of this story, the *wihtiko* son has a snowball fight with the father and sneaks stones into his snowballs.<sup>118</sup> There is a constant threat of disintegration of their relationship. In the story of Shaywayko, some family members agree to kill the father, and then they turn on each other.<sup>119</sup> The disintegration is inevitable. This is clear with the origin stories told by Small, Stevens and Rickard. Some exceptionally malicious *wihtikowak* deceive and manipulate others to such an extent that their evil nature goes unchecked or undetected for a period. They may remain in society, but they are not part of it.<sup>120</sup> The *wihtiko* described by Etherington is such a one. Most *wihtikowak*, however, retreat from relationship, if they are not first ostracized. Nanusk, for example, would only place his furs on a large stone and refused to interact with others, behaviour that immediately aroused suspicion. When he recovered his senses, Swift Runner explained that he killed his last surviving child, not out of hunger, but to remove the last reminder of the gravity of his crime.

Conversely, reintegration into human relationship and reality was the means by which an almost-*wihtiko* could recover mental, moral and emotional competence – even if it meant a painful coming to terms with the experience and understanding a deviant act done under duress.

Bab Wesley tells of one such story:

There was a man who killed his children and his wife. The man's brother came to him ... [with] an axe ... gave him an awful crack but didn't kill him [and] ... took him back to his own camp. He melted a big bladder full of grease and made the man drink that. It made him vomit bad. At last he started to bring up ice ... and at last the ice was all yellow ... And when he started throwing up all that ice he started crying and thinking about what he had done.

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<sup>117</sup> Flannery et al., "Witiko Accounts," 62.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>119</sup> Teicher, "Windigo Psychosis" (1960), 56. The mother convinces the older son to kill his father. They do this, and then the son and his eldest sister kill their younger siblings, and then their mother. Finally the elder son kills his eldest sister.

<sup>120</sup> One story tells of a father and two sons who live with the other Indians in the summer. They actually provide food to starving families in order to fatten them up, with the intention of killing them. They are eventually tricked and killed. Flannery et al., "Witiko Accounts," 62.

His brother did that to him to bring him to his senses. And he was a live person again. They used to hear him crying because he had killed his wife and children.<sup>121</sup>

A human who turns *wihtiko* is believed to develop a heart of ice.<sup>122</sup> It cannot be cured until the ice is removed; nor are they fully destroyed until the heart is burnt.<sup>123</sup> More than an association with winter and times of famine, the heart of ice represents an interior coldness, an inability to relate to others, and a loss of capacity for reciprocity.<sup>124</sup> The *wihtiko* is “not a kindhearted one.”<sup>125</sup> Emotions and thoughts contrary to the *wihtiko*’s self-centred epistemology are rejected: “nothing else matters – not compassion, sorrow, reason, or judgment.”<sup>126</sup> The withdrawal from relationship, however, might not manifest itself as an overt lack of empathy, but as depression resulting from a fatalistic loss of hope. Therefore, symptoms associated by others with depression were potentially far more serious from the perspective of Algonquians.

“Some say that people who are cannibals go mad, others that they go thoroughly wicked.” This explanation, from Frenchman and Iserhoff’s account of “Nanusk’s Stone,” indicates that the *wihtiko* concept accounts for varying degrees of responsibility. Madness points to a less or non- culpable breakdown in the unity of experience, understanding, action, and objective reality. It is also seen as treatable, even if not entirely curable. Wickedness, in contrast, entails culpability, perversion and immorality: a wilful and often incurable breakdown in the unity of experience, understanding, action and objective reality. Madness may weaken humanity, but wickedness can pervert or destroy it.

In Algonquian culture, the concept of mental illness unrelated to malevolence or moral weakness (whether internal or external to the afflicted person) is a relatively new importation

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 72.

<sup>123</sup> “His heart was ice all over and did not burn for a long time.” Sarah John “Atuc,” in *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>124</sup> McIntyre, “Evil and Hope,” 39.

<sup>125</sup> Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 7.

<sup>126</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 224.

from Western science, which sometimes reduces evil to mental illness.<sup>127</sup> The Algonquian used the *wihtiko* to cope with extreme mental and moral incompetence harmful to persons and society, regardless of the origin of responsibility – “Wetiko was the only sickness.”<sup>128</sup> Insofar as this was the case, manifestations of *wihtiko* traits and the responsibility attached to them, were necessarily ambiguous. This helps explain the ambivalence about possession or transformation captured in the phrase “going *wihtiko*.”

Cooper refers to “belief in identification with or metamorphosis into a Witiko,” but does not elaborate.<sup>129</sup> Teicher suggests that possession was an integral aspect of the phenomenon, allowing otherwise incomprehensible behaviour to be understood.<sup>130</sup> He notes elsewhere that a person “who *becomes* a windigo is usually convinced that he has been *possessed* by the spirit of the windigo monster.” Teicher elaborates:

Transformation into a windigo, rather than possession by the spirit of a windigo, is also advanced as an explanation ... by the ill person and his fellows. ... The difference between these two processes – transformation and possession – is relatively slight in the eyes of the Indians who feel that similar handling is indicated, regardless of the process by which the individual became a windigo.<sup>131</sup>

Although Teicher and some Algonquian narrators give little importance to the ambivalence regarding possession and transformation, it is not insignificant in other narratives. This is suggested by two stories: “The Wetiko Mother,” and “The Took-Luck Windigo,” involving a man named Pelly.<sup>132</sup> In the first story the *wihtiko* mother refers to her human victims as animals, but knows that this is a lie. She twists reality, deceives and manipulates others, and she is sneaky about her killing and her refusal of normal food. When she is finally killed, her

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<sup>127</sup> Richardson, “Monster or Clown” in Nelson et al., *Creating Humanity*, 181-191.

<sup>128</sup> Merasty, in Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*, 1.

<sup>129</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 22.

<sup>130</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 5, 76, 111.

<sup>131</sup> Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>132</sup> Merasty, “The Wetiko Mother,” in *World of the Wetiko*, 3-6; Samuel Makidemewabe, “The Took-Luck Witiko,” in Norman, *Where the Chill*, 103-106

body takes a long time to burn because the melting ice repeatedly extinguishes the fire. She had *become* a *wihtiko*. In the second story, briefly cited earlier, Pelly is more clearly overcome by a *wihtiko*. He kills others without being sneaky. When Pelly's companions kill the *wihtiko*, Pelly not only survives but is also cured as a result. He was clearly *possessed* rather than *transformed*.

Possession by a *wihtiko* implies the preservation of humanity, perhaps the humanity of a loved one who *could not have committed such a monstrous deed*, and whose execution is not a punishment but liberation from a monster. A man could not leave a deranged and potentially violent brother at camp with his wife and children while he hunted, but staying at camp would lead to starvation.<sup>133</sup> If treatment failed and necessity forced one's hand, killing a *wihtiko* in possession of a loved one was easier than killing a loved one. As Angell observes, the "*windigo* effectively separates the person from the problem."<sup>134</sup> Some individuals, lacking self-control, could allow themselves to be possessed by evil, but even this implies only partial culpability.<sup>135</sup> However, Angell ignores how the *wihtiko* can bind the person to the problem.

In contrast with possession, transformation into the *wihtiko* usually entails a judgment about a person's evil or inhuman actions. Transformation of humans into *wihtikowak* against their will implies a taking possession of someone *in order to* transform them. Transformation points to inhumanity and implies condemnation. It may be the inhumanity of those who drive others through their cruelty or sorcery to become *wihtikowak*. More commonly, it is the inhumanity of those who become what Bird calls the worst kind of *wihtiko*: "Some of those who became *wihtigo* were *mitews* who were capable and powerful, and they became the worst kind of

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<sup>133</sup> Preston points out that "Being out of control made the insane person too dangerous to have near the family when the men were out hunting." Preston, "James Bay Cree," 273.

<sup>134</sup> G. Brent Angell, "Madness in the Family: The 'Windigo,'" *Journal of Family Social Work* 2, no. 2 (1997): 179.

<sup>135</sup> Johnston, *Manitous*, 221-224, 227.

wihtigos – they were cannibals and mitews at the same time.”<sup>136</sup> They became *wihtikowak* not because they were too weak to resist a malevolent power or persist under duress, but because they had powerful capacities that they used for malevolent purposes.<sup>137</sup> They lost their humanity by their own choice. In many cases, however, the nature of the phenomenon remained unclear because the degree of responsibility was unclear.

Validation of an experience of ambiguous phenomena, such as a *wihtiko* threat, was often determined by its consequences. To cite Black-Rogers again:

essence (the only stable aspect) of the objects one is encountering at a given moment is often *not expected to be known until some later moment* – sometimes after a considerable period of time. It is quite satisfactory, and the better part of caution, to leave the matter ambiguous until then.<sup>138</sup>

Waiting too long could have fatal consequences, as could acting hastily. This is why, as Friedland and many before her observe, caution was employed, cures were usually sought first, and killing was a last resort. Responses might vary enormously from one context to another, depending on the nature and degree of the *wihtiko* threat and the self-control and experience of those facing a difficult life or death decision.<sup>139</sup> If a difficult decision later seemed premature or doubtful, it could be tempting to adjust one’s perceptions to justify the decision taken. Admitting the possibility that one had killed an innocent and curable person could be no less painful than the process that Wesley described for the *wihtiko* who killed his family and was cured by his brother.

There was good reason, therefore, to discern the true nature of the phenomena – to follow the principles of jurisprudence that Friedland has drawn from her analysis of *wihtiko* stories as case law. *Wihtiko* responses, she argues

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<sup>136</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 113.

<sup>137</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 60.

<sup>138</sup> Emphasis in the original. Black-Rogers, “Ojibwa Taxonomy,” 103.

<sup>139</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 357-358.

usually go from least intrusive to most intrusive, as needed, and available resources and larger political realities affect decisions. The overall principle is ensuring group safety and protection of the vulnerable. There are four response principles that are blended and balanced depending on the facts in a particular case. These are healing, supervision, separation, and incapacitation. To a lesser extent, retribution may also be considered.”<sup>140</sup>

In contrast, Teicher argues that the diagnosis and treatment of “windigo psychosis” was fairly rigidly conceived and strictly applied.<sup>141</sup> As evidence, he cites, among others, the case of Chimooshominaban, a prominent Cree hunter from Mistissini. During the winter of 1834-35, he apparently “caused his son to be strangled when he was near the last stage of being apprehensive that his son would turn out to be a cannibal if he should recover [from his illness].” According to Teicher,

What is so forcibly illustrated in this case is the dominant nature of the windigo belief. It rigidly channelled the interpretation made by the father, and with equal rigidity, it prescribed the appropriate behavior, leaving no room for alternatives. Unlike a more complex culture, holding multi-causational and transactional notions of behavior, the belief system in this situation dictated the one-cause explanation and the one-path action.

The evidence of this case, however, allows for a different interpretation. Citing subsequent HBC reports, Teicher points out that the “apparent secrecy surrounding the death of his son seems to have forfeited Chimooshominaban – his hunting luck and so his influence as a chief.”<sup>142</sup> Was it rather that other Crees were doubtful of Chimooshominaban’s precipitous actions? This latter interpretation is consistent with Friedland’s reading of *wihtiko* cases and Flannery’s observation that the “[i]dentification of witikos is based on a wide variety of behaviors that are judged to be abnormal, and the means for handling threatening individuals are likewise flexible and situational.”<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Friedland, “The Wetiko (Windigo),” 120-121.

<sup>141</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 62.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78.

<sup>143</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59. It is also consistent with the story of Wisagan’s family. Wisagan’s family was starving. Returning from an attempt to hunt buffalo, Wisagan found his wife cutting up a child to eat. “In a transport of passion, the Indian rushed forward and stabbed her, and also the other woman.” His own loss of self-control led to him become a windigo himself. Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 90-92.

As Brown and Brightman point out, *wihtiko*-associated incidents ended more often in cure than in cannibalism, killing or execution.<sup>144</sup> Attempts to cure people who showed signs of going *wihtiko* usually involved reconnecting them with reality and relationship. Force-feeding someone warm animal grease to help melt the ice around their heart may have also been a pungent reminder of what humans were supposed to eat. Regardless, a consistent theme in the recovery of persons threatened with *wihtiko* possession is the reintegration of reality and relationship. The starving mother who began to go *wihtiko* was jolted back to reality by her daughter: ‘This is not a moose! It is my brother! Your son!’<sup>145</sup>

Execution was usually only contemplated if treatment failed or danger escalated. This might be requested by the afflicted individual, fearful of going *wihtiko*, or by close relatives. In these cases, the target of the execution was the *wihtiko* that was in the midst of possessing the person. It was meant to save a life. Alternatively, it was an execution of someone who had become a *wihtiko*, and a condemnation of their inhumanity. As Marano points out, however, it is problematic to “label ... a group of executed persons on the basis of information provided by their executioners.”<sup>146</sup>

Marano’s argument points to the fact that the *wihtiko* could unconsciously or intentionally become primarily a means or object of control rather than understanding. This could be manifested in many ways, some not harmful at all. For example, *wihtiko* stories could be used to instil respect for the principle of reciprocity with human and animal persons alike, to discourage abuse of shamanistic power, or to prevent children from wandering off on their own.<sup>147</sup> On the other hand, the *wihtiko* could also serve more malicious or self-centred quests for

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<sup>144</sup> Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 165.

<sup>145</sup> Merasty, “Almost a Wetiko,” in *World of the Wetiko*, 1. This is a paraphrase, not an exact quotation.

<sup>146</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 408.

<sup>147</sup> Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 124-128.

control. It could become a justification for euthanasia, especially in difficult circumstances when sick or elderly became a burden.<sup>148</sup> It could also become a means of frightening, manipulating or scapegoating others, or concealing murder or suicide.<sup>149</sup>

Algonquians were not naïve about such manipulation.<sup>150</sup> Regardless, for the *wihtiko* to serve such purposes, the fear of it had to be and remain real, at least for most involved. As McGee points out, such uses cannot explain the origin of the *wihtiko* phenomenon, even if they help explain its evolution.<sup>151</sup>

#### STRUGGLES FOR UNDERSTANDING & CONTROL OF THE WIHTIKO

Algonquians struggled to understand and control the threats that were associated with the *wihtiko*, but the *wihtiko* also provided a tool for controlling or manipulating others, whether for benevolent or malevolent purposes. Algonquians were aware of such manipulation, but did not abandon their belief because of it. Despite the mythic proportions that the *wihtiko* attained in various Algonquian traditions, these myths conveyed an implicitly symbolic understanding of a threat that was real and multi-layered. It posed a threat to individuals who were, or believed they were, susceptible to *wihtiko* possession or transformation. It posed a two-fold threat of

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<sup>148</sup> Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 386. Brightman and Brown suggest this was rare. See discussion in Chapter Six.

<sup>149</sup> Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 385-386, 388, 393-394. Paul Le Jeune, August 28, 1636, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 9: 113; Nelson, in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 88-90. See the case of Marie Courtereille, discussed in Chapter Four. When asked if she wished to be killed, she apparently said yes, but it is not clear if this desire for death originated with as *wihtiko* fatalism or a suicidal wish.

<sup>150</sup> Weipust, cited in Preston, "Witiko" (1980), 122-123. Nelson tells how one man came into his fur trade post claiming to need a strong drink because he felt he was going *wihtiko*. Nelson was advised by two others to give him a strong drink and put him by a large fire. They explained, as reported by Nelson: "if he is a real Windigo it will only do him good by driving out the ice, but if he *lies* to you indeed, then it certainly will injure him, but it will be good for him, and teach for the future not to impose upon people to frighten them." Cited by Nelson, in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 93.

<sup>151</sup> McGee, in Marano, "Windigo Pyschosis" (1982), 401.

potentially fatal consequences to the relations of such individuals, if they responded either too cautiously or too hastily. Finally, it posed a threat to those who were vulnerable to unconscious use or conscious abuse of the *wihtiko* as a means of controlling others for selfish or malevolent ends.

Some *wihtiko* threats could only be deemed real from within an Algonquian cosmology. Nevertheless, Algonquian *wihtiko* beliefs and myths pointed beyond the particular experiences that continued to shape and reshape them. They constituted an Algonquian response to questions about free will, moral responsibility, madness, and evil with which humanity continues to grapple. The multi-layered threat of the *wihtiko*, however, has rarely allowed for facile resolution or closure of the gaps that remain in any culture between its constitutive elements – understanding, experience and action – and the reality in which it is immersed. Algonquians varied in the strength of their *ehbebukdaet* (hope),<sup>152</sup> their capacity to penetrate into “the grandeur of reason incarnate in existence, which, in its depths, is inaccessible to man.”<sup>153</sup> Faced with such depths, some tried to reduce them to that which could be understood, or to rule out questions that could not be answered with certitude. Others reduced rich metaphors and “implicit symbols” to their literalist reading. Important ways of knowing were thus weakened by overstating – or understating – their explanatory capacity. Either way, reductionist or literalist attempts to avoid mystery could produce interpretations of a phenomenon like the *wihtiko* that, in Preston’s words, were “too easy to be real.”<sup>154</sup> In short, some Algonquians were searching above all for understanding and self-control. Others were searching above all for control even at the expense of understanding.

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<sup>152</sup> As noted, this is an East Cree concept akin to “hope” that means “untying something, like a knot – plus the quality of a revealing insight or perception, expressing some new knowledge.” Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 208.

<sup>153</sup> Einstein, “Personal God Concept,” 182.

<sup>154</sup> Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 118.

As subsequent chapters show, European responses to the *wihtiko* reveal great similarities in this regard, even if these similarities sometimes manifest themselves differently. Amidst changes, differences and divisions that are often more obvious, Native and Newcomer encounters with the *wihtiko*, like the concept itself, reveal a persistent shared conviction that reducing others or reality to objects of power, even for the sake of self-preservation, is a sign of mental and moral incompetence.

## CHAPTER 3

### *WIHTIKO* AMONG PARTNERS IN FURS, 1630-1870

#### EARLY NEWCOMER ENCOUNTERS WITH THE WIHTIKO, 1630-1815

Referring to the origin of the *wihtiko*, Cree knowledge-keeper and scholar, Louis Bird, writes that it “was many years before the European came. People overpopulated the land and over-hunted. They sort of drove themselves [sic] into starvation. And then some of them became wihtigo – they started to eat each other – many became cannibalistic.”<sup>1</sup> This echoes much older traditional narratives of the James Bay Cree, some of them cited in the previous chapter. In the 1930s, Cree elder Patrick Steven stated that his people “never knew about Matchi [bad] Manitu till they got the Bible. My father told me the same. They had only one Manitu. But they believed in Wihtiko long ago.”<sup>2</sup> The early and wide geo-cultural distribution, as well as the style and nature of *wihtiko* narratives, in Cree and other Algonquian traditions, weigh in favour of Steven’s view that the *wihtiko* is an ancient concept.<sup>3</sup> Evidence of the *wihtiko* concept – both as an evil spirit and as a mental illness caused by *wihtiko* possession or transformation – is also found in some of the oldest documentary evidence relating to the James Bay Cree and their southern Algonquian neighbours.

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<sup>1</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 113. This echoes what David Thompson writes: “Tradition says, such evil Men [*wihtiko*-possessed men] were more frequent than at present, probably from famine.” Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative of his Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, ed. J.B. Tyrell (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916), 260.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 52. Cooper describes Steven as a roughly sixty-five-year-old (born circa 1865) son of a conjuror who himself had also been destined to become a conjuror (until he became a Christian), “extremely well informed regarding the old customs, not only in religious but in general culture ... unusually intelligent ... [in fact] one of the most intelligent and best equipped informants [he had] ... ever met anywhere in the North.” *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>3</sup> This is also the finding of Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 338, 344; and Smith, “Notes on Witiko,” 31-34.

This chapter begins by examining the earliest European encounters with the *wihtiko* – both to probe further the question of its pre-contact origins, nature and evolution, and to discern how Europeans responded to it. The second section details a series of nineteenth-century *wihtiko*-associated incidents that involved European and James Bay Cree “partners in furs,” including several generations of one Cree family.<sup>4</sup> These interconnected incidents, and the chapter as a whole, illustrate the difficulties and interdependence that shaped Native-Newcomer relations in subarctic Rupert’s Land. They show how Newcomers, faced with *wihtiko* allegations, threats, fears and executions, espoused Cree understandings and customary law, but also challenged them. Likewise, the Cree adjusted to fur traders’ perspectives and interventions, and even solicited and aided the latter. Finally, this chapter illustrates how the *wihtiko* was an object and source not only of understanding, but also of control, for Native and Newcomer alike.

The earliest English written records on James Bay were kept by Henry Hudson and a crewman on their calamitous voyage of 1610-11, and by Thomas James – after whom the bay is named – on a 1631-32 voyage. These first European visitors had little contact – none in James’ case – with the local inhabitants.<sup>5</sup> The first direct French contact with the people of this region came several decades later, but earlier French records contain secondary evidence of the *wihtiko* phenomenon among the James Bay Cree.

In his account of 1635, Jesuit missionary Paul Le Jeune explains that a severe famine had struck New France for the second winter in a row. This famine had left many Algonquians “greatly disfigured and as fleshless as skeletons,” and many “Hunters had been found stiff in

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<sup>4</sup> *Partners in Furs* is the title of Francis and Morantz’ study of the HBC fur-trade relationship before 1870.

<sup>5</sup> Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 16-17.

death upon the snow, killed by cold and starvation.”<sup>6</sup> Under these conditions a number of people had apparently been driven to cannibalism:

Near Gaspé, the savages [i.e. dwellers of the forest] killed and ate a young boy whom the Basques left with them to learn their language. Those of Tadoussac, with whom I passed the winter a year ago, have eaten each other in some localities. ... there were still some in the woods who do not dare appear before the others because they had wickedly surprised, massacred, and eaten their companions.<sup>7</sup>

If starvation cannibalism provoked fear, so also did the social repercussions of resorting to it or threatening to do so.<sup>8</sup> A third incident reported by Le Jeune this same year suggests that past experiences had led Algonquians to associate certain behaviour – among other things, the refusal to eat normal food – with a form of madness that led to cannibalism. Fear of this madness could prompt pre-emptive attacks of self-defence:

A Savage told me, during this famine, that his wife and sister-in-law contemplated killing their own brother; I asked him why. “We are afraid,” he replied, “that he will kill us during our sleep, to eat us.” “We supply you,” said I, “a part of our food every day to help you.” “That is true,” he replied, “thou givest us life; but this man is half-mad; he does not eat, he has some evil design; we wish to prevent him, wilt though be displeased at that?” I found myself a little troubled; I could not consent to his death, and yet I believed they had good cause for their fear.<sup>9</sup>

In his account for the following year, Le Jeune records one of the names associated with this fear. At Trois-Rivières, he writes, a woman performed a shaking tent ceremony during

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Le Jeune, “Relation de ce qui s’est passé en la Nouvelle France, en l’année 1635,” August 28, 1635, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 8: 29.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8: 27-29. *Sauvage* or “savage” at this time did not have the negative connotation it has today, but referred to a dweller of the forest (*silva* in Latin, from which *sauvage* is derived). See: Robert J. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 13-15.

<sup>8</sup> Morrison cites a case reported by Jesuit Chrestien Le Clerq among the Mik’maq in 1680, when a family resorted to killing some of their children to survive. They were ostracized. “They could not find tears enough nor words enough to condemn and to express on their own behalf the enormity of their crime. ... They imagined that they saw as many executioners as they met Indians; and they travelled ... without ceasing, seeking everywhere in vain for a rest which they could find no place.” According to Le Clerq, they found peace when he explained to them that “God has more goodness and compassion for them [than] they had of wickedness and cruelty” and received his assurance of God’s pardon for their crime. Cited in Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 70-71.

<sup>9</sup> Le Jeune, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 68: 29-31. The missionaries recommended that the worried man hide all weapons except one, which should be kept with him at night. This was done. “Three days later, this poor wretch [the “half-mad” man] went to Kebec, where, having tried to kill some Frenchman, Monsieur le Governor, seeing that he was mad, had him put in chains, to surrender him to the first Savages that might come along.”

which a “Demon, – or rather this Devilish woman” threatened that if the Attikamegouekhi settled in a village close to the French, that he (the Demon), would devour more of them than he had already, or that an “Atchen (a sort of werewolf), would come in his place to devour them.”<sup>10</sup> The conjuror would not have used the threat of an attack by a cannibal monster if it had been laughed at or dismissed by the Attikamegouekhi, or by their close neighbours. And this was not just any cannibal monster; it was well-enough known and feared to have a name: “Atchen,” a variant of the term *atoosh* – both synonymous with *wihtiko*.<sup>11</sup>

Then, as now, the Attikamegouekhi (older spelling of the plural of *Atikamekw*, as they are more commonly called today) inhabited the headwaters of the Saint-Maurice River, which flows into the Saint Lawrence at Trois-Rivières. Among their neighbours were a people known as the Kilistinons – a variant of which was Cristinots, from which the name Cris or Cree is derived.<sup>12</sup> The Jesuits were aware of the Kilistinons since 1640 and they knew many different Kilistinons inhabited the lands around James Bay.<sup>13</sup> Contemporary linguistic and geo-cultural ties between *Atikamekw* and southeastern James Bay Cree have a long history, as evidenced in the Jesuit account of 1660-61:

[T]he Nation of the Kilistinons, situated between the upper lake and the sea-bay that we have mentioned ... have sent us an invitation by a Christian Captain who came from the upper lake down to Tadoussac by the routes described by us above, and they exhort us to form an alliance with them and go next spring to visit their nine Villages, where we shall find people of a gentle and tractable disposition, as well as the Atikamegues and the Montagnais, with whom they have language and disposition in common.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Le Jeune, “Relation,” August 28, 1636, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 9: 113 (It seems that the conjuror feared the loss of a middleman position for her own kin if the Attikamegouekhi moved closer to the French.)

<sup>11</sup> Atoosh is a cannibal giant, an entity that appears to be relatively synonymous with the *witiko* among the Eastern James Bay Cree and their Montagnais-Naskapi neighbours. Speck, *Naskapi*, 67-68.

<sup>12</sup> Paul-Émile, *Amiskwaski*, 13. Toby Morantz, “Land of the Lions,” 161. *Atikamekw* means whitefish, and has an identical pronunciation and meaning among the southeastern James Bay Cree of Mistissini, Waswanipi and Oujebougamou. See: *Cree Lexicon: Eastern James Bay Dialects* (Mistissini, Quebec: Cree School Board, 1987), 57.

<sup>13</sup> Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations* (1640), 21: 238; (1657-1658), 44: 242; (1660-1661), 46: 248.

<sup>14</sup> Jérôme Lalement, “Relation de ce qui s’est passé . . . en la Nouvelle France, és années mil six cent cinquante neuf & mil six cent soixante,” in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 46: 67-68.

However much they may have been interested in the missionaries' message, it is likely that the Kilistinons or James Bay Cree were equally interested in a commercial and military alliance with the French.<sup>15</sup> French colonial records indicate that the James Bay Cree went to Quebec to seek a missionary in 1661. That summer, therefore, Jesuits Gabriel Druilletes and Claude Dablon left Quebec for the North Sea (James Bay).<sup>16</sup>

On this first attempt to reach the populations of James Bay, the Jesuits again encountered stories of cannibal monstrosity, this time explicitly linked to the people of James Bay. Having travelled up the Saguenay River to Lake Saint-Jean, the Jesuits discovered on arrival that the men their guide had earlier sent northwest

for the purpose of summoning the Nations to the North Sea [James Bay] ... had met their death the previous Winter in a very strange manner. Those poor men (according to the report given us) were seized with an ailment unknown to us, but not very unusual among the people we were seeking.<sup>17</sup>

Although the ailment in question was left un-named, the description, however exaggerated, leaves little doubt that they were referring to the phenomenon described, some three centuries later, as *wihtiko* "psychosis."<sup>18</sup>

They are afflicted with neither lunacy, hypochondria, nor frenzy; but have a combination of all these species of disease, which affects their imaginations and causes them a more than canine hunger. This makes them so ravenous for human flesh that they pounce upon women, children, and even upon men, like veritable werewolves, and devour them voraciously, without being able to appease or glut their appetite – ever seeking fresh prey, and the more greedily the more they eat. This ailment attacked our deputies; and, as death is the sole

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<sup>15</sup> This is what is suggested by Bacqueville de la Potherie in his *Histoire de l'Amérique Septentrionale* (Paris: Nyon Fils, 1753), 141: "Ceux-ci [the people of James Bay] sachant qu'il y avoit une Nation étrangere dans leur voisinage, envoierent en 1661, par les terres à Quebec des Députez aux François pour faire un commerce, & demanderent un Missionnaire au Vicomte d'Argenson qui en étoit pour lors Gouverneur."

<sup>16</sup> Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 20.

<sup>17</sup> Gabriel Druilletes and Claude Dablon, Nekouba to Jérôme Lalement, July 2, 1661," in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 46: 261-263.

<sup>18</sup> Teicher comments that this incident "suggests that windigo psychosis was probably an aboriginal form of mental illness," Teicher, "Windigo Psychosis," 77. The claim that it was "an aboriginal form of mental illness" has been debated, but it is difficult to context that, whatever it was, *wihtiko* had pre-contact origins.

remedy among those simple people for checking such acts of murder, they were slain in order to stay the course of their madness.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps threatened by the potential loss of their profitable middleman position, the Jesuits' Innu guides appear to have tried to dissuade them from travelling further towards James Bay. Le Jeune and his companions did not give this story full credence, even if it concerned them more than the earlier warning of perilous rapids on the route to the Northern Sea: "This news might well have arrested our journey if our belief in it had been as strong as the assurance we received of its truth."<sup>20</sup> Even if they were fear-mongering fabrications, the stories of the perilous rapids and the "ailment" were told on the assumption that the listeners knew the existence of both to be possible. The Jesuits did, in fact, encounter perilous rapids when they finally continued on their way. As it turns out, others would soon confirm the belief in the possibility of affliction by this terrifying "ailment," or worse, possession by an evil being that could induce it.

Thomas Gorst's 1670-75 account from southern James Bay refers to Cree beliefs in two superior spiritual beings or Manitus, one benevolent and the other malevolent, from whom came all sickness and evil.<sup>21</sup> On October 7, 1714, James Knight, the HBC's overseas Governor at York Fort, wrote in the post journal that "Some [Cree] Indians came From Fort Nelson who says thay Saw a Whitego wch is an Apparition [ghost] & I keep ym to hunt the Winter."<sup>22</sup> The "Apparition" was real enough that they were too frightened to return to Fort Nelson. Several accounts from the mid- to late 1700s reiterate Gorst's distinction between two supernatural beings, but all of them refer to the benevolent spirit as *Manitu* or *Okimaw* and to the malevolent spirit as *Wihtiko*, or variants thereof. Significantly, only of the *wihtiko* is it said that they had a

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<sup>19</sup> Druilletes and Dablon, in Thwaites, *Jesuit Relations*, 46: 261-263.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 46: 263.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Gorst's manuscript journal of 1670-75 speaks of a belief in "two Monetoes or Spirits, the one sends all the good things they have, and the other all the bad." Gorst did not name the *wihtiko*, but other accounts do. Cited in Cooper, "Northern Algonquian," 42.

<sup>22</sup> York Fort Journal, HBCA, B.239/a/1, cited in Smith, "Notes on Witiko," 21.

“notion of a personal appearance.”<sup>23</sup> David Thompson’s account from his time among the Cree who traded at Churchill and York Factory, between 1784 and 1807, not only echoes these distinctions, but elsewhere describes “‘Wee tee go’” as “the evil Spirit that devours humankind,” or may possess them.<sup>24</sup> He made this point in 1796, explaining the momentarily drunken utterings of Wiskahoo, a Cree man who had recently narrowly escaped starvation and the dreadful necessity of cannibalism:

It is usual when the Indians come to trade to give them a pint of grog. ... Wiskahoo, as soon as he got it, and while drinking of it, used to say in a thoughtful mood ‘Nee-wee-to-go’ ‘I must be a Man eater.’ This word seemed to imply ‘I am possessed of an evil spirit to eat human flesh’; ‘Wee-to-go’ is the evil Spirit that devours humankind.<sup>25</sup>

Wiskahoo was killed three years later.<sup>26</sup> As his fears and those of his companions who killed him indicate, one of the worst things that could befall a person was not merely to starve to death, or even to fall victim to violent cannibalism, but to engage in violent cannibalism oneself. To do so was to become a *wihtiko*, even if it was not the only manifestation of *wihtiko* possession or transformation. Thompson claimed that he had “known a few instances of this deplorable turn of mind and not one instance could plead hunger much less famine as an excuse of it. There is yet a dark chapter to be written on this aberration of the human mind.”<sup>27</sup> The oldest surviving

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Swaine’s 1746-47 account from Fort Nelson (York Factory) region refers to “*Manitou*, to which Spirit, they attribute all the Perfections of the Deity, the other Spirit they call *Vitico*, and that Spirit they imagine to the Cause of all the Evil and Misfortune that happens to them ... They have a Notion of a personal Appearance of *Vitico* ... , but not of *Manitou*.” Henry Ellis’ 1748 account, also from the York Factory region, refers to “*Ukkewma*, which in their Language signifies the great Chief,” a “Being of infinite Goodness,” and “*Wittikka*, whom they represent as the Instrument of all kinds of Mischief and Evil; and of him they are very much afraid.” William Wales 1768-69 account from the Churchill region, refers to “*Ukkemah*” and “*Witakah*,” one of them “the author of all good, the other of all evil.” Edward Umfreville’s account from York Factory, where he resided between 1771 and 1782, refers to “*Kitch-e-man-e-to*,” a “good Being,” and “*Whit-ti-co*,” of whom “they are very much in fear.” Cited in Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 90-92. See also James Isham’s account from 1749, which refers to the “whiteco” as “the Devil”; Theodore Swaine Drage’s 1748-49 account, which refers to “Manitou” and “Vitico”; Andrew Graham’s 1767-91 journal, which refers to “Kitchimanitow,” “Wesucacha,” and “Uckimow” as names for the benevolent being and “Whittico” as the evil being. Cited in Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 342.

<sup>24</sup> Cited in Cooper, “Northern Algonquian,” 93.

<sup>25</sup> Cited in Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 348.

<sup>26</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 357-358.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative*, 260-261.

official HBC item of correspondence from North America, written by Captain John Fullartine from Albany Fort in 1703, gives an account of the worst of these tragedies, though it stops short of referring to the *wihtiko*:

It was a very hard winter (for provision) all over the country, for abundance of the poor Indians perished and were so hard put to it that whole families of them were killed and eaten by one another: the young men killed and eat [sic] their parents and the women were so put to it for hunger that they spared not the poor sucking infants at their breasts but devoured them. The reason of this famine amongst them was the little snow that fell so that they could not hunt beasts.<sup>28</sup>

This 1703 letter does not reveal Fullartine's source for these alleged cases of violent starvation cannibalism. Neither does it indicate if they were exceptional, or whether they were caused or exacerbated by disease.<sup>29</sup> Nor is it clear from this letter how far from the post these alleged incidents occurred, how Fullartine learned of them, and what opportunity or effort there was to intervene. Nevertheless, the tone suggests a degree of distance or detachment from the Cree that would dramatically change in subsequent eighteenth-century accounts of starvation, violence and cannibalism, or the threat of it.

Smith cites the earliest of these subsequent accounts, received from a mother and her daughter who arrived, "in a most miserable Condition of hunger," at Fort Churchill in February 1741. The daughter had three children and a husband who was described by the HBC trader as "one of *our* goose Hunters Spring & fall."<sup>30</sup> His journal recounts the "Tragical Story":

Sometime last month this family was in such a Starved Condition that ye man murdered his youngest Child & Eat it, And in 4 Days after he murdered his Closest Son who was about 12 Years of age, the women fearing he would murder them all they Left him wth ye dead Boy, taking wth them their Second Child wch was a girl about 7 or 8 years old, & made for ye factory, they then being about 150 miles Distance from hence, 3 Days after he pursued them

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<sup>28</sup> Published in *Letters From Hudson Bay, 1703-1740*, ed. K.G. Davies and A.M. Johnson, Hudson's Bay Record Society Publications 25 (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1965), 9.

<sup>29</sup> European epidemics had reached James Bay by this point, and as Hackett points out, starvation was often a secondary effect of sickness. Paul Hackett, *A Very Remarkable Sickness": Epidemics in the Petit Nord, 1670-1846* (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2002), 46-51.

<sup>30</sup> Emphasis added. February 1741, in the Fort Churchill journal, HBCA, B.42/a/22, cited in Smith, "Notes on Wittiko," 22.

and Coming up wth them he Endeavoured to arrest ye Girl from ye mother but both ye Women Endeavouring to preserve ye Child, he throatled it in it's mothers hands & after that Seized his wife to Murder her also, but ye two women over Come him & his wife Knocked him on ye head wth a hatchet after they had Slue him they Buried him & his daughter together under ye Snow & came for ye factory & in 16 Days time they got here, what is very Surprising at ye time of this Disaster there was Plenty of Deer [caribou] about him & he had amunition & might have Kild Venison wch his family Strongly Desired him to do, but he gave no manner of Care to their Sollicitations but his mind seemed to be fixed upon what is above related, ye Subsistence ye women got to bring them forward, was for Sevrall Days Deer Dung wch they Picked up and Desolved in warm water & So Drank it till at Length providence flung in their way ye Scraps of a Deer that ye wolves had Killed & Left.<sup>31</sup>

Brightman cites another account, given by Alexander Henry when, in 1767, he wintered north of Lake Superior with an Anishinabe group. A lone hunter arrived, who it was discovered had killed and eaten four relatives during a starvation crisis. Without mentioning the *wihtiko*, Henry explained the following belief and its consequences:

The Indians entertain an opinion that the man who has once made human flesh his food will never afterwards be satisfied with any other. It is probable that we saw things through the medium of our prejudices; but I confess that this disturbing object appeared to verify the doctrine. He ate with relish nothing that was given to him but, indifferent to the food prepared, fixed his eyes continually on the children which were in the Indian lodge, and frequently exclaimed, "How fat they are!" It was perhaps not unnatural that after long acquaintance with no human form but such as was guant and pale from lack of food a man's eyes should be almost riveted upon anything where misery had not made such inroads, and still more upon the bloom and plumpness of childhood; and the exclamation might be the most innocent and might proceed from an involuntary and unconquerable sentiment of admiration. Be this as it may, his behavior was considered, and not less naturally, as marked with the most alarming symptoms; and the Indians, apprehensive that he would prey on these children, resolved on putting him to death.<sup>32</sup>

Smallman cites another case from September 1774, in which the Cree near Fort Severn were pressuring the officer in charge to kill a Cree man who was showing signs of insanity and had threatened violence against his own wife and others. In this case the term *wihtiko* was used. In a failed attempt to appease their fears without killing the man, the trader placed him in irons. On September 29, however, he reported as follows:

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Brightman, "Windigo in the Material," 347-348.

The poor man deprived of reason was unfortunately murdered last night by those Indians that came from Beaver river one of whom is the deceased wife's brother who [after] they had attempted to strangle him, bruised his skull in a shocking manner with a Hatchet. I enquired why they had put him to death as there was no danger from him when fast in irons? To which they answered, he was so furious in the night they were afraid he would have broke the irons and [they] intreated us to continue them on otherwise he would get out of his Grave and come back and kill them, and frighten trading natives from coming to the place. Their superstition leads them so far as to imagine People deprived of reason stalk about after death and prey upon human flesh, such they are Witiko's (ie.) Divils. In the month of February a. 1772, the above unhappy man was so distressed for food that he kill'd his own Sister and her child.<sup>33</sup>

This incident and two others from 1798 and 1816, also cited by Smallman, suggest that fur traders were often reluctant to accept Cree beliefs and customs even to the point of expressing an “element of empathy with the perceived windigo.”<sup>34</sup> One expressed astonishment at “the Dread they have of being near a person insane ... the very name of one being within several days Journey from their Hunting Ground will occasion that quarter to be deserted for some years.”<sup>35</sup> James Clouston found the “terror” evoked by one insane Cree man “hardly conceivable ... Not one of them but has attempted to terrify me with him.” His remarks suggest he had not seen the man's condition yet. He informed the Cree that he

would endeavor to protect him *should he come to the House* they uniformly replied that he would kill every person that he could see; that sometimes he walks in the air invisible from where he can do Mischief; that when he alights on the earth he uses no common food, being supplied from above; but when he kills a human being he feasts thereon; and that he is supplied, from above, with a large knife but no other Instrument.”<sup>36</sup>

As Brightman points out, these fur traders were genuinely perplexed by the phenomena.<sup>37</sup> If they often sought to prevent the killing of insane individuals deemed to have become *wihtikowak*, they could not ignore the fear instilled by the *wihtiko*. According to Smallman, however, it was

<sup>33</sup> Severn House Journal, 29 September 1774, HBCA, B.198/a/19, cited in Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 578.

<sup>34</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 581.

<sup>35</sup> York Factory Journal, 26 April 1798, HBCA, B.239/1/101: 26d, cited in Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 578-579. The fur-trader expressed concern about the impact on the “goose hunt” but this was not an economic concern, but a subsistence concern. Geese were a staple in their diet, and as later incidents show, shortage could mean hardship for fur traders as well as Crees who might seek relief.

<sup>36</sup> James Clouston, Neoskweskau House Journal, 14 September 1816, HBCA, B.143/a/17: 10, cited in Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 579-580.

<sup>37</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 348.

“far more typical for the local traders to be asked to care for the mentally ill,” which they usually did.<sup>38</sup> Brightman concurs, citing a detailed 1823 testimony by fur trader George Nelson, that it was more common for a cure to be sought for those who showed signs of insanity or *wihtiko* possession:

they are in general kind and extremely indulgent to those thus infected: they seem to consider it [windigo disorder] as an infliction [sic] and are desirous of doing all they can to assist. There are however many exceptions but these depend upon the circumstances attending them.<sup>39</sup>

In this regard, fur traders and Cree were more often united in their interventions. On January 18, 1780, for example, this report was penned in the Moose Factory journal:

In the evening the Albany Indian then went away the third instant, returned in such a starved condition, that it was with some difficulty he was prevented from killing one of his own children for the horrid purpose of subsistence by one of our Moose Indians who most fortunately was with him.<sup>40</sup>

There is no further indication of how the Moose Cree hunter perceived this incident, and whether he took further steps later on to respond to actions that were clearly associated with the *wihtiko*. Nevertheless, the phrase “one of our Moose Indians” confirms what has been argued already, that the HBC had developed with at least some of the Crees, a mutually beneficial partnership, to echo Francis and Morantz’ term, that extended well beyond mere commerce to reciprocity in time of need.<sup>41</sup>

Such reciprocity, as pointed out in Chapter One, cannot be attributed to mere economic pragmatism or elevated to generosity and charity – though both were often at play for Native and Newcomer alike. European or Euroamerican fur traders – until well into the nineteenth century –

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<sup>38</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 580-581. Smallman cites an 1845 case at Oxford House, where a *wihtiko* scare threatened the fur returns and the HBC trader, George Gladman, sent out men to track down the alleged *wihtiko*.

<sup>39</sup> George Nelson, referring to Cree of Lac la Ronge (in present-day Saskatchewan) in the early 1800s, cited in Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 358.

<sup>40</sup> HBCA, B.135/a/61.

<sup>41</sup> Francis and Morantz, *Partners in Furs*, 93-94.

were no less vulnerable to starvation than Cree and other Algonquians; neither were they immune to the threat of the *wihtiko*.

John Long gives one of the earliest and most widely published accounts of a Euroamerican *wihtiko* – or at least a man identified as such by Algonquians. He recounts how, in the winter of 1779 near Lake Nipigon, starvation led a *Canadien* fur-trade *engagé* to kill and cannibalize, first an Anishinabe man, and then a fellow *engagé*.<sup>42</sup> As postmaster at Dead Lake (east of Lake Nipigon), Long himself was in a dire situation that winter with seventeen of his men. “The frost continuing very severe, and no appearance of Indians to supply our wants,” recounted Long, “we were obliged to take off the hair from the bear skins, and roast the hide, which tastes like pork. This, with some *trip de roche* [lichen], was all our nourishment.” Fortunately, an Anishinabe chief arrived with hunters, bringing provisions: “the Indians seeing our distress by our looks, which were very meagre, gave us all their provisions.” After Long and his men had eaten, the chief recounted a very recent incident, in which a Mr. Fulton, in charge of a neighbouring fur-trade post, had been obliged by lack of provisions to split his party into three groups, one to remain at the post, one to hunt and one to fish.<sup>43</sup>

The fishing party, made up of Charles Janvier and two others *Canadien engagés*, was unsuccessful, and they soon found themselves so weak with starvation that when an Anishinabe hunter arrived with some furs they immediately ate the skins. The hunter indicated he would seek provisions for them, but Janvier tricked and killed him, carrying out an intention he had earlier

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<sup>42</sup> John Long, *Voyages and travels of an Indian interpreter and trader describing the manners and customs of the North American Indians; with an account of the posts situated on the river Saint Laurence, Lake Ontario, &c. to which is added, a vocabulary of the Chippeway language, names of furs and skins, in English and French, a list of words in the Iroquois, Mohegan, Shawanee, and Esquimeaux tongues, and a table, shewing the analogy between the Algonkin and Chippeway languages* (London: Robson and Co., 1791), 117-126. German and French translations of Long’s book were published in 1791 and 1794, which suggests that it attracted a lot of attention. See Charles Bishop, entry for “Long, John, fur-trader; b. London, England; fl. 1768–91,” in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed June 16, 2014, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/long\\_john\\_4E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/long_john_4E.html).

<sup>43</sup> Long, *Voyages*, 119.

declared – to the disbelief of his fellows. He cooked and ate his victim, forcing his weaker compatriots to partake of the meal and vow to silence or fall victim to the same fate. When one soon voiced criticism, Janvier killed and ate him too, forcing the other to again partake and swear to secrecy, on pain of death. When they were later reunited with the rest of their party, Mr. Fulton – wanting information about the missing man – convinced Janvier’s unwilling accomplice to tell his story. When confronted, Janvier eventually confessed, declaring “that in a similar situation he would kill his [own] brother.” He was then summarily shot by Mr. Fulton.

Throughout all of this, Long commented, Janvier had shown no sign of mental derangement; nevertheless, the Anishinabe chief who related the story to Long explained that “the bad spirit had entered into the heart of Janvier.” The bad spirit he had in mind was likely the *wihtiko*.<sup>44</sup> With many more such stories in circulation around fur traders’ campfires and hearths, it is no surprise that the fear of *wihtikowak* or at least *wihtiko*-like behaviour was not limited to the Cree and their Anishinabe neighbours.<sup>45</sup>

In 1806, William Budge, an Orcadian engaged by the HBC in 1790, was on a mail run in the northwest with two *Canadiens* when he overheard one of them say to the other: “Let us roast the Englishman as he is lazy and will not assist in beating [breaking] the path.” Budge’s decade and a half in the fur trade had taught him that such utterings were not to be taken lightly – though the comment was not likely an expression of literal intent. Or perhaps Budge had heard the story of *Janvier*. Fearing for his life, Budge shot at both men during the night, killing one of them.<sup>46</sup> Nine years later, fear would again grip the heart of another Orcadian, also named William

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<sup>44</sup> Long, *Voyages*, 120 & 125.

<sup>45</sup> See Podruchny, “Werewolves and Windigos.”

<sup>46</sup> HBCA biographical sheet for William Budge, accessed November 26, 2014, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/b/budge\\_william.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/b/budge_william.pdf); HBCA, B.239/a/112: 28d-29d.

Budge, in the aftermath of a *wihtiko* incident that would resonate across a century, an ocean and several generations of Cree families, one in particular.

## 1817 BIG LAKE INCIDENT: *WIHTIKO* TRIAL THAT RESONATED ACROSS CENTURY & OCEAN

### *Big Lake Incident, 1816-17*

On September 20, 1818, James Clouston, the Orcadian manager of the Hudson's Bay Company's recently established Naisquiscaw (Neoskweskau) District, arrived at Big Lake – *Chi-Sekehikan* – one of the two outposts that depended on Naisquiscaw House.<sup>47</sup> There, he found the 23-year-old clerk in charge, a fellow Orcadian named William Budge, in such “a state of inebriety” that he was “immediately induced ... to examine the stock of rum.”

One keg was empty, another was filled up of water, a third ... [was partly filled with a mixture of] rum and ... water, and the fourth keg was untouched. There was only one net at the House. Consequently a sufficiency of fish could not be procured for their use, and they were living on pork and flour. On asking him how he expected to do for the winter he said “that he knew his way to Ruperts House, when his provisions should happen to fail, and that every person was satisfied this lake was a bad fishing lake, *or else the people would not all have starved last winter.*”<sup>48</sup>

By all appearances, William Budge was drowning his fears of starvation in rum. Such fears were not unwarranted, even without considering the tragic events of the preceding winter.

A year earlier, in 1817, Governor Thomas Vincent at Moose Factory had reported to his London superiors that the Company's situation in James Bay was strained. The early

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<sup>47</sup> HBCA biographical sheet for James Clouston, accessed November 26, 2014, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/c/clouston\\_james1808-1827.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/c/clouston_james1808-1827.pdf).

<sup>48</sup> Emphasis added. September 20, 1818, Big Lake Journal, HBCA, B.19/a/1. Just three years previously, James Russell, the Orcadian trader in charge of the Eastmain District, had described Budge as a “young, strong and active” clerk who “... will make a good hand against the Canadians.” Eastmain List of Servants, 1815, HBCA, B.59/f/9. See also: HBCA biographical sheet for James Russell, accessed November 26, 2014, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/r/russell\\_james.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/r/russell_james.pdf).

encroachment of ice floes in Hudson Strait had forced supply ships to retreat south and winter in James Bay the previous two years.<sup>49</sup> As a result,

the exhausted state of the stores in the country; the reduction of the stock of cattle, and an unprecedented scarcity of every species of country provisions, for three successive years rendered the strictest economy and a prudent foresight absolutely necessary to avoid the miseries of starvation and all the train of evils to which an approach to that state must have led.<sup>50</sup>

Four men from the Kenogamissee District, in fact, had already died of starvation or exposure in the 1816-17 season, but their deaths may not have been the worst of the “train of evils” that Vincent had in mind.<sup>51</sup> He had certainly been in the region long enough to have heard or read stories of starvation cannibalism and the *wihtiko* – perhaps even Long’s account of *Janvier*.<sup>52</sup> But there was also an English tradition of stories relating to the “custom of the sea,” whereby cannibalism might be resorted to by shipwrecked – or ice-locked – sailors.<sup>53</sup>

The train of evils was not long in signalling its arrival that fall, with an early onset of cold weather. Early winter gales left people fighting for breath in the frigid air, promising little respite for Native and Newcomer alike. Writing on New Year’s Day, 1818, experienced Hudson Bay

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Vincent, “Remarks and General Observations on the Trade and Occurrences in the Southern Department 1816-1817,” HBCA, B.145/e/4. Vincent elaborated that “The distress occasioned by the return of the ships Prince of Wales and Emerald, to winter in the country has been as severely felt as that experienced the preceding year, by the return of the Eddystone and Hadlow and this notwithstanding the large supply of provisions received by the Emerald in the fall of 1816.” As it turns out, another supply vessel, the *Britannia*, would also be frozen over in the Bay in 1817-1818. See Captain John Camans to Trader in charge at Moose Factory, November 3, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 25; J.B. Tyrrell, “Arrivals and Departures of Ships: Moose Factory, Hudson Bay, Province of Ontario,” *Ontario History* 14 (1916): 163-168.

<sup>50</sup> Vincent, “Remarks and General Observations on the Trade and Occurrences in the Southern Department 1816-1817,” HBCA, B.145/e/4.

<sup>51</sup> Kerry M. Abel, *Changing Places: History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 28-29. Two died from starvation, two from exposure. See also: Roderick McColloch to Joseph Beioley, Moose Factory, August 30, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 7. McColloch informed Beioley “Mr. [James] Russell has been telling all the People at Eastmain that you was the cause of the men starving at Kinnogamissee last winter and the blame was wholly attached to you and to none else. Mr. Greely & Peter White are my author[itie]s. I think it is incumbent duty on me to put you in the knowledge of it, knowing well you are innocent of the charge.”

<sup>52</sup> Long, *Voyages*, 117-126.

<sup>53</sup> See Neil Hanson, *The Custom of the Sea: The Story that Changed British Law* (New York: Doubleday, 1999). See chapter four for a discussion of this.

Company fur trader Alexander Christie described the situation on the eastern James Bay coast and its interior:

The season last Autumn was extremely untoward, the rivers were froze over at an early date, and afterwards broke up, this was followed by heavy gales, and severe weather, the effects of which have been severely felt in this Department, both on the Coast and in the Interior.<sup>54</sup>

By the end of the 1817-18 season, at least twelve more HBC employees or their wives lost their lives around James Bay. Five died from starvation and exposure in the Albany River watershed on the west coast of the bay, where they had been sent inland to establish or maintain trade outposts.<sup>55</sup> Increased competition from Montreal-based traders was forcing the Company to venture further inland into unfamiliar territory – often with inexperienced employees.<sup>56</sup> At least seven others also died on the east coast. In August 1818, Joseph Beioley, Master of the Moose Factory District, wrote to Governor Vincent:

Mr. Christie's letter of the 1st April made me acquainted with the melancholy and distressing intelligence of the loss of two men in Naisquicow District, and of the Master and two men out of a party of five persons sent last summer to make a settlement at Waswanaby having perished at a Lake called Great Lake [Big Lake]; a subsequent letter, dated June 21st informed me of the death of the other two, whom it was imagined might possibly have been surviving. In what manner some of these unfortunate people perished does not appear, but the best account yet received is contained in the letter just mentioned. The disastrous catastrophe which had attended this attempt at establishing a post at Waswanaby renders it necessary that all the circumstances relative thereto should be explained. So far therefore as I have it in my power to give any account of them I will endeavor to do so.<sup>57</sup>

As it turned out, only three died of starvation or exposure. The other two were claimed by the *wihtiko* – whether real or imagined. This catastrophe at Big Lake had provoked William Budge's

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph Beioley to Alexander Christie, June 21, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 63.

<sup>55</sup> Beioley to Christie, April 13, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 46. Beioley writes: "No less than five persons have lost their lives in the AR [Albany River] Inland Quarter, and one man has, tho in existence and likely I believe to continue so, lost both his feet at the ankle. Mr. Brown (Lake Sloop Master) is one of the deceased." See also: Christie to Beioley, January 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 33. John Malcolm, the survivor who lost both his feet to frostbite, would have perished had it not been for a Cree hunter who found and rescued him. See: William Thomas to Thomas Vincent, February 12, 1818, HBCA, B.78/b/3.

<sup>56</sup> Vincent to Beioley, September 19, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 13; Vincent, "Observations and Remarks on the Annual Reports of the District Masters in the Southern Department, 1818-1819," HBCA, B.145/e/8.

<sup>57</sup> Beioley to Vincent, Moose Factory District Report, August 3, 1818, HBCA, B.135/e/4.

plunge into inebriety in September 1818. A few hundred kilometres west, in Moose Factory, it had also provoked the repeated plunge of quill into inkpot.

The HBC records indicate that the leader of the party sent to establish the Waswanaby (Waswanipi) post was John Pitt Greely, an American. In September 1817, he had departed Rupert's House, the Company's main trade-post in southeastern James Bay, provisioned for little more than the journey. Also in his party was Henrick Swainson and his wife, Peter White and his wife (and likely a son<sup>58</sup>), as well as William Laughton, who was fresh off the boat from Stromness, Orkney.<sup>59</sup> They were accompanied part of the way by Robert McColloch and his party, destined for Naisquiscow, as well as by two Cree guides.<sup>60</sup> After the parties went their separate ways, the abrupt and early onset of cold weather forced Greely's party to winter at Big Lake, some distance from their planned destination of Waswanipi.<sup>61</sup> "They built a log cabin," as Henrick Swainson's half-brother, William Weigand would later recall, "on the south side of the

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<sup>58</sup> "Peter White steer'd a Canoe in the Spring and now he has his Wife and an Indian youth to assist him. The fact is, they do not like to go inland, particularly White." Eastmain Journal, October 10, 1816, HBCA, B.59/a/96.

<sup>59</sup> Stromness was the HBC ships' last watering and provisioning stop before their trans-Atlantic voyage. It was here that the HBC engaged the majority of its servants. By 1800, eighty percent of the HBC's employees were of Orcadian origin. James A. Troup, "The Canadian Connection," in *The Orkney Book*, ed. Donald Omand, 224-233 (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003), 226.

<sup>60</sup> John Pitt Greely to Beioley, September 11, 1817, Greely to Beioley, September 11, 1817, and Christie to Beioley, January 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37, 18 & 33; Moose Factory Journal, August 29, 1817, HBCA, B.135/a/116.

<sup>61</sup> Many years later, in 1899, the elderly half-brother of Henrick Swainson's wife shared a story of this expedition. His name was William Weigand, and despite his years, he seems to have had a sharp memory. Peter McKellar, eventual founder of the Thunder Bay Historical Society, was the person who recorded the story. A onetime surveyor and prospector, McKellar "was surprised at his [Weigand's] knowledge of the district between Rupert & Mistassini. He pointed out all the old routes and lakes etc." According to Weigand, "there were two parties started from Rupert House about the beginning of August" (they left Moose Factory, in fact, on August 21, and only left Ruperts House on September 10). "The Greely party was going to ... Waswanipi Lake. ... The two parties went together up the Rupert River to Namiska Lake. It seems they were having a good time while together and took much longer time than they should. When they separated the Greely party went south and the other NE. The former only got to the narrows and Mount Hugh when the frost prevented their going further with their canoes." Weigand, cited or paraphrased in Peter McKellar to Robert Bell, May 26, 1899, LAC, MG 53, B174. By Greely's account, however, it was high water levels and ice that had prevented them continuing. Greely to Beioley, November 13, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 34.

narrows on the East side of the Lake,” and then “commenced fishing with nets in the Lake through the ice.”<sup>62</sup>

Suddenly, the weather changed again. November 6 brought warmer air currents and a “heavy fall of rain” that re-opened the river “and a considerable part of the lake.”<sup>63</sup>

All our hooks, about 60 that was in the river, are carried off and those in the lake we cannot get. We have not been able to get any supply from either hooks or nets for eight days. We are obliged to live entirely on flour. This together with the latter end of our journey and before the ice was strong enough to fish on has reduced our stock of flour to one hundred and fifty pounds. If the fishing proves as good after the river sets fast as it was for a short time before it opened I shall be able to lay up a stock to carry us to Woswonnuppy in the spring. as I have sent Peter White to winter with an Indian, Simon Corston & William Laughton are going to hunt Rabbits one days walk from this as soon as they can get by walking.<sup>64</sup>

Greely expressed confidence that he could stay on and avoid retreating to the coast.<sup>65</sup> Not long afterwards, however, the temperature suddenly dropped again, wreaking havoc around the bay. As George Gladman later reported from Eastmain House, echoing Alexander Christie’s assessment, even experienced hunters found themselves in great difficulty.<sup>66</sup> In the meantime, Greely’s letters – delivered to the coast by one of the two Cree men who had been engaged to guide the expedition – nonetheless exuded confidence. Alexander Christie, the Superintendent at Rupert House, thus reported to Joseph Beioley on January 1, 1818 that he was “under no apprehension for their safety”; moreover, he had been told by the Cree that fish were abundant in

<sup>62</sup> William Weigand, in McKellar to Bell, May 26, 1899, LAC, MG 53, B174.

<sup>63</sup> Greely to Beioley, November 13, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 34.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* According to Weigand, in the end, “they lost all their nets.” McKellar to Bell, May 26, 1899, LAC, MG 53, B174.

<sup>65</sup> Greely to Beioley, November 13, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 34.

<sup>66</sup> Eastmain Report on District, 1817-1818, July 1, 1818, HBCA, B.59/e/5. In this report Gladman detailed the impact of the abrupt change in weather, after the early October freeze: “on the 5th November it began to thaw and continued until the 12th with very heavy rain on that day, the water rose in the river rapidly, the river ice was torn up, a heavy gale and changes of weather immediately following choked the creeks and river with rough ice and snow, filled the marshes also and destroyed alike the fishery and hunting and a winter of hunger and misery commenced that has been seldom equalled; before the end of the year Indians began to arrive with distressing accounts of want, the creeks by the sudden change of weather were filled with ice to an uncommon thickness, made the taking of beaver houses in some places impracticable, difficult in all; this was the universal account given by all the Indians who arrived, they also say that many young beaver perished by the sudden inundation. The same scarcity continued all the winter ... the snow was uncommonly shallow and hard, so that where a few birds were found the snow shoes made so much noise in walking that no hunter could approach them. Indians was frequently arriving with such distressing accounts of hunger that I was obliged to afford them some relief to prevent their perishing.”

that area, and he therefore expected to be able to send sufficient supplies to get Greely and his companions through the winter and on to Waswanipi in the spring.<sup>67</sup>

It took Christie some time to find a Cree hunter who knew the route and was available to bring supplies to Greely and his companions. On February 23, a Cree hunter named Stacimow and his wife left Rupert House with this very mission. It had been agreed that they would remain there, if needed, to assist in provisioning Greely's party. Arriving at the camp, however, they found only one person: the wife of Henrick Swainson.<sup>68</sup> According to the story recounted some seventy years later by her half-brother, Weigand, she had been living

for some time on rabbits. Coming home with six rabbits one evening she saw smoke in the house, and was glad that someone had come. She found an Indian named Stishimow and his wife. They were sent by Mr. Cristy who was then in charge of Rupert House, to see how Big Lake Post was getting on.<sup>69</sup>

They were not getting on. Three had died of starvation. As Mrs. Swainson then informed Stacimow,

her husband and Simon Corston were the first that died, ... Mr. Greely and her was then for some time by themselves. She went off to set some rabbit snares, and having slept one night out caught two rabbits, and was returning home. But perceiving something laying on the Lake, she went towards it, and to her great surprise found it to be the body of Mr. Greely, who she supposed was endeavouring to follow her track, but from weakness and extreme cold had dropped down and perished. She also stated that Peter White & wife was hunting by themselves, that William Laughton was wintering with an Indian Cammitchesit.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Christie to Beioley, January 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 33. Christie had also seen Greely's November 14 letter (also delivered by Nabowisho on December 3) addressed to Andrew Moar, the Orcadian Master in charge of Rupert House: "If any provisions have been sent from Moose don't concern with them [i.e. do not send them out yet] for I expect to have to send down." Cited in: Christie to Beioley, April 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/137: 43.

<sup>68</sup> Christie to Vincent, Eastmain Department: Report on Districts, 1817-1818, August 31, 1818, HBCA, B.186/e/1.

<sup>69</sup> William Weigand, John Weigand, Thomas Weigand Jr., "The Hannah Bay Massacre," compiled and edited by Peter McKellar, April 16, 1899, LAC, MG 53, B174. John Weigand was son of Thomas Weigand Sr., brother of William Weigand. Thomas Weigand Jr. was the son of William, named after his uncle. Peter McKellar interviewed them on behalf of Robert Bell. The younger relatives helped William recount the story more accurately, having themselves heard it previously, and from other relatives. McKellar's May 26 letter to Bell, provided further clarifications and details, based on a follow-up conversation with William Weigand.

<sup>70</sup> Christie to Vincent, Eastmain Department: Report on Districts, 1817-1818, August 31, 1818, HBCA, B.186/e/1.

What happened next proved more shocking to Alexander Christie than the starvation deaths of Swainson, Corston and Greely. “After the poor unfortunate girl had given him this circumstantial account,” Christie later explained in his annual report, Stacimow “inhumanly put a period to her existence, alleging her to be insane.”<sup>71</sup> According to Weigands’ April 1899 account, however, she was not killed immediately. She first gave half of her freshly snared rabbits to Stacimow and his wife,

and said she would go back with them to Rupert House. The Indian wanted to kill her then, pretending she was a cannibal but his wife prevented him for some time. On the way to Rupert however he murdered her, and it seems, nothing was done to him for it.<sup>72</sup>

Christie’s initial assessment of the matter, captured in his April 1, 1818 letter to Beioley, was little different from the Weigands’: “for this barbarous act the Indian deserves to be severely punished. I do not believe she was in the state he [Stacimow] described as he says she informed him of Mr. Greely’s being frozen to death on the Lake” – and provided many other details of what had happened.<sup>73</sup> By the time he wrote up his annual report in late August, however, Christie appeared ready to acknowledge that Stacimow had acted sincerely, according to his own customs, however doubtful he remained about the allegations of insanity: “With respect to her insanity it appears very improbable. But it is common amongst Indians to put to death even their highest relations when they know of their having been reduced to the dreadful necessity of eating human flesh.”<sup>74</sup>

Had Stacimow’s intentions been murderous it is highly doubtful that he would have continued on to Rupert House as he did, arriving there on March 22. It is even more doubtful that he would have reported the “dreadful news” to Christie without hesitation. Were his deeds

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Weigand et al., “The Hannah Bay Massacre,” 4, LAC, MG 53, B174.

<sup>73</sup> Christie to Beioley, April 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/137: 43.

<sup>74</sup> Christie to Vincent, Eastmain Department: Report on Districts, 1817-1818, August 31, 1818, HBCA, B.186/e/1.

murderous and duplicitous, he would more likely have simply claimed that all four victims had died of starvation. Instead, when he arrived at Rupert House in March, Stacimow told Christie directly that the woman was “completely deranged” that “she would not taste any of the victuals he offered her, and made several attempts to take his life and in self defence that he put an end to her sufferings.”<sup>75</sup>

Even Weigand, some eighty years later, was willing to consider Stacimow’s motives sincere. Other Weigand family members were present with William when he first shared his story with Peter McKellar in April 1899. In a follow-up one-on-one conversation with McKellar in May, however, Weigand noted that Stacimow’s wife had later informed others “that Mrs. Swanson, when unable to get rabbits, [had] cut a slice of the flesh of the dead men and eat[en] it. This,” Weigand explained, “accounts for the Indian *thinking* she was dangerous.”<sup>76</sup> The shift in language from the earlier account to the later one – from “pretending” to “thinking” – suggests that, deep down, Weigand knew that Stacimow’s concerns were sincere, whether misguided or not.

It is unclear whether Mrs. Swainson actually made several attempts to take Stacimow’s life, or whether Stacimow projected his fears on her. If she had moments of full lucidity, as it appears she did, she may also have experienced moments of intense post-traumatic stress. It may also be possible that Stacimow later made up the story of the attacks – even unconsciously – in order to justify a rash action in the face of his own genuine fears. Some Crees, after all, were more prudent than others in assessing *wihtiko* threats.<sup>77</sup> According to William Weigand,

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<sup>75</sup> Christie to Beioley, April 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/137: 43. Christie’s April 1, 1818 letter to Beioley dates Stacimow’s return as March 22, but his Report on Districts, written on August 31, 1818, dates it as March 23.

<sup>76</sup> Emphasis added. Weigand, cited in McKellar to Bell, May 26, 1899, LAC, MG 53, B174.

<sup>77</sup> In a lengthy 1947 article on Cree-Naskapi law, Julius E. Lips examines one *wihtiko* case from the Rupert’s House district in the 1830s, in which the killing of an alleged *wihtiko* appears to have been questioned by other Crees. Lips, “Naskapi Law (Lake St. John and Lake Mistassini Bands) Law and Order in a Hunting Society,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 37, no. 4 (1947), 411.

Stacimow's "wife prevented him for some time" from killing Mrs. Swainson, but William clearly found it difficult to accept that his half-sister might have resorted to starvation cannibalism, let alone attempted violent cannibalism.<sup>78</sup>

Beioley's April 13 response to Christie's letter suggests that Stacimow may have acted rashly and then stretched the truth to justify his actions:

very little dependence can, I have reason to think, be placed upon the report made to you by the Indian (Stacemow) as I am given to understand he is of a very light volatile & fickle lying disposition, speaking and acting without thinking and capable of committing any foolish action whatever. The unfortunate woman whom he murdered if insane could hardly I think have given him the circumstantial account he reports her to have done and Mr. McColloch tells me that he heard that she had but just returned with 2 rabbits from her snares when the Indian and his wife arrived, one of which she presented to the Indian's wife, a circumstance which if true by no means tends to corroborate the Indian's account of her refusing the victuals he offered her. Till his report is confirmed or some authentic and credible account is received the real cause & manner of the deaths of the unfortunate persons will I now fear be ever dubious and unknown.<sup>79</sup>

Beioley does not indicate the source of his character assessment of Stacimow, but it was not based on firsthand knowledge of Stacimow (whom he would come to know much better after 1822, when he took up residence at Rupert House); rather, it was something he was "given to understand." It is necessary, however, to keep in mind these allegations of a "volatile & fickle lying disposition" when considering the allegations that Stacimow himself is said to have brought against another Cree hunter, Cammitchesit.

It was to Cammitchesit, in the vicinity of Big Lake, that Greely had sent Peter White and his wife to winter to ease demand on the meagre supply of provisions. If Stacimow is to be trusted, the allegations against Cammitchesit originated with Hendrick Swainson's wife, who stated that:

Camichisit (an Indian) ... never ... pointed out to them the proper places for setting their nets or hooks, altho he was engaged expressly for the purpose of procuring provisions for them. The Indian (Stacemow) farther states that he saw no place where they had been setting either

<sup>78</sup> Weigand et al., "The Hannah Bay Massacre," 4, LAC, MG 53, B174.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Beioley to Alexander Christie, April 13, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 46.

nets or hooks, and in the same Lake within half a days journey of the house he passed an old encampment which the Indians had left only about eight or ten days before and from every appearance they had been catching a great quantity of Mathy in the spawning season and also other kinds of fish and that he thinks (the Indian) Camitchisit, has entirely deceived them. Whether this has been the case or not time will prove.<sup>80</sup>

Stacimow' suspicions were reinforced by the fact that there was no sign they had been setting nets or hooks. He was unaware, however, that they had lost most or all of them.<sup>81</sup>

When Christie wrote the foregoing words on April 1, he still had hope that the remaining members of Greely's party – Peter White, his wife, and William Laughton – might be able to shed light on the outstanding questions. An expedition, guided by Stacimow's brother Sheutickush (elsewhere spelt Shaintoquiash), was already on its way to seek news and bring any required assistance:

As soon as the necessary articles for the journey could be got ready, I sent off William Donald, James Hourrie, David Manson and an Indian (Sheutickush) as guide, with the hopes that they may meet with Peter White and Wm Laughton and also to take charge of the property there. They are well provided with provisions and every necessary article for fishing and hunting, in case that Indians may have plundered part of the goods before they arrive.<sup>82</sup>

The track record of the inexperienced HBC servants did not bode well for those who remained inland in this difficult winter. Cold and fatigue had already claimed the lives of Thomas Redland and Thomas Oman, two men in McColloch's party, after they lost their way on route to Neisquiscow House.<sup>83</sup> Their surviving companions, including McColloch himself, owed their lives to the Cree hunter who found them; otherwise, wrote the district manager James Clouston, they too "undoubtedly ... should had [sic] perished."<sup>84</sup>

Having set out from Rupert's House in late March, Sheutickush, William Donald, James

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<sup>80</sup> Christie to Beioley, April 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/137: 43.

<sup>81</sup> Greely to Beioley, November 13, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 34. According to William Weigand's May account, in the end, "they lost all their nets." Cited in McKellar to Bell, May 26, 1899, LAC, MG 53, B174.

<sup>82</sup> Christie to Beioley, April 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/137: 43.

<sup>83</sup> Beioley to Christie, April 13, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 46.

<sup>84</sup> James Clouston, Extracts from the Neisquiscow Post Journal, November 16, 1817, Clouston to Beioley, November 26, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/137: 35.

Hourrie, and David Manson soon discovered that Peter White had starved to death – no mention is made of his wife or son – and that William Laughton had been killed by Amoshish, a Cree hunter with whom Laughton had been living. Laughton had left Amoshish' camp earlier in the month to get rum and tobacco from the Big Lake camp, and when he failed to return, Amoshish followed him.<sup>85</sup> As Christie later reported, Amoshish “found ... Laughton by himself, at the same time observing that Laughton had been subsisting upon human flesh, he through a superstitious fear, unhappily deprived him of life.”<sup>86</sup> Camitchesit later told Christie that he had initially helped Greely with provisions, and in mid-January had tried to convince him to be guided to the coast or to spend the rest of the winter at his own camp. Greely, however, had refused both offers.<sup>87</sup>

One possibility could account for many of the outstanding questions. Greely and his companions might have died of “protein starvation” or “rabbit starvation,” a wasting, often fatal condition caused by a diet that is too high in protein.”<sup>88</sup> Ethnologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson describes what can happen to those who suffer from “rabbit starvation”:

If you are transferred suddenly from a diet normal in fat to one consisting wholly of rabbit, you eat bigger and bigger meals for the first few days until at the end of about a week you are eating in pounds three or four times as much as you were at the beginning of the week. By then you are showing both signs of starvation and protein poisoning. You eat numerous meals; you feel hungry at the end of each; you are in discomfort through distention of the

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<sup>85</sup> Christie to Beioley, June 21, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 61. Christie to Vincent, Eastmain Department: Report on Districts, 1817-1818, August 31, 1818, HBCA, B.186/e/1.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* Christie gave a more detailed opinion in June 21, 1818 letter to Beioley: “The reason Amoshish assigns for committing this barbarous act is, that finding Laughton alone and observing that he had been subsisting on human flesh, led him to suppose that he had murdered the others.” HBCA, B.186/e/1.

<sup>87</sup> Christie to Vincent, Eastmain Department: Report on Districts, 1817-1818, August 31, 1818, HBCA, B.186/e/1. “When the Indian (Cammitchesit) arrived at Ruperts House, I enquired the cause of his negligence in not endeavouring to procure provisions for Mr. Greely and party. In reply, he said that he had done every thing in his power to supply them with provisions, and some time about the middle of January he went to the house in purpose to persuade Mr. Greely and party to leave the house and goods, and go to live along with the Indians, or if he preferred going down to the coast that he would conduct them thither, as he had at that time a tolerable stock of provisions at his tent. Mr. Greely unhappily did not comply with the wishes of the Indian, or had he done so, in all probability both him and his party would have been alive to this day.”

<sup>88</sup> Susan Allport, “The Skinny on Fat,” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 3, no. 1 (winter 2003), 34. Rabbit meat is extremely lean, and would normally be consumed by Cree along with much fatter meats.

stomach with much food and you begin to feel a vague restlessness. Diarrhea will start in from a week to 10 days and will not be relieved unless you secure fat. Death will result after several weeks.<sup>89</sup>

This could explain why Greely did not return to Cammitchesit to seek assistance after the Swainson and Corston had died, why Cammitchesit did not notice the further degradation of their situation, and why Greely and Mrs. Swainson did not go for help immediately after their two companions died. A sufficiency of rabbits may have given them the illusion of a sufficiency of nourishment, until they fell ill and “starved” to death. It might explain why Mrs. Swainson, more likely as a woman to have a higher body fat percentage, survived the longest and perhaps only found full nourishment when she resorted to eating the flesh of her dead companions. In moments of insanity, even after her rescue, she may have attempted to procure from Stacimow the human flesh that previously had kept her alive. Although this explanation is plausible, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that it is any more probable than the other possible explanations. The answer, as Christie feared in 1818, may remain “ever dubious and unknown.”<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, notwithstanding allegations against Stacimow and Camitchesit, the evidence suggests quite strongly that the Cree who came in contact with the starving HBC servants tried to help them, but by resorting to cannibalism, Laughton and Mrs. Swanson fell under suspicion of ‘going *wihtiko*.’ Most HBC officers and servants disapproved of the Cree custom of killing even close relatives who had resorted to cannibalism in order to survive.<sup>91</sup> On the other hand, they acknowledged that this custom was grounded in a genuine belief and fear.

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<sup>89</sup> Vilhjalmur Stefansson, *Arctic Manual* (New York, 1944), cited in Susan Allport, “The Skinny on Fat,” 34. Stefansson was a Canadian explorer and ethnologist who studied northern dietary issues in detail; he was Director of Polar Studies at Dartmouth College.

<sup>90</sup> Beiolley to Christie, April 13, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 46.

<sup>91</sup> Christie to Vincent, Eastmain Department: Report on Districts, 1817-1818, August 31, 1818, HBCA, B.186/e/1.

In these cases, the HBC officers ceded to the rule of Cree customary law and no punitive or retaliatory measures were taken against Amoshish or Stacimow. Instead, a scapegoat for the disastrous inland venture was found in James Russell. Ironically, Russell had himself blamed Beioley for starvation deaths at Kenogammissiee in 1816-17 and for hardship experienced at Eastmain that same year, where Russell had struggled to find resources to provision almost twenty Crees on a daily basis through the winter months.<sup>92</sup>

The quest for a scapegoat, however, did not stop with Russell. This incident would echo through generations, and not merely in the name given by the Cree to the place where Greely and his party died: “the starving place.”<sup>93</sup> In 1832, starvation would provoke another *wihtiko* incident that once again involved the families of both Henrick Swainson as well as Stacimow and his brother Sheutickush. This time, however, the Cree hunters and their families would find themselves on the wrong side of Cree law. It also presented an opportunity for those Company men who felt there was still justice or revenge to be meted out for the 1818 *wihtiko* killings.

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<sup>92</sup> Beioley to Christie, April 13, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 46; Christie to Vincent, Eastmain Department: Report on Districts, 1817-1818, August 31, 1818, HBCA, B.186/e/1; Vincent, “Remarks and Observations on the Reports of the several District masters and on the Trade and Occurrences in the Southern Department 1817/18,” September 1817, HBCA, B.145/e/6. In this last document Vincent writes: “There is I am sorry to observe but too much reason to believe that Mr. Russell when he received notice of his intended removal from Eastmain, conceived the base and mean idea of distressing as far as lay in his power, the District he was about to leave. The circumstance of sending the two casks of geese to Moose which had been set apart for the express purpose of supplying the party who were to proceed to Wassonaby, and the letters written by Mr. Russell on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> July 1817 are strong proofs that he no longer felt interested in the success of the Expedition after the notice he received of his intended Removal from that part of the Country. I am perfectly satisfied with the correctness of Mr. Beioley’s Report.” A closer reading of the reports suggests that this is not an unquestionable nor unbiased interpretation of the facts. They appear to be allegations that escalated to accusations and a judgement, as senior officials – especially Beioley, who had been accused of similar neglect by Russell – sought someone to blame. For Russell’s allegation against Beioley regarding Kenogammissiee, see: Roderick McColloch to Joseph Beioley, August 30, 1817, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 7. Regarding Russell’s difficulties feeding Cree destitute at Eastmain, see Russell’s entries in the post journal for February 7, 1817 and March 1: “In the forenoon 4 Indians (Artawayum’s wife and Three Children) arrived from the Southward in a deplorable state of Nakedness and starvation this makes the present number of Indians that E.Main has Daily to Maintain (besides visitors) 10 exclusive of 8 Orphan Children and several destitute Women. ... [March 1] Part of this misery might have been relieved had Mr. Beioley sent a Cask (or two) of Oat broat hither in the Fall as I earnestly requested.” HBCA, B.59/a/96: 28 & 31.

<sup>93</sup> David Denton, personal communication, August 2009.

### *Hannah Bay Incident, 1831-32*

If the winters of 1816-17 and 1817-18 were long and harsh, HBC journals are full of evidence that the winter of 1831-32 was also unusually difficult for the inhabitants of James Bay. Drastic temperature fluctuations created conditions similar to early spring when travel is made difficult and food is harder to obtain.<sup>94</sup> In January, Quappikay, a Cree *okimaw* (chief or leader), and his extended family found themselves in a desperate situation on the Ministikawatin Peninsula, between Hannah Bay and Rupert Bay. Among them were his two sons: Stacimow and Sheutickush.<sup>95</sup>

HBC and Cree accounts reveal that, facing starvation and unable to seek help at Rupert House, the HBC post where they normally traded, Quappikay and his sons used the *quashapachikun* (shaking tent) to ask their *mistabeo* (a personal spirit helper) for guidance.<sup>96</sup> According to Iiyuu Cree elder George Diamond, they were desperate enough that they ended the life of an elderly and crippled woman:

She was very old and unable to do things for herself. She must have been blind because of how old she was and must have been just carried around. This was the first person they

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<sup>94</sup> See Chabot, "Merging," 53-54. My MA thesis provides a very detailed account of what happened in 1831-32. In order to avoid encumbering the current text with extensive comparisons and analyses of sources, most footnotes refer to my MA thesis, except where the nature or interpretation of the sources is relevant to the argument here, or where new sources are cited.

<sup>95</sup> *Mushkego* (West Coast Cree), Iiyuu (East Coast Cree), and HBC accounts are nearly unanimous in affirming that Quappakay was an Iiyuu *okimaw* (leader) who traded at Rupert's House (Waskaganish) and belonged to the band associated with that region. John Blackned, an Iiyuu 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 Waskaganish Indians." Cited in Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 153. It is possible that Quappakay and his family were from the region south of Hannah Bay. They might have been *Irininwak* ('R'-dialect Cree from the Harricanaw watershed) with *Iyuu* relations, who they traded both at Rupert's House and Hannah Bay, and that Blackned's account complements rather than contradicts the other versions. On the other hand, as Colin Scott and James Morrison point out in a 1993 study, there may simply have been a distancing going on, with neither community wanting to be associated with Quappakay's family. Colin Scott and James Morrison, "The Quebec Cree Claim in the Hannah Bay/Harricanaw River Drainage in Ontario: Report of the Ontario Claim Research" (Report prepared for the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec, June 1993), 142. See also: Chabot, "Merging," 141-147.

<sup>96</sup> Chabot, "Merging," 141-142, 54-55.

killed - the old woman. I don't think they properly buried the old woman because of how they acted. The whole camp was on the move."<sup>97</sup>

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. At this small out-post, dependent on Moose Factory, semi-retired Orcadian-born HBC trader William Corrigan had already been provisioning several Cree families – ostensibly Mushkego Cree – most likely with the same geese these families had shot for the Company during the previous fall goose hunt. When the temperature dropped on January 20, Quappikay, his sons and son-in-law, as well as their families – numbering over twenty people in total – were able to cross the Harricanaw River to Hannah Bay House.<sup>98</sup>

According to an 1881 account shared by retired HBC servant James Morrison, and another account by William Weigand, Quappikay's previous visit with Corrigan, in fall 1831, had left the two of them at odds. They had disputed the amount of winter supplies Quappikay – who usually traded at Rupert House – was to receive on credit at Hannah Bay. Morrison blamed the altercation on Corrigan's "shrod and rugh" treatment of Quappikay.<sup>99</sup> According to William Weigand's account from this year, however, Quappikay had left with vengeful and cannibalistic intentions, sending

one of his sons to call the howl [whole] Band and have a feast at which Quapikay killed one of his wives and sead [said] by feasting on her flesh it would make them brave so as to be

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<sup>97</sup> George and Louise Diamond, "The Hannah Bay Massacre," interview by Christopher Stephen, trans. Brian Webb, *the Nation*, 15 January 1999, 10; George and Louis Diamond, interview by Paul Rickard, Waskaganish, Quebec, November 5-6, 1998 (transcript/translation provided by the interviewer), 1. In an account of the "Hannah Bay Massacre" recorded by John Driver in 1881, William Weigand stated that the woman Quappakay killed was one of his elderly wives. Weigand, "Hannah Bay Massacre," 2, attached to a letter to Robert Bell, May 3, 1899. In an earlier, letter, dated February 8, 1899, Driver had informed Bell that he had heard the story from Thomas Weigand. LAC, MG 53, B175.

<sup>98</sup> Chabot, "Merging," 54-55.

<sup>99</sup> James Morrison, "The story related to the Hannah Bay Murdring of Mr. Wm Corrigan and servants," transcribed by John Driver, 1881, sent to Robert Bell on May 3, 1899, LAC, MG 53, B175. Morrison was of Orcadian and Cree ancestry. See the HBCA Biographical Sheet for James Morrison, accessed November 26, 2014, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/m/morrison\\_james-b.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/m/morrison_james-b.pdf).

able to carry out there [their] intentions by eating human flesh in stad [instead] of Deer or Rab[b]its.<sup>100</sup>

These are not mere allegations of starvation cannibalism, but of a particular sort of cannibalism associated with the *wihtiko* and its refusal to eat proper food, animal meat. This was not the first or only time the allegation was made moreover. More than one hundred years after Weigand shared this story, 98-year-old Margaret Rosie, a descendent of Corrigal, gave another account of the Hannah Bay “massacre,” transmitted across the Atlantic and across generations of her Orcadian family since then:

The story that one of me sisters gave me that I’d a great-great-grandfather that some cannibals chased and he was a bit crippled and he couldn’t a run and they [who passed on the story] thought they [the cannibals] ate him, but I thought that this was just – you know – a story ... So I discovered the name Corrigal ... so there must have been somebody Corrigal ... a relative ... it was something about cannibals chased them.<sup>101</sup>

In an account compiled and edited by McKellar in April 1899, however, Weigand, his son and nephew, omitted both the fall altercation and the allegations of cannibalism. Instead they claimed – in McKellar’s words – that Quappikay had “developed a scheme to kill all the white people in the vicinity of James Bay,” and that the whole “trouble [had] originated at ... Big Lake” some years earlier.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Weigand, “Hannah Bay Massacre,” 2, LAC, MG 53, B175.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Margaret and Alexander Rosie with the participation of Joseph Stuart, April 30, 2008, Edinburgh, Scotland. (Alexander is Margaret’s son; Joseph is a fellow historian and friend.) This is the somewhat fragmented story told by Margaret Rosie (née Keldie), in 2008 at her home in Edinburgh, Scotland. Margaret, born in Orkney almost a century earlier, in 1911, had been given the name of her mother, Margaret Corrigal Simpson (born in 1875), who herself had been named after her own paternal grandmother, Margaret Corrigal, who was born in 1817, a year after her father, George Corrigal had married. No further family records are available, but other fragments of this Orcadian oral tradition, recently shared by Margaret Rosie and her relatives, confirm that the incident involved a Corrigal ancestor employed by the HBC, who was killed in a dispute with ‘Native folk’ in the Hudson Bay area. Interview with Neil Leask (Margaret Rosie’s great grand-nephew), Kirkwall, Orkney, October 27, 2009.

<sup>102</sup> Weigand et al., “The Hannah Bay Massacre,” 1-5, LAC, MG 53, B174. Thomas Weigand Sr. was a sloop (boatman) at Moose Factory in 1831-32, and William was employed at Rupert’s House. See also: Chabot, “Merging,” 54-59, 147-148.

The events of 1818 were intimately tied, in their eyes, to the “Hannah Bay Massacre,” which they characterized – in the aftermath of the 1885 rebellion – as part of an ambitious anti-white plot. As McKellar put it:

It seems that a family of Indians at Hannah Bay developed a scheme to kill all the white people in the vicinity of James Bay. They consisted of seven Indians: Stissimow [Stacimow] the murderer of Big Lake; his father, Quabiga [Quappikay]; his son (Chief of the gang, name forgotten), his brother-in-law [sic], Bowlan [Bolland]; and three brothers, one named Sandigiss [Sheutickush], the other names forgotten.<sup>103</sup>

Stacimow was listed first because, as the ‘murderer’ of William Weigand’s half-sister and Thomas Weigand’s full-sister in 1818, he was seen as the link between two murderous acts by members of the same family. The perception of a link between these two incidents was so strong, it seems, that in Captain Thomas Weigand’s obituary, published in January 1892 by *The Colonist* of Winnipeg, the two incidents appear to be blended into one:

Something like fifty years ago, the Hudson’s Bay post at Hannah Bay, in charge of Weigand’s brother-in-law, was attacked by Indians, and his sister, her husband and nearly all the employees of the post murdered. Mr. Weigand joined a party seeking retaliation and revenge and succeeded in shooting or capturing all the Indians but one who had participated in massacre.<sup>104</sup>

If this does not reflect a conflation of the Big Lake and Hannah Bay incidents, and a mistaken replacement of Henrick Swainson as the man in charge instead of Greely, then there is only one other explanation: Corrigan (who had no sisters in James Bay) was brother-in-law to Thomas Weigand and his sister, Mrs. Henrick Swainson, the woman killed by Stacimow in 1818. This would certainly have given significant motive for Corrigan to ill-treat Stacimow’s father and the rest of his family in the fall of 1831 and in January 1832, as was alleged by more than one account that echoed James Morrison’s. Cree elder John Blackned, for example, stated in the

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<sup>103</sup> Weigand et al., “The Hannah Bay Massacre,” 5, LAC, MG 53, B174. Note that Bolland was, in fact, son-in-law, not brother-in-law to Quappikay.

<sup>104</sup> “A Hudson’s Bay Veteran: Death of Charles Weigand who Sailed on Hudson’s Bay Sixty Years Ago,” *The Colonist* (Winnipeg), January 1892. The name “Charles” appears in the title, but “Thomas” is the name referred to throughout the obituary. This is either a mistake or an indication that he had two names.

1960s that the “reason the Indians did that was because the Manager wasn’t trying to help them” in their starving condition.<sup>105</sup>

Regardless, three days after Stacimow’s family arrived at Hannah Bay House January 1832, three Mushkego Cree and a young HBC apprentice fled overnight some fifty kilometers from Hannah Bay House to Moose Factory. Arriving cold and shaken on January 23 – the first two at 3 am – they hastily divulged the news that Quappakay, and his family, after arriving at the house, had shortly thereafter made a surprise attack, killing Corrigan and several of the nine others who had been at the house, all of Cree – apparently Mushkegowuk – or mixed ancestry. They feared that no one else had escaped the attack. 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, who may have been related to Henrick Swainson, these HBC men arrived at Hannah Bay to find frozen evidence confirming the report, but no sign of the alleged assailants (or of cannibalism). 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.<sup>106</sup>

There was no further sign of the accused until the end of March when Sheutickush and his brother-in-law Bolland arrived at Rupert House with their wives and children. Although alleged to have stripped Hannah Bay House of provisions they were nevertheless starving, a point that Joseph Beioley found troubling. Swanson was there and some accounts suggest he wanted to shoot the alleged murders immediately, but Beioley asserted his authority and

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<sup>105</sup> Cited in Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 156. See also: Chabot, “Merging,” 57-61.

<sup>106</sup> Chabot, “Merging,” 60-71. I have yet to confirm whether William Swanson was related to Henrick Swainson (a possible alternative spelling of Swanson). William’s son was named Henry, perhaps after a deceased uncle? See George Simpson McTavish, *Behind the Palisades: An Autobiography* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing, 1963), 53. William Swanson was present at Rupert House when Henry Swainson’s wife was killed and the news was later received at Rupert House. Christie to Beioley, January 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/37: 33.

separated the men for questioning, from which Swanson was excluded. The men soon confessed their involvement in the sacking of the post, albeit in terms that Beioley attributed to “gross mental dillusions [sic] or partial insanity.”<sup>107</sup> Two days later, the two men were escorted towards Moose Factory by Beioley, Swanson and several others, including a son of William Corrigan. Bolland escaped before they arrived. Sheutickush, however, did not.

Several days after being interrogated at Moose Factory, Sheutickush was executed by an HBC-led posse (with Mushkego Cree members) as it set out from the island post on a mission that had now put Beioley and McTavish sharply at odds. Beioley, it seems was in favour of leniency or at least a fair hearing. McTavish, in contrast, was in favour of swift retaliation. By the end of April 1832, Quappakay and his two other sons – Stacimow and a 15-year-old boy – had been found and executed, with the help of some of the relatives of murdered Crees. Bolland was the last to be apprehended, apparently with the help and consent of his own father who told him he must face the consequences of his conduct. Other Iiyuu Cree also helped apprehend Bolland.<sup>108</sup>

A number of Iiyuu Cree, it seems, had initially fled the Ministikawatin area, fearful of the *wihtiko*-like behavior of Quappakay and his family.<sup>109</sup> According to Cree elder John Dick, whose father was one of the first two Cree survivors to arrive at Moose Factory at 3 am on January 23, 1832, Quappikay and his sons were very difficult to kill. As he put it in 1935, “It took many shots to kill them because they were living on human flesh.”<sup>110</sup> Cree accounts are almost

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<sup>107</sup> Rupert House Journal, March 25, 1832, transcribed in Moose Factory Journal, HBCA, B.135/a/138: 5-6d. See also: Chabot, “Merging,” 74-75. Regarding tensions between Swanson and Beioley, see also Connolly, “Reminiscences,” 77, LAC, MG29, B15, vol. 16, folder 34.

<sup>108</sup> Chabot, “Merging,” 71-91.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>110</sup> John Dick, “Hannah Bay Massacre,” interview by John M. Cooper with the assistance of interpreter Willie McLeod, Moose Factory, Ontario, 1935, excerpt from John M. Cooper, “1934 Field notes,” pp. 575-585 (field notes in the possession of Regina Flannery, Catholic University of America), cited in: Long, “Shaganash,”

unanimous in placing primary blame on Quappikay and his family for their actions, but the suggestion that they became *wihtikowak* seems to represent a minority view at most.<sup>111</sup> In the 1840s, William Kennedy gave a different account of the multiple gunshots used to kill Quappikay, by both HBC men and Cree, including a brother-in-law of Quappikay himself:

To revenge this, the Company fitted out an armed expedition, which in time came upon the party, and though they were perfectly unresisting, the culprit said to have been the leader in that affair was bound hand and foot, and without the least form of trial whatsoever, was shattered to pieces; each man of the expedition all but touching the body with the muzzle of his gun before drawing his trigger. The Company had not even the humanity in this butchery to prevent one brother-in-law from shooting the other. If any man will call me to the proof for this, I can direct to the man that was at the shooting of his own brother-in-law.<sup>112</sup>

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 or general law and order.<sup>113</sup>

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.<sup>114</sup>

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“Appendix” (This “Appendix” is not attached to the copy of Long’s thesis held at OISE: he himself provided me with a copy.), pp. 1-5.

<sup>111</sup> Chabot, “Merging,” 137-138. John Blackned’s account blamed the poor advice of the Mistabeo – a criticism extended by some to pre-Christian Cree religion more generally. John S. Long, “Manitu, Power, Books and Wihtikow: Some Factors in the Adoption of Christianity by Nineteenth-Century Western James Bay Cree,” *Native Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (1987): 9; C. Douglas Ellis, “The Missionary and the Indian in Central and Eastern Canada,” *Arctic Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1964): 28.

<sup>112</sup> Kennedy, “The Hudson’s Bay Company,” 2.

<sup>113</sup> Preston, “The View,” 318-322. See also: Chabot, “Merging,” chapter 3.

<sup>114</sup> James Anderson to George Simpson, September 16, 1849, LAC, MG19, James Anderson fonds, A.29, Vol. 3, pp. 67-69.

He added, finally, that the Company supported “at considerable expense” the families of the murderers and protected them against vengeance: “They were, when I last heard of them, comfortably situated, and I believe the bad feeling which existed against them has at length died away.”<sup>115</sup> Anderson’s report – a defence of McTavish and himself – was addressed to the HBC’s overseas governor, Sir George Simpson, who placed it in a secret file.<sup>116</sup> It was what Simpson wanted to hear. In 1832, he had criticized Beioley’s handling of the matter, in a private letter to sent to J.G. McTavish:

You managed admirably in regard to the Hanna Bay Murders; it will strike terror from one end of the country to the other. Poor B[eioley] has been a shade too cautious I am sorry to find. He has given me a very guarded report of the whole operation.<sup>117</sup>

It is unclear whether Simpson was referring to the murders or the retaliation as “strick[ing] terror from one end of the country to the other.”

Nevertheless, Anderson’s interpretation stands in contrast with evidence suggesting that the Hannah Bay ‘massacre’ was as much about retaliation and revenge, for fur traders and Crees alike. In this regard, the London Committee expressed concern to both McTavish and Simpson:

We very much lament the unfortunate affair that occurred at the post of Hannah Bay, and we think that it would be proper to direct persons in charge of posts to use more precaution against such treacherous attacks as the best means of preventing them. The loss of our own servants, and the consequent necessity of punishing the Indians are both extremely distressing and *we trust that the punishment in this case was not extended further than was necessary* to deter others from being guilty of similar crimes.<sup>118</sup>

Cree customary law, public opinion and *wihtiko* beliefs not only allowed, but also supported – at least in some Cree quarters – the retaliation for the Hannah Bay “massacre.”<sup>119</sup>

This customary law also gave Thomas Weigand, who participated in the final punitive expedition

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> George Simpson, “Confidential” letter to Robert S. Miles, January 2, 1849, HBCA, D.4/70: 292; James Anderson, “Private” letter to George Simpson, September 17, 1849, HBCA, D.5/26: 99.

<sup>117</sup> Simpson to McTavish, July 19, 1832, HBCA, B.135/c/2: 85-87d.

<sup>118</sup> Emphasis added. Governor and Committee to Simpson, March 1, 1833, HBCA, A.6/23: 1; Governor and Committee to McTavish, March 1, 1833, HBCA, A.6/23: 18. The text is identical in both communications.

<sup>119</sup> This is clear from oral traditions among the *Mushkego* Cree. Chabot, “Merging,” chapter 3.

that killed Quappikay, the opportunity to use a *wihtiko* execution he supported to obtain retribution for an earlier *wihtiko* execution that he did not.<sup>120</sup> He and his brother, in fact, seem to have implicitly appealed to Cree *wihtiko* beliefs and customary law with their 1881 allegation of Quappikay's cannibalistic actions and intentions.<sup>121</sup>

If Weigand and others contested the 1818 *wihtiko* accusations and killings and sought revenge by means of the 1832 *wihtiko* accusations and killings, others would soon contest the latter as well, and seek their own revenge. Fur trader Henry Connolly's unpublished memoirs recount how an HBC fur trader named George Alder came close to losing his life in 1845 on account of the HBC-led Hannah Bay executions, despite having had no part in them. Two brothers from Quappikay's family – likely grandsons – who had been spared execution because of their age in 1832, sought to take advantage of isolated circumstances near Ungava Bay to kill Alder. Only the intervention of a Cree *okimaw*, supported by others, saved his life.<sup>122</sup> Connolly, for his part, fully approved of the quick end that McTavish had put to “the Hannah Bay murder affair. If it had not been checked in time,” he remarked, it is hard to tell where it would have

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<sup>120</sup> Moose Factory Journal, April 2, 1832, HBCA, B.135/a/137.

<sup>121</sup> Weigand, “Hannah Bay Massacre,” 2, LAC, MG 53, B174.

<sup>122</sup> Henry Connolly explains in his memoirs that in the early 1840s, John McLean – who a few years later authored an account of the Hannah Bay retaliation that was critical of the Company (cited earlier) – wrote to Governor George Simpson that the land from Ungava to the height of land southwest was full of fur-bearing animals that only needed hunters, and recommended that Cree from the Rupert River District be recruited for this purpose, by offering higher prices. In 1844, therefore, George Alder was sent with one man and supplies to establish an outpost at Manawan Lake (halfway between Forts Chimo and Nascopie), but when Crees recruited from the Rupert River District began to arrive over the height of land that winter, they “were very much disappointed in their expectations ... not finding the country as they had been told [i.e. “such a fine country overrun with beaver and other fur bearing animals, etc.”], but instead, endless, barren, and swampy, far from flowing with milk and honey.” They informed Alder that they would return home, which most of them did, except for two family groups. Alder and his assistant returned to winter at Fort Nascopie. When Alder returned to the Manawan Lake area the following spring, in order to collect furs, he came very close to losing his life. Among the Cree from the Rupert River District, explains Connolly, “were two brothers, who were the sons of one of the Hannah Bay murderers, in 1832, who had promised to have their revenge one day. They now wanted to kill Mr. Alder, but the Chief would not allow it, and the brothers had a fight with him. Mr. Alder did not know the cause of the fight until he was told by those who remained. He then saw that he had a narrow escape from being murdered.” Connolly, “Reminiscences,” 126, 129-130, LAC, MG29, B15, vol. 16, folder 34.

ended!” Such a perspective is not surprising given that his primary informant was Ned Richards, a survivor of the Hannah Bay ‘massacre.’<sup>123</sup>

It was the vengeful nature of the retaliation, which some justified by *wihtiko* accusations, that seems to have perpetuated the “affair.” Certainly, it did not escape the criticism of other Company men or the growing scrutiny of the Company’s critics. By mid-century, criticism of the summary executions of the Crees involved in the 1832 Hannah Bay ‘massacre’ had reached Canadian and British newsprint and bookstores, and possibly even the desk of a British MP and future Prime Minister.<sup>124</sup> Although they tended to support the Company’s handling of the 1832 incident, missionaries who arrived in Rupert’s Land and James Bay after 1840 had also exposed the Company to additional scrutiny.<sup>125</sup> By the mid-1800s, the weight of the HBC’s public relations strategy was shifting towards a predominantly British public.

In the context of James Bay, however, the Company still depended on a good relationship with its Cree and other Native “partners in furs,” and their customary laws. It had to be especially careful how it responded to *wihtiko* incidents – alleged, apparent or real – regardless of who was involved. Such caution was exercised when two HBC servants were killed and cannibalized in 1842.<sup>126</sup> It was also exercised when Quappikay’s family allegedly became involved in another *wihtiko* incident.

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<sup>123</sup> Connolly “Reminiscences,” 78, LAC, MG29, B15, vol. 16, folder 34. Connolly’s account of the Hannah Bay murder affair is found on p. 75-78. His primary source was Ned Richards, one of the survivors of the original attack on the post, whom he described as the “hero.” Ibid., 136.

<sup>124</sup> *The Times*, November 9, 1838, 5; Letitia Hargrave to Mrs. Dugald McTavish, December 2 [to 9], 1842, transcribed in Letitia Hargrave, *The Letters of Letitia Hargrave*, ed. Margaret Arnett MacLeod (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1947), 132-133; William Gladstone notes, August 18, 1848, BL, MC, Gladstone Papers, Add. 44651, fol. 30; John McLean, *John McLean’s Notes of a Twenty-Five Year’s Service in the Hudson’s Bay Territory*, volume 1 (London: Richard Bently, 1849), 222-221, 264-265; William Kennedy, “The Hudson’s Bay Company: To the Editor of the Chronicle and News,” *Kingston Chronicle and News*, September 27, 1948, 2.

<sup>125</sup> Chabot, “Merging,” 106-111; Clerical Library, *Anecdotes*, 262-263.

<sup>126</sup> John Lee Lewes to Governor, Chief Factors and Chief Traders, November 17, 1842, cited in *Certain Correspondence of the Foreign Office and of the Hudson’s Bay Company: Copied from Original Documents, London 1898* (Ottawa: Government of Canada, 1899), 25-28. Lewes reported to his superiors that John Spence and Murdoch Morrison had been killed in their sleep by a “party of starving Cannibal Indians, immediately cut to pieces

***“Little Cannibal” Incident, 1888-90***

The winters of 1888-89 and 1889-90 were among of a series of very difficult winters for the Cree of Eastern James Bay, from the 1880s into the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>127</sup> “The five families who failed to come in last Summer,” reported W.K. Broughton from Moose Factory in July 1890, “have all, it appears, except one lad, perished, having been reduced to cannibalism; and again this Winter we have sustained serious loss through the death of our chief and all his sons, who have starved to death.”<sup>128</sup> The families in question appear to have been led by an *okimaw* and *mitew* named Petawabano. He and his wife had six sons and four daughters-in-law, a daughter and her husband, and children. Their winter camp was on the upper Eastmain River. Only two of them, it turns out, survived to see the spring of 1890.<sup>129</sup>

Although no official contemporary HBC records mentions any connection between Petawabano’s family and the 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre,” such a connection is asserted by Charles H.M. Gordon, who, from 1885 to 1902, served as apprentice clerk, then clerk and

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and devoured.” The report he had received “stated that four women were the perpetrators of this dreadful deed, they are still living and at large in the vicinity of Good Hope, it is further reported of these four women that previous to the murder of our two men they had killed and eaten all their husbands and children except one of the latter a little boy who was last Sept in life with its mother. Are these women, Gentlemen to be punished if I can get a hold on them? Your instructions regarding them I shall expect to receive per first opportunity till then restraint of their persons only will be put in force against them, that is if any of them should fall into our hands before I receive your definite orders of what is to be done with them. I beg that what orders you may deem it advisable to issue regarding them may be full and explicit, in the meantime, I shall refrain from entering further on this unpleasant circumstance and draw your attention to the general state of the Company's affairs in this District up to the last dates.”

<sup>127</sup> Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 142-144, 150-152; Morantz, *White Man's*, 50-53.

<sup>128</sup> W.K. Broughton to Joseph Fortesque, 30 July 1890, HBCA, B.135/e/28a. Broughton continued: “These frequent losses from starvation lead me to propose the erection of a small Wintering Post at the first Lake above this [Namasaka Lake], to be supplied solely with provisions and ammunition for trade.” In 1889, Thomas Vincent had expressed “grave fears” that the families in question had “succumbed to the ruthless enemy,” commenting that the Indians at Rupert House had “suffered severely, and had to be kept alive by advancing provisions.” Thomas Vincent to W.K. Broughton, 23 July 1889, HBCA, B.135/e/26. The HBC Commissioner in Winnipeg approved Broughton’s plan of establishing an outpost at Nemaska, and expressed hope that it “may be useful in prevent such lamentable loss of life as has lately occurred and enable hunters to venture farther away without fear of starvation.” Commissioner, Winnipeg, to the Officer in Charge, Rupert’s River District, October, 24, 1890, HBCA, B.135/e/28a.

<sup>129</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 133-134, 138-139. Preston cites John Blackned’s mid-1960s account, which comes from the one woman who survived. This woman had shared her story with Blackned’s mother and grandparents, who had once wintered with the Petawabano family. Charles H.M. Gordon’s account makes reference to five sons instead of six, and he states that there was also a child who survived. Gordon, “Peetawabinoo, the Ill-Fated,” *The Beaver* (March 1923), 235-236.

accountant, in the Rupert's River district.<sup>130</sup> In fact, Gordon's 1923 account of what transpired between 1888 and 1890 is prefaced by an account of the 1832 "massacre." According to Gordon, Petawabano, "a younger brother of one of the murderers who had been shot" in 1832, had "vowed vengeance on the whites if ever he got an opportunity ... and used to give all kinds of trouble at Eastmain post. ... [William] Corston, the manager, [used to] relate stories of how he and his sons used to try and frighten them."<sup>131</sup> It is not clear if this connection to the Hannah Bay incident is valid or if it is a scapegoating of one family. In further support of his claim that "[t]hey were all a bad lot," Gordon recounts other examples of unusual or cruel behaviour, including an attempt to exorcise a *wihtiko* and an alleged killing of an unwanted wife by one of Petawabano's sons.<sup>132</sup>

Cree elder John Blackned's detailed account – given by the lone female survivor to Blackned's mother, whose family used to winter with the Petawabano family, makes no mention of any connection with Quappikay or the 1832 Hannah Bay murders. And Blackned's separate account of 1832 incident Hannah Bay incident, cited already, makes no reference to Petawabano's family, but describes the perpetrators as "Moose Indians."<sup>133</sup> Rupert House elders

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<sup>130</sup> The HBC records are incomplete or sparse, with the exception of Moose Factory's records, which include some correspondence and reports received from Eastmain and Rupert House. The Eastmain records themselves include no post journal for the relevant years, and the correspondence records are incomplete, as are the reports on districts. The Rupert House post journals for 1889 and 1890 make no mention of Petawabano; neither do the correspondence records and reports on districts, which are also incomplete and sparse. Gordon was an apprentice clerk in the Rupert River district from 1885-1887, and clerk and accountant at Rupert House from 1887 to 1902, during which period this incident occurred. HBCA, biographical sheet for Charles Hugh Munro Gordon, accessed November 26, 2014, [http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/g/gordon\\_charles.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/g/gordon_charles.pdf).

<sup>131</sup> Gordon, "Peetawabinoo," 235-236.

<sup>132</sup> On an earlier occasion, Gordon claims, the eldest son became "sick and delirious" and the "others, thinking that the devil [a *wihtiko*] had entered into him, stripped him naked, tied him to a tree, thrashed him with burnt brush and set the small island on which they were camped on fire." On another occasion, another of the sons allegedly "got rid of his wife in a specially cruel manner," by burying her alive. *Ibid.*, 236.

<sup>133</sup> HBC records show that the family was far more closely linked to Rupert River and Eastmain families, though they may well have originated from somewhere else and had Moose connections as well. On this point, see also Chabot, "Merging," 141-148. It seems more likely, however, that Blackned, or his grandparents, chose not to identify the descendants of Quappikay's family precisely because of the prejudice it evoked against a family with whom they once wintered, or because it would have identified other relatives as well. If Petawabano was indeed part of Quappikay's family, moreover, Blackned's grandparents would certainly have heard Petawabano's point of view

George and Louise Diamond assert, in contrast, that there were people at Eastmain and Waskaganish who were related to Quappikay. As George explains, however, they “never mentioned who those people were. They hid everything.” “They were afraid,” adds Louise, “that if the others found out who ... [Quappikay] was related to, something would happen to them.”<sup>134</sup> Gordon’s claim of a connection between Quappikay and Petawabano, therefore, seems quite likely, especially considering his 17 years in the Rupert River district between 1885 and 1902.

Blackned’s account confirms that one of Petawabano’s sons rejected his crippled wife, the daughter of another hunter named Meskino, who was Blackned’s great grand-father (his grandfather’s father). In fact, Blackned’s grandparents stopped wintering with the Petawabano family in 1888 because of the conjuring battles that ensued between Petawabano, two of his sons, and Meskino, who was angry that Petawabano’s son had not taken responsibility for his new wife who was now pregnant – especially in a time of great difficulty. Petawabano’s sons wanted to kill Meskino, but he was a stronger shaman according to Blackned. Blackned adds that the Petawabano sons were eating too much and had abnormally large appetites: a sign that they were “going to have very bad luck” and might “soon be eating something they should not be eating.”<sup>135</sup>

Blackned provides the most detailed narrative of what transpired next, and the few details provided by the HBC records concur with it. Despite several discrepancies, Gordon’s much briefer account – also based primarily on the lone woman survivor’s testimony – tends to

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about what transpired in 1831-32. This might explain why Blackned’s story of the Hannah Bay incident refers to allegations that Corrigal had not helped Quappikay’s family. As Blackned points out, however, he was unsure that these latter allegations were true. Overall, the relationship between Blackned’s grandparents and Petawabano’s family appears to have been ambivalent and then conflictual. The accounts passed on about both these events is critical of their behaviour. See Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 133-148, 153-156.

<sup>134</sup> George and Louise Diamond, “The Hannah Bay Massacre,” 13.

<sup>135</sup> Blackned states that Petawabano’s son wanted to return the girl to her father, Meskino, in exchange for another of Meskino’s daughters. Meskino replied that this was wrong, since Petawabano’s son had already made his daughter pregnant. In the end, however, he took his daughter back, but refused to give the other daughter in exchange, because it was not right to abandon the first one. Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 133-134 and 145.

confirm the Blackned's narrative as well.<sup>136</sup> The only other version of what transpired was given by the other of the two survivors, the youngest son of Petawabano, named Robert. His account, transmitted to ethno-botanist Rousseau in the late 1940s, was published in 1951.<sup>137</sup> Blackned was aware of Robert Petawabano's version of the story, but he states: "Robert P couldn't tell it [the full story] because he ate his mother and father and his brothers."<sup>138</sup>

As the weather grew colder in the winter of 1888-89, the Petawabano family were less and less successful in their hunts. They caught some fish, but not enough. And they soon "quit playing with the conjuring tent. The old man knew that the other old man [Meskino] was going to kill them all [with his conjuring]." By this time, two of Petawabano's married sons had departed with their families in another direction. Not long afterwards, another of the sons, married to a woman from Waswanipi, died while out hunting, but nobody helped the widow look for him or try to bury him. The situation grew desperate and they weakened. To feed his family, Petawabano drew his own blood from a vein. Only the widowed daughter-in-law – by her own account – refused to partake.<sup>139</sup> According to Gordon, Petawabano was then killed by one of his sons and eaten and subsequent acts of murder and cannibalism are alleged to have continued.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> The sparse HBC records confirm that the families did not report back for an entire summer, and that the lone male survivor was suspected of cannibalism and was feared by the Cree, who considered him a *wihtiko*. The HBC correspondence makes no mention of the woman who survived, but the focus of the correspondence was on the boy. Gordon's account confirms that there was a woman who survived, but adds that she had a child with her as well. He also reduces the two winters to one and is generally short on detail.

<sup>137</sup> Jacques Rousseau, "La malchance de Pitewabano," *La Patrie*, September 2, 1951, 34. Shawn Smallman examined this incident in his 2009 article, using the accounts of Blackned and Gordon. He had not yet located any HBC records relating to the incident, however, and was unaware of Jacques Rousseau's article. Preston was working only from Blackned's account, but his focus was not the incident so much as Blackned's narrative of it, and the meanings associated with it.

<sup>138</sup> Blackned, cited and translated in Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 135.

<sup>139</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 134-136. Gordon also records this, noting that the woman who survived, his source, could not tell why. Gordon, "Peetewabinoo," 236. According to Robert Petawabano's version, it was because they were sick and Petawabano was the only healthy one. Rousseau, "La malchance de Pitewabano," *La Patrie*, September 2, 1951, 34. Blackned clearly states that it was because they were starving.

<sup>140</sup> Gordon says that the woman was there when the slaughter occurred, and only escaped at that point. Gordon, "Peetewabinoo," 236.

Blackned states, however, that the widow had already withdrawn from the camp and did not witness any killings directly. It was only after returning a week or so later that she found only her two unmarried brothers-in-law alive. They offered her food, but – as she later alleged – she saw human bones that confirmed her fears of cannibalism. She immediately returned to her own temporary camp, and then, after burying her husband, she withdrew to the site where the entire family had left their canoes in the fall. Waiting for the other two families who were due to meet them there in the spring, she survived on rabbits, partridge and some fish. As the spring thaw began, the two surviving sons showed up, but not the other families. When the widow shared some of her food with them, they did not eat it immediately – an ominous sign. With the warmer weather and easier access to food, however, they began to behave more normally, though they refused to go down to Eastmain. ““They will soon know what we have been doing,’ they said.”<sup>141</sup>

Spring warmed into summer, which then ceded to fall. As the days shortened and grew colder, the widow began to regret not having gone to Eastmain on her own. Soon after freeze-up, Robert, the younger of the two brothers, allegedly shot the other, claiming it was an accident; the older brother, as he bled to death, claimed it was not an accident. Again, the widow did not witness the shooting directly. She wanted to bury the body immediately, but Robert refused. Becoming frightened, she left on the pretext of getting wood; after bringing two loads back, she went for a third, but did not return. Instead, she walked all night to Eastmain House.<sup>142</sup> According to Gordon, she arrived there in February (1890 according to contemporary HBC records) in a “half-starved condition” with a young child, but Blackned’s narrative makes no mention of a child.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Blackned, cited and translated in Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 136-138.

<sup>142</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 136-138.

<sup>143</sup> Gordon, “Peetawabino,” 236.

At the end of March, says Gordon, the surviving son showed up at the same post in much better condition than his sister-in-law. According to Gordon, the woman had reported this brother dead – a point that contradicts Blackned’s more detailed account. The sixteen-year-old, Gordon explains, claimed to have escaped death by hiding in the woods and killing enough game to feed himself.<sup>144</sup> Blackned’s account, however, states that he was slow to eat the food he was given, an indication to the Cree that he had been eating human flesh and had possibly ‘gone *wihtiko*.’<sup>145</sup> Corston kept Robert at the Eastmain House to protect him. Gordon writes:

The Eastmain Indians who heard the details of the murders got very excited and would not go hunting, but congregated at one spot, all on account of superstitious notions regarding cannibals. Mr. Corston tried to reason with them, but it was of no use, and he was finally obliged to take the lad into his own house.<sup>146</sup>

Blackned points out that even one of Corston’s sons wanted to shoot the lad on account of the suspicions aroused by his not eating normal food immediately. Not long after, continues Blackned, Robert was sent down to Rupert House where he was questioned at length by the post manager and the Anglican missionary. In the end, Robert finally admitted to eating human flesh, but not to killing anyone, and he also tried to implicate the widow, stating: “She ate the same thing, too.”<sup>147</sup>

In August, W.K. Broughton, who had just taken charge of the Rupert River District, reported to Joseph Fortesque at Moose Factory that if Robert were turned loose again, “without giving him the means of subsistence ... he might either resort to his practices of last summer again, or he might be hunted down and shot by the other Indians.”<sup>148</sup> This was not Fortesque’s first dealing with such issues. In July 1882, an insane man had been sent from the Trout Lake

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<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*,” 236.

<sup>145</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 140.

<sup>146</sup> Gordon, “Peetawabinoo,” 236. Gordon’s account gives no confirmation that the lad participated in the killings.

<sup>147</sup> Blackned, cited and translated in Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 140-144.

<sup>148</sup> Cited in Fortesque to Wrigley, August 20, 1890, HBCA, B.135/e/28a.

district to York Factory, where Fortesque was then in charge. Fortesque took care of the man and reported, the following year, that the “lunatic is recovered and is a very useful man, but is very unwilling to return to your post, as he fears his life might be [sacrificed] to the superstition of his Countryman.”<sup>149</sup> Fortesque was inclined to suspect *wihtiko* accusations. He passed on Broughton’s report on Petawabano to the HBC Commissioner Joseph Wrigley in Winnipeg, who replied as follows:

From your former letters I gathered that there is no proof of his having committed the crime alleged. Such cases must be to a great extent left to the discretion of the Officer on the spot, and care must be taken that the Company do not put themselves a wrong position.<sup>150</sup>

Commissioner Wrigley, it seems, may have also had in mind the consequences of the Hannah Bay ‘massacre’ and the repercussions of the retaliation meted out for it.

Eventually, Robert was sent inland to the HBC post at Mistissini.<sup>151</sup> According to Blackned – who laughed as he recounted this part of the story – the HBC trader there

expected him to get crazy again and kill somebody. He stayed there for many years and never did anything bad. ... Some of the Mistassini Natives were scared of him at first ... because they heard the story. When he first tried to get a wife, the girl didn’t want to, she was scared that if she married him he would eat her!<sup>152</sup>

Finally, after being rejected by another girl, Robert Petawabano got married, and was eventually deemed cured from his *wihtiko* possession. Instead of being considered an *atoosh* or *wihtiko*, he

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<sup>149</sup> Todd responded later that he concurred with the assessment of the danger. Fortescue to Todd, July 24, 1883, and Todd to Fortescue, 2 January 1884, HBCA, B.220/b/2, cited in Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 581-582.

<sup>150</sup> J. Wrigly, Commissioner, Winnipeg, to Joseph Fortesque, October 25, 1890, HBCA, B.135/e/28a.

<sup>151</sup> Fred Swindlehurst, an Anglican missionary who spent seven years in Rupert House from 1897 to 1904, took a photograph of him, which he labelled: “The Cannibal Living Near Rupert House.” The photo in question was shared by Jim Chism, of the Waskaganish Cultural Institute, who obtained a copy from Inid Cooper, whose husband Robert inherited it from Swindlehurst. It is not copied here at the request of the Waskaganish Cultural Institute, which plans to publish the collection of photos of which this is a part. Jim Chism, personal communication, July 30, 2009. Fred Swindlehurst was interviewed for an article by *Schenectady Gazette*, published on January 6, 1921: “Aeronauts’ Escape was Miraculous.” In this article, Swindlehurst spoke of his years at Rupert House, commenting that the “Indians are peaceful and would do anything to help travellers ... so kind are they.” See also: Swindlehurst, “Folk-lore of the Cree Indians,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 18, no. 69 (April-June 1905): 139-143. He makes no mention here of the Petawabano incident.

<sup>152</sup> Blackned, cited and translated in Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 144.

was known as *Atooshish* (“little *atoosh*”).<sup>153</sup> Apparently he later drowned trying to save the infant of an HBC trader.<sup>154</sup>

While the sequence of these later events is more certain, it is very difficult, as Preston points out, to make “an acceptable and accurate interpretation” of what happened from fall 1888 to spring 1890, not because of Blackned’s reliability, but because the original

source is a woman who may have misconstrued events due to her emotional and physical deprivation. The alternative source is the single other survivor, whose responses [as transmitted by the other survivor and his accuser] are few and poorly explanatory, and who also was living in great emotional and physical deprivation.<sup>155</sup>

Another account, possibly originating – in part – with Robert himself, was recorded by Rousseau in the 1940s. Rousseau knew Robert, but does not state that he told him the story. His published account and fieldnotes indicate that he heard versions or parts of the story from other Crees, such as Andrew Gunner, his guide, and from the regional Indian Agent, Hervé Larivière.<sup>156</sup> One suspects Robert’s input, whether directly or indirectly, because of the emphasis of this narrative, found in its title, “La malchance de Pitewabano.” Although the account of starvation cannibalism

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<sup>153</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 144.

<sup>154</sup> Richard J. Preston, personal communications, August 15, 2009 and February 2, 2013.

<sup>155</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 144.

<sup>156</sup> Rousseau’s 1946 fieldnotes include a story by the title “La malchance de Pitewabano,” told to him by Hervé Larivière, who was Indian Agent at the time. DAUL, Jacques Rousseau fonds, Journal de voyage, 1946, P174:B:46, 17, p. 313-315. Larivière was an Indian Agent who was often very critical of government policies, at least in conversations with his brother Roger. Roger Larivière (brother of Hervé), personal communication April 6, 2008. Rousseau, however, may have heard the story from several people, include Petawabano himself, whom he knew. The story published in *La Patrie* does not indicate a source other than Andrew Gunner, a Cree hunter who was his guide, and it states that Rousseau knew Petawabano, but does not specify that he was the source of the story. Larivière’s account states that the “père (ou le grand-père ou l’arrière-grand-père, je ne sais) du dernier Petewabano [living in the 1940s] était même chef de la band de l’Eastmain.” The published account, however, inserts a distance of extra time and generations between the Petawabano Rousseau knew and Robert Petawabano, the lad of 16 who survived the events known to have occurred between 1888 and 1890. This may have been done by Rousseau to protect the contemporary Petawabano. Swindlehurst’s photo of Robert, taken in the late 1890s or early 1900s, shows a young man in his early twenties. Gordon’s account, published in 1923, states that he married a widow in Mistissini, and Rousseau states that the Petewabano he knew married a widow. By the 1940s, he would have been in his sixties.

is confirmed, albeit without specifying whether it was violent or not, blame is ultimately assigned to a curse placed on the family by other Eastmain band members.<sup>157</sup>

What is clear from all the accounts is that nobody actually saw Robert Petawabano kill anyone, and if he was at first deemed a *wihtiko* by some, he was eventually considered cured.

### STRUGGLES FOR UNDERSTANDING & CONTROL OF THE *WIHTIKO*

There “is little sign in many of the HBC records,” concludes Smallman, in his study of HBC encounters with the *wihtiko*, “that the HBC men came to share the beliefs of their Cree allies.”<sup>158</sup> This conclusion may reflect who was writing and receiving these records: usually senior officers and clerks, writing to superior officers, and ultimately, the London office. Stories like “Nanusk’s Stone,” as recounted in the mid- to late twentieth century by at least three former HBC employees of mixed ancestry, suggests there was much more going on. When fur traders and Crees in Moose Factory faced Nanusk’s *wihtiko* threat in the mid-nineteenth century, there was little dispute about the application of the law with regard to the suspected *wihtiko*. Cree and

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<sup>157</sup> Rousseau, “La malchance de Pitewabano,” 34. Petawabano was “un homme respecté ... Chef honoré et consciencieux” among the Eastmain Cree. In a time of sickness, however, he was asked by other band members to give some of his healthy blood as a remedy. He agreed, giving one spoonful to each. The next day, however, they returned, accused him of poisoning them, cursed him and his family for generations to come, and exiled them. As a result, Petawabano’s family died of sickness and starvation, with the exception of one son. Two generations later, with the family now in Mistassini, the curse returned. The Petawabano family found themselves once again plagued by sickness and starvation, reduced to two parents and a son, who, in desperation, soon resorted to eating his parents in order to survive. (It is not specified whether he killed them, or whether they died of starvation or sickness.) He then found solace in a female companion, but she was afraid of him: “Vivre avec un windigo, – un être promu à un rang démoniaque pour avoir mangé la chair de ses semblables, – n’a rien de très réjouissant.” One day, when the fishing nets were found empty, the woman departed to seek refuge at the nearest HBC post. Discouraged, the young man followed his “dulcinée,” with a plan to kill the manager in order to take her back. He was apprehended by the manager, however, who brought him into the kitchen. The young man “ne voulut pas manger ni regarder personne. Quand on est windigo, on n’affronte pas facilement les regards humains.” Eventually, however, the manager succeeded in getting him to eat and then found him work. Time passed and “tout rentra dans l’état normal.” The young man got married and grew old, but – pursued by the curse – he lost his wife and children, with the exception of one son. “Ce dernier que j’ai connu,” writes Rousseau, “n’a guère eu été chanceux non plus.” The story concludes with an account of how the younger Petawabano (known to Rousseau) lost his wife and then his children, to sickness, but eventually remarried a widow and began to experience good fortune, a sign that the curse was gone.

<sup>158</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 581.

Company men at Moose Factory first tolerated the suspected *wihtiko* and then came together to destroy him, burying his heart of ice at a stone that now bears his name: Nanusk's Stone.<sup>159</sup> Referring to this period some eighty years later, in 1934, retired fur trader James Miller recalled hearing of incidents when Cree and Anishinabe resorted to starvation cannibalism and even violent cannibalism:

Yes, there was cannibalism among the Indians, no lie about that. ... The Hudson's Bay Company heard about what was going on. They sent their men out and brought back some of the guilty ones and kept them at their forts for a short time. No, they didn't punish them. They couldn't do that because the poor Indians were crazy from starvation. It wasn't entirely their fault.<sup>160</sup>

Miller, an Orkney-born man who rose to the senior management position of HBC Factor, gave serious credence to Cree beliefs: "After resorting to cannibalism," Miller states, "Indians craved human flesh."<sup>161</sup> Fur traders were not the only ones to take the *wihtiko* belief seriously.

Hans M. Carlson observes that

[Bishop] John Horden described atoosh [*wihtiko*] as a "semi-spiritualized body assumed by a cannibal which rambles through the country but is seldom seen; it is of immense size and the print of its feet, which are often seen are of a size corresponding to the bulk of its body." This was how the creature was described to him, and he recorded what he heard, not with complete acceptance but, significantly, without quite being able to dismiss the idea either.<sup>162</sup>

Citing the *wihtiko* killings at Big Lake in 1818, Carlson astutely elaborates that:

What we believe, in the end, about the reality of the Cree hunting world is a matter of philosophy or religion, and answers to such questions are not found in the historical record. What is found in the historical record is the fact that Cree hunters spoke and acted within this worldview and, in their interactions with Europeans, made some of it a part of the outsiders'

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<sup>159</sup> See the introduction for the full story. Although I heard versions of this story earlier, it was not until recently that I uncovered Frenchman's account, which gives an approximate mid-century date to the incident. I have not yet had the chance to systematically review the extensive relevant HBC records in search of corroborating evidence.

<sup>160</sup> James Miller, cited in "Tells North Privations – Indians Were Cannibals 80 Years Ago, Says James Miller ...," *The Border Cities Star*, 4 October 1934, 12. Miller was born in Orkney and joined the HBC in 1872. He worked in Moose Factory district for much of his 45-year career.

<sup>161</sup> Miller, cited in "Tells North Privations," *The Border Cities Star*, 4 October 1934, 12.

<sup>162</sup> Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 57-58.

worldview when they came to live on Cree land. The Cree negotiated the nature of the world with these outsiders, adapting themselves even as they sought to change the outsiders.<sup>163</sup>

Miller's story supports Smallman's observation that "in many HBC accounts the traders seem to have an element of empathy with the perceived windigo."<sup>164</sup> This was especially the case in 1818, when two of their own were executed as suspected *wihtikowak*. Grave doubts were raised about these *wihtiko* accusations, but even the relatives who later sought retaliation recognized that they were sincerely held. At the same time, they justified their retaliation, at least in part, by *wihtiko* accusations. These were exceptional cases in several respects.

As HBC trader George Nelson observed in 1823, empathy was more common among the Cree and Anishinabe who held the *wihtiko* belief.<sup>165</sup> Ultimately, they saw most cases as a form of madness or sickness, for which the afflicted people were minimally responsible, if at all. In this regard, they were little different from Joseph Beioley, who was reluctant to condemn the men accused of the Hannah Bay "massacre" once he heard them and saw how afflicted they were by "gross mental dillusions [sic] or partial insanity."<sup>166</sup> Robert John Renison, the third Bishop of Moosonee after Horden, recalled having friends who had previously resorted to cannibalism:

It was not uncommon. They used to scatter from Moose Factory for hundreds of miles to hunt. If the fish, rabbits and deer failed them, the weaker ones died. Once they had eaten their dead, I think their minds became affected. When men went mad, the old Wendigo superstition was associated with cannibalism.<sup>167</sup>

As Regina Flannery notes, based on Cree accounts she and John Cooper recorded in the 1930s, most people who resorted to non-violent cannibalism in times of starvation were simply watched

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<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>164</sup> Smallman, "Spirit Beings," 581-582 (he cites several examples).

<sup>165</sup> Nelson, referring to Cree of Lac la Ronge (in present-day Saskatchewan) in the early 1800s, cited in Brightman, "Windigo in the Material," 358.

<sup>166</sup> Rupert House Journal, March 25, 1832, transcribed in Moose Factory Journal, HBCA, B.135/a/138: 5-6d. See also: Chabot, "Merging," 74-75.

<sup>167</sup> R.J. Renison, cited in "Retired Archbishop, Metropolitan, Most Rev. R.J. Renison Dies at 82," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* (October 7, 1957), 14

closely until it was clear they had recuperated.<sup>168</sup> This echoes George Nelson's 1823 assessment elsewhere, but it is not clear to what extent either context was impacted by the influence of fur traders. HBC men were quicker to intervene on behalf of those accused of turning *wihtiko*. Without such intervention Petawabano would not likely have lived or recovered, if indeed, he had gone *wihtiko*. Without the intervention of HBC fur traders and other Euroamericans, many suspected *wihtikowak* would never have avoided execution. Smallman acknowledges this, but argues that

fur traders did not see themselves as threatened or involved when local people were perceived to have become windigos except to the extent that it affected the relationships that supported their trade. ... HBC men seldom intervened in crises in which Cree people killed people believed to be windigos.<sup>169</sup>

With respect to the first point, the stories of Budge, Janvier, Nanusk, Petawabano and Miller suggest otherwise. With respect to the second point, intervening after the fact was of little point, especially if the execution was clearly motivated by genuine fear of imminent threat. The HBC did not intervene after the fact even when its own people were killed in 1818. Fur trader Henry Connolly observes that many fur traders were negligent or self-interested, but HBC traders, like the Cree, had more incentive to exercise reciprocity. The lives saved by Cree intervention in and around the time of the Big Lake incident made this clear to many of them. Even reciprocity was no guarantee against the risk of starvation. Connolly's own son, like those in the winter 1817-18, died of starvation and exposure while making a trip for the HBC. Clearly, if the HBC lacked the capacity to intervene and prevent these starvation deaths, it lacked the capacity to intervene and prevent most *wihtiko* executions, which took place in isolation and

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<sup>168</sup> Flannery et al., "Witiko Accounts," 59.

<sup>169</sup> Smallman, "Spirit Beings," 582. Smallman also points out that fur traders did not actively or systematically attempt to "reshape indigenous culture in such a way as to challenge its perception of the windigo" – at least not in the way missionaries did. *Ibid.*, 590. Yet, even if only by adopting different approaches or sheltered alleged *wihtikowak*, they also challenged Algonquian perceptions and beliefs.

often because of it. Nevertheless, efforts made in Petawabano's case were not exceptional. Connolly recounts one such intervention that he himself made, at the request of a relative the alleged *wihtiko*:

A few years ago "Old Nigger" and another Indian were camping opposite to the Post about a mile off. One morning a son of "Old Nigger," came across crying and saying his father had 'turned Windigo,' and wanted me to go and see him. So I went at once, taking one young man John Gowdie [who had participated in the 1832 posse], with me. We just got to the camp in time to stop the strangling of the old fellow, who was raving. They had a long deer-skin line ready to put round his neck and then from outside the wigwam to pull with all their might. He was well bound. I said to them: "Let him alone: we will take care of him." "Well," said they, "If he wants to kill you we will not help you." "All right," I said, "leave him to us. All of you go to the other tents; we will look after him." The old fellow would now and then talk, as he fell asleep; so about one o'clock, I roused Jack to watch the old man, and told him if he should again get in his fits, to send for me. Jack came back about daylight and told us the old fellow was all right again and asleep. If the fits had come on him elsewhere, without doubt he would have been strangled.<sup>170</sup>

Connolly explains that it was "a custom of theirs to put the sick and helpless ones to death," that he and other traders had "often spoken to the Indians about this ... and ... [had] succeeded in stopping it a good deal," an effort that missionaries had since continued.<sup>171</sup> As noted already, other evidence and testimony suggests that such customs and their application varied greatly, and that it was more common for someone suspected of going *wihtiko* to be treated or ostracized rather than executed, and for sick and elderly to be cared for rather than killed off.<sup>172</sup>

As this chapter shows, Newcomer encounters with the *wihtiko* led to entangled struggles for understanding and control. These were not primarily struggles *against* Native people, but *alongside* them. Even the Hannah Bay retaliation brought Crees and traders together on opposite sides of the clemency versus retaliation response. If fur traders sometimes led or helped in the hunt for a suspected *wihtiko*, it was not merely because it was allowed or demanded by Cree law,

<sup>170</sup> Connolly "Reminiscences," 169, LAC, MG29, B15, vol. 16, folder 34.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-169. Carlson cites another case from 1897, in which the HBC clerk at White Fish Lake in northern Alberta, took two women to Lesser Slave Lake to prevent their being executed by family members who feared they were going *wihitiko*, and who had been trying to cure them for some time. Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 364-365.

<sup>172</sup> Brightman, "Windigo in the Material," 357.

or because survival, commercial success or a contest for power were at stake. It was also because mental and moral competence was at stake. If, on the other hand, fur traders also expressed empathy for those deemed *wihtikowak* – to the point of challenging Cree law, medicine and religion or their own superior officers in the case of Beioley – it was also grounded in quests for mental and moral competence rather than mere power or prejudice.

Finally, if some fur traders tolerated, acquiesced to, or adopted the exercise of Cree law – which others sometimes disparaged as ‘superstition’ and ‘cowardice’ – it was not merely because of a “cultural distancing” in which they “perceived themselves more as observers than participants,” or because they lacked power to ensure an alternative or impose a punishment. It was also because they recognized Cree *wihtiko* beliefs and killings – even when it involved the killing of their own servants – were grounded in quests for survival as well as mental and moral competence.<sup>173</sup> “HBC men and aboriginal peoples lived side by side, [but] ... often seemed to occupy separate worlds, notwithstanding exceptions such as Nelson,” writes Smallman. There certainly was a “cultural gulf between some HBC traders and their Cree partners,” but it was perhaps less of a gulf than it appeared.<sup>174</sup>

George Nelson may stand out for his 1823 exploration and appreciation of Cree cultural and religious traditions, but other texts and narratives suggest that recognition of deep affinities – of humanity beyond their differences – was more the norm than the exception among fur traders. Twentieth-century appearances of the *wihtiko* in courts of public opinion and law, in the wider British world, provide even stronger evidence of this. By the late nineteenth century, such courts were penetrating into Rupert’s Land, where the HBC had long adapted to courts of Native public opinion and law. This penetration was facilitated by the common ground between long-

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<sup>173</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 582.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

established “partners in furs.” Yet it was also contested, and remains so today, amidst entangled struggles for understanding and control that have more than the *wihtiko* as their object.

## CHAPTER 4

### *WIHTIKO* IN THE BRITISH WORLD, 1870-1914

#### STARVATION CANNIBALISM & *WIHTIKO* IN THE BRITISH WORLD, 1870-1914

The year was 1913. Eight years previously, Cree and other Algonquians of the western Hudson Bay watershed had entered into a treaty relationship with the British Crown. Now, faced with great hardship, some of them approached Sister Magdalene, an Anglican religious superior, and asked her to appeal to King George V on their behalf. Sister Magdalene traveled to England to secure an audience with the King. These “loyal subject[s],” she explained in her petition for an audience, did not want “alms,” but rather the “protection” of the King, whom they considered “their Defender of the Faith” and “outside the Church, ... their only [apparent] friend.” She carried heart-wrenching stories of the “extreme need” of the people of this “wise gentle, faithful race,” among whom she had been working “for ten years or more as a missionary.”<sup>1</sup> So dire was their privation that some were starving to death or avoiding it only by means they deemed abhorrent:

When they go into the bush to build their wigwams, ... there is not enough food for the winter so they have been known to starve to death. In a whole family, perhaps only one comes out alive in the Spring. It is awful ... The Indian is ashamed to beg so dies.

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<sup>1</sup> Sister Magdalene to Lord Stamfordham, August 5, 1913, LAC (Library and Archives Canada), RG10, Indian Affairs, vol. 3174, file 432,659. She refers to the “old Treaty Indians of King George IV in the second and third generation, in the region of Moosonee between Lake Superior and Hudson Bay,” but the Department of Indian Affairs file containing this and other related correspondence is entitled: “Treaty 9: Cannibalism, destitution etc among the Indians.” Treaty No. 9, involving the James Bay Cree and more northerly Anishinabe was signed in 1905-06, and only with additional adhesions in 1929-30 did it become valid as far north as Hudson Bay. Treaty 9 includes those parts of the James and Hudson Bay watersheds that fall within the present-day boundaries of Ontario. See John S. Long, *Treaty No. 9: Making the Agreement to Share the Land in Far Northern Ontario in 1905* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010). Sister Magdalene’s full identity is not yet clear from this letter alone. She signed off as “Mother Superior of Nazareth,” and indicated that she was born and brought up in Canada and had been a “sister of the Church of England for 17 years under the sanction of the Archbishop of Ontario.” I have not yet found more details about her background, despite consulting the General Synod Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada, as well as the archives of the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine, and the archives of the Sisters of the Church, the two Anglican women religious communities that were based in Ontario in this period.

In one case that I met, a man's child died, one year old, starved because the mother was not nourished with food to supply the child. The Indian father, a fine young man whom I knew, was starving and thought of eating the dead infant. He said No, I cannot eat my child, so he broke a hole in the ice and buried it. Then the mother died.

The father looked up and said "God sees me starving too", so he cut a piece out of her side and out of one arm. He eat [sic] it cooked. Thus he lived, and came out of the bush in the spring.<sup>2</sup>

By this and her appeals to affinities of faith, friendship and fealty, Sister Magdalene sought to show that, despite dire circumstances, these people had maintained their humanity – and their mental and moral competence. Nevertheless, she warned, it could get worse: "The Indian has not yet learnt to kill and eat man, but human flesh leaves a craving and I fear he will do so."<sup>3</sup>

This chapter examines the appearance of starvation cannibalism and the *wihtiko* in the British World between 1870 and 1914. It focuses on the northwestern territory that the British Dominion of Canada was attempting to integrate into the "inner empire." Here, *wihtiko* beliefs, practices and behaviours were increasingly a target of Newcomer intervention, as pragmatic accommodation, typical of the "outer empire," was gradually displaced by the imposition of the British rule of law.<sup>4</sup> The entire *wihtiko* phenomenon was frequently judged a lethal superstition if not evidence of Algonquian mental and moral incompetence. In different ways, the *wihtiko* continued to be, for Native and Newcomer alike, something to be understood or to help understand mental and moral failures. Yet, in this period especially, it was also and increasingly something to be controlled. Nevertheless, British North American interventions in *wihtiko* behaviours, practices and beliefs cannot be reduced to mere acts of cultural, political or legal imperialism. A comparison with British interventions in starvation cannibalism on the high seas

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Michael Broers' description of the Napoleonic empire applies well to Britain's empire: the imposition of the universal rule of law in the "inner empire" was juxtaposed with pragmatic accommodation in the "outer empire." Cited in Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2010), 232.

makes this clear, as does a re-examination of one of the most widely publicized British North American prosecutions of a *wihtiko* executioner in 1907.

Although Sister Magdalene made no mention of the *wihtiko* in her correspondence, it is highly unlikely that this Canadian-born religious sister was unaware of it. The *wihtiko* was present in mission literature as well as in popular literature, folklore<sup>5</sup> and newspaper articles. In light of this, Sister Magdalene's assertion that the "Indian has not yet learned to kill and eat man" appears to be a pre-emptive argument against a misrepresentation of the *wihtiko* as evidence of mental and moral deficiency among the Algonquian or the futility of any mission among them.<sup>6</sup>

Four years earlier, in August 1909, the *Montreal Gazette* ran a story about a "Windago in the [Cree] Tribe":

Because one of their number became a "windago," which in English means a violent lunatic, a tribe of Cree Indians, who make their trading headquarters at Moose Factory, on Hudson Bay, came near starving during the spring just passed. ... So superstitious are the Indians regarding an insane person that instead of continuing their usual fishing and hunting occupations they flocked to Moose Factory.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The first bishop of the Diocese of Moosonee, John Horden, and at least two of his successors, George Holmes and R.J. Renison, had written about the *wihtiko*. Horden arrived in Moose Factory in 1851 and was ordained the first Bishop of Moosonee in 1872, serving until his death in 1893. Holmes was bishop from 1904 to 1909, during Sister Magdalene's time, when Renison was present as a young missionary (he was later ordained bishop). Holmes arrived in Canada as an Anglican missionary in 1885, and in 1901 he was ordained Archdeacon of Athabasca. He returned to the Diocese of Athabasca in 1908 as Acting Bishop of Athabasca, while remaining Bishop of Moosonee, before becoming Bishop of Athabasca in 1909. See: Long, "Manitu," 19; H. Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 57-58; N. Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 360; Richard G. Bailey, "George Holmes," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed October 11, 2014, <http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio.php?BioId=41571>; "Retired Archbishop, Metropolitan, Most Rev. R.J. Renison Dies at 82," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 October 1957, 14. See Chapter One for a discussion of the *wihtiko* in popular culture.

<sup>6</sup> Sister Magdalene to Lord Stamfordham, August 5, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659. Some argued that missions of civilization were hopeless: "Au point de vue intellectuel, le sauvage est absolument borné. Il est radicalement incapable de tout développement. ... Les missionnaires ont souvent essayé de faire instruire des petits garçons et des petites filles indiennes avec l'idée d'en faire des prêtres et des religieuses, mais ce fut peine perdue. Ils ne parviennent pas à raisonner plus qu'un enfant en bas âge; ils demeurent naïfs, crédules et ignorants. Voilà jusqu'où la décadence peut atteindre une race. On se console en constatant que ces dégénérés paraissent heureux." Edgar Rochette, Avocat et Conseil du Roi, *Notes sur la Côte nord du Bas St. Laurent et le Labrador Canadien* (Québec, 1926), 103-104, cited in Speck, *Naskapi*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> "Windago in the Tribe: So Cree Indians Refused to Fish and Almost Starved," *Montreal Gazette*, August 2, 1909.

The Cree man in question, John Chakason, was not actually from the Moose Factory area, but had been bound and brought there by dogsled from the more northerly Attawapiskat watershed, and had been held there while the HBC petitioned the Canadian government for assistance.<sup>8</sup> In response, a Dominion Police constable and a medical doctor were sent from Ottawa to bring the man to the Hamilton Insane Asylum. Embarking in canoes at Missinaibi for the final leg of the trip to Moose Factory, they were joined by a Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) policeman, a fur trader and several Cree men. Arriving on July 28, they laid eyes on a man who was said to be “giant in stature” with “giant strength” and “enormous appetite” – a man of “violent temper and weird ways” who let out “weird” and “hideous yells.”<sup>9</sup> The *Dawson Daily News* article continued its description as follows:

Chained to a huge anchor in an open field, was John Chakason, *all Cree and more devil in appearance than human*. Dirty and unkempt, with hair 18 inches long, Chakason tugged at his chains and made incantations in the Indian language ... while the Indians at the post shivering in superstitious terror and kept at a safe distance from the evil spirit which they believed Chakason to be.<sup>10</sup>

It took ten days to get Chakason out by canoe to the CPR line. Among the escorting party

vigilance never relaxed for a moment, knowing his giant strength, and remembering the stories of the Indians of the mad Cree’s bloodthirstiness, he being reputed a murderer many times, although natives would not go into details, so great was their fear of his supernatural powers. ... Each night he was chained to a tree and once succeeded in uprooting the tree.<sup>11</sup>

Several days later, Chakason was admitted to the Hamilton Insane Asylum, where the Department of Indian Affairs covered the cost of his confinement and treatment for several

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<sup>8</sup> “Trip with Madman: Thrilling Story of Long Journey Made with Insane Indian,” *Dawson Daily News*, September 10, 1909. Long notes that “Cree elder Gilbert Faries of Moose Factory recalls the case of an insane Attawapiskat man, in the days before the RCMP, who was brought to Moose Factory and ‘treated like a beast,’ chained to a large ship’s anchor, ‘for the safety of the residents of the James Bay area’.” John S. Long, “That Justice which ought to come from their own hands’: The Imposition of Euro-Canadian Law & Order on the Western James Bay Cree” (unpublished manuscript, 1994), 13-14. The *Dawson Daily News* article describes Chakason as chained to a huge anchor at Moose Factory.

<sup>9</sup> “Trip with Madman.” I have not yet located any records on this in the files of the RCMP (which merged with the Dominion Police in 1924). I have not yet consulted CPR records, but they may contain information on this incident.

<sup>10</sup> Emphasis added. “Trip with Madman.”

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

years, but the payments appear to have stopped after 1911,<sup>12</sup> when the Asylum caught fire and many inmates died, especially “on the fifth floor, where the dangerous inmates were confined.”<sup>13</sup> It is not clear what treatment Chakason received, but it is almost certain that he died in this fire – ironically, a traditional means of destroying a *wihtiko*. He left behind five children who were provided for by the HBC until homes could be found for them.<sup>14</sup> Chakason’s insanity had allegedly been triggered by the recent death of his wife, the only person capable of keeping him calm.

Chakason was not the only alleged *wihtiko* to be saved from execution and given treatment, in an asylum or another institution. In 1910, a year after Chakason was apprehended, the NWMP<sup>15</sup> intervened in the case of Marie Boucon, a Cree woman from Little Red River in Northern Alberta who believed she was ‘turning *wihtiko*.’ Intervention by the NWMP prevented a *wihtiko* execution and she was sent to the Fort Vermillion Catholic Mission to be given medical care by the Sisters of Providence. She violently attacked people while at the mission and at one point asked that she be guarded by armed police lest she cannibalize someone. After four years, she was sent to a psychiatric institution in Calgary.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> LAC, RG10, vol. 3519, file 347079, lists a January 5, 1910 “Letter no. 357061 from Hamilton Insane Asylum Acknowledging receipt of \$39 for the maintenance of John Chakason.”

<sup>13</sup> “Twelve Inmates of Insane Asylum Lose Lives in Fire,” *East Oregonian*, August 1, 1911, 1. The *Washington Post* (“Maniacs Burn as Fire Levels Insane Asylum,” August 1, 1911, 1) listed at least fifteen bodies cremated and eight bodies recovered, and this on the day of the event. Before finding these articles I had tried to locate relevant files for the Hamilton Asylum from the Ontario Archives. The search was performed by an archivist, due to confidentiality issues. No records pertaining to Chakason were found. The records were most likely burnt.

<sup>14</sup> “Trip With Madman.”

<sup>15</sup> In 1904, the North West Mounted Police became the Royal NWMP. In 1920, the RNWMP merged with the Dominion Police to become the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Appointed as stipendiary magistrates, the NWMP commissioner and his assistant commissioners wielded “full judicial powers extending even to capital crimes.” Sidney L. Haring, “‘There Seemed to Be No Recognized Law’: Canadian Law and the Prairie First Nations,” in *Laws and Societies in the Canadian Prairie West, 1670-1940*, ed. Louis A. Knafla and Jonathan Swainger, 92-126 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 94-96. See also Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Carlson, “Reviving witiko,” 373. Edward Rae and Roger Vandersteene give accounts of two other cases (one of them is discussed below) where alleged *wihtikowak* were sent to asylums, but the precise dates of these incidents are not clear. Edward Rae, cited in Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens, *Killing the Shamen* (Moonbeam, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1985), 32-35. Vandersteene, “Some Woodland,” 56-57.

In 1911, the *Edmonton Bulletin* published the memoirs of Anglican Bishop George Holmes, who recalled the case of Samuel Auger, an alleged Cree *wihtiko* who was saved from execution by a NWMP intervention in 1898. Holmes had helped care for Auger before he was sent away for treatment at Stony Mountain Asylum, where he recovered and was sent home.<sup>17</sup> Few cases, if any, however, were as widely publicized as that of Chakason. This story was reported across the continent, from Phoenix to Ottawa and Dawson City to St. John's.<sup>18</sup>

Chakason's case was not the only *wihtiko* story to catch global media attention during the decade Sister Magdalene had spent with the Algonquian peoples in the Diocese of Moosonee. In 1906, for example, a New Zealand paper reprinted a story from a London (UK) paper about mysterious tracks of several monstrous beings cited in North West River, Labrador. The account came from E.W. Maunder, an astronomer and leader of the Canadian Government's Eclipse Expedition. The largest of the tracks were said to be human-like with the addition of a single claw-mark on each footprint. Captain Fournier of Revillon Frères, a fur-trade company, estimated the creature's weight to be a full 700 lbs. There could be "no reasonable doubt as to the real nature of these mysterious beings," Maunder wrote, in concluding his account:

The wandering Indians in the vast solitudes of Labrador and Northern Canada are peculiarly liable to attacks of madness, or, as they put it, to possession by an evil spirit. When so "possessed" they seem to have strong cannibalistic tendencies. In Nova Scotia last year I visited Dr Hind, the explorer of Assiniboia and of the Moisie River in Labrador, from whom I learnt of the tales that the Indians tell of these 'Wendigoes,' whom they describe as gigantic cannibals and vampires.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "The Hero Priests of the North," *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 25, 2011, 8, cited in Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 364, and endnote 44 (note the typographical error regarding the date).

<sup>18</sup> "Indian Created Terror: Believed to have Murdered a Number of People," and "Redskin Goes to Asylum," *Globe* (Toronto), August 14, 1909; "Got Out with Crazy Indian," *Ottawa Citizen*, August 13, 1909; "1000 Miles with Insane Indian," *Evening Telegraph* (St. John's, NFLD), August 17, 1909; "Bad Indian man - Giant Fellow Who Slew Tribesmen Taken to Asylum," *Daily Phoenix*, August 19, 1909.

<sup>19</sup> "Weird Stories from Hudson's Bay," *Grey River Argus*, November 9, 1906. Identical articles entitled "An Arctic Mystery: Wild men of the North Believed to be Indians who have gone Mad and turned Cannibals," were carried by at least two Canadian papers: *The Outcrop*, November 1, 1906, 2, and the *Red Deer News*, November 27, 1906, 3.

Less than a year later, stories of violent cannibalism between James Bay and Labrador once again circulated the globe. They originated with reports by *Fort Frances Times* editor J.A. Osborne, who had just finished a six-month mineral exploration trip in the region. The *Victoria Daily Colonist* reported on the main purpose of Osborne's trip but briefly cited two incidents of cannibalism among the Cree that supposedly led "Osborne to think that the practice of cannibalism is not by any means unknown in that sparsely settled country, where occurs at times a great scarcity of game."<sup>20</sup>

Almost all the published accounts focused on Osborne's accounts of cannibalism. Some emphasized the "Terrible Suffering Among Natives" in northern Canada,<sup>21</sup> or were careful to note the exceptional circumstances. One New Zealand paper, for example, cited Osborne's explanation that "the famine is due to an utter [and exceptional] absence of game."<sup>22</sup> The *Washington Post* ran a similar article.<sup>23</sup> Australian and New Zealand newspapers stated that famine cannibalism was "practised openly amongst the Indians and half-breeds of that locality," but also reported Osborne's comment that "even the white hunters have been driven to the extremity of devouring their kind."<sup>24</sup>

Most papers, however, did not mention this comment by Osborne. Intentionally or not, they gave a very poor impression of the region and its Native peoples. The *San Francisco Call's*

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<sup>20</sup> "Bring Tales of the Far North – J.A. Osborne and Party of Explorers Return From the Hudson's Bay Country," *Daily Colonist* (Victoria, BC), October 27, 1907, 19. I have not succeeded in locating any private papers of Osborne or copies of the *Fort Frances Times* from this period. The newspaper itself does not have any copies.

<sup>21</sup> "Tales of Cannibalism and Famine in Canada – Terrible Suffering Among Natives in Northwestern Part of Country," *Telegraph* (Nashua, New Hampshire), October 11, 1907, 5.

<sup>22</sup> "Strange Stories from Foreign Press," *Hawera & Normanby Star*, December 10, 1907, 3. This story also recounted an incident of violent cannibalism that occurred in Terra del Fuego, Argentina.

<sup>23</sup> "Natives Driven by Famine to Live on Human Flesh," *Washington Post*, October 13, 1907, E1.

<sup>24</sup> "Stories of Cannibalism," *Otago Witness*, December 25, 1907, 81. This story was drawn from a report published by the *Melbourne Age*, whose San Francisco correspondent had learned of the story. See also: "Trapper was a Cannibal? Finding of Man Half Insane May Clear Up Mystery," *Detroit Free Press*, February 7, 1909, 3. This article reported on a Belgian Trapper named Grasset, who was found "badly frozen and half insane, in the wilderness near Ft. Albany, on James Bay." He had eaten the flesh of two of his hunting companions and the Cree of Chiboogamoo, Quebec, suspected he had killed them.

headlines were among the most negative: “Cannibalism Practiced in Canadian Northeast – Explorer Brings Back Account of Shocking Barbarism – Feuds and Murders – *Human Life Held in Little Esteem by the Indians and Halfbreeds.*”<sup>25</sup> According to the *Call*, Osborne had brought back

Tales of cannibalism, wholesale murder, awful privation and famine and deadly feuds among the natives ... in that desolate, uninviting country. ... While at Moose Factory Osborne met a young man who had fled thither in terror of his uncle, who, he said, had killed and eaten eight human beings. There, too, he saw a woman who had killed and eaten her two children last winter, so great was the famine. ... As these occurrences did not seem to cause any great stir in that region Osborne has come to the conclusion that *cannibalism was practiced openly on many occasions among the Indians and halfbreeds.*<sup>26</sup>

The headlines and story run by the *Windsor Evening Record* struck an almost identical tone.<sup>27</sup> The *Toronto Globe*, the *New York Times*, and at least seven other American papers ran stories implying that such violent cannibalism was “practiced openly among the Indians” of the region.<sup>28</sup> No mention was made of the *wihtiko* in these stories of violent cannibalism among the

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<sup>25</sup> Emphasis added. “Cannibalism Practiced in Canadian Northeast – Explorer Brings Back Account of Shocking Barbarism – Feuds and Murders – Human Life Held in Little Esteem by the Indians and Halfbreeds,” *San Francisco Call*, October 11, 1907, 3. This article did not mention the purpose of Osborne’s trip, in contrast to the *Victoria Daily Colonist* article, “Bring Tales of the Far North” (cited above) which focused on the mineral exploration and presents a far less sensationalist account of the alleged cannibalism.

<sup>26</sup> Emphasis added. “Cannibalism Practiced in Canadian Northeast.”

<sup>27</sup> “Tales of Cannibalism,” *Evening Record* (Windsor, Ontario), November 26, 1907, 6.

<sup>28</sup> “Cannibalism in Manitoba: Explorer Tells of Two Instances Near Hudson Bay,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1907, (Osborne had shared the story in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but the incidents themselves were from the James Bay region); “Practice Cannibalism,” *Lawrence Daily Journal* (Kansas), October 11, 1907, 1 (citing a story from the *Chicago Record Herald*); “Tales of Murder and Cannibalism Brought Down from Canada’s Hinterland – Last Winter’s Famine Drove Indians to Kill and Eat Their Fellows,” *Globe* (Toronto), October 12, 1907, 4 (citing a story in the *New York Herald*); “Starving Indians Live on Human Flesh – Mother Said to Have Killed and Eaten Two of Her Children – Famine in Northern Part of Canada – One Native Said to Have Killed Eight to Save Life,” *Richland Shield and Banner* (Ohio), October 10, 1907; “One Man Killed and Ate Eight Human Beings – Woman Slays and Eats Her Two Children in Northeastern Canada – Cannibalism Openly Practiced Among Indians and Half-Breeds,” *News-Democrat* (Providence, R.I.), October 11, 1907, 1; “Indian Eats 8 Human Beings – Squaw Kills her two Children and Subsists on their Flesh,” *Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, Washington), October 15, 1907, 2; “Tells Story of Cannibalism,” *Baltimore Sun*, October 11, 1907, 1; “Tells Wild Tales of Cannibalism,” *Pioneer Express* (Pembina, North Dakota), October 18, 1907), 6; “Cannibalism in Canada,” *Butler Weekly Times*, October 17, 1907, 1; “Eat their Fellows: Cannibals Found in North-Eastern Canada,” *Plymouth Tribune*, October 17, 1907, 2.

Cree. That same year, however, a more explicit *wihtiko* story, the Fiddler case discussed below, also made headlines across Canada, the United States and Great Britain.<sup>29</sup>

The mainly negative media storm created by Osborne's reports may have prompted Sister Magdalene to insist upon the "wise gentle, faithful" character of the Algonquian peoples and to subtly deny accusations of violent cannibalism. If this was the case, she was not alone in her concerns. Canadian officials had expressed great concern over the reports attributed to Osborne and had asked – publicly and by letter to Osborne – "for details or denial" of the

Sensational statements ... as to alleged cannibalism on the part of Indians between the eastern shore of James Bay and Labrador. As this area covers territory larger in extent than civilized Europe, it is impossible for either the Indian Department or the Mounted Police Department to confirm or deny the statements which have been imputed, erroneously, it is believed, to Mr. Osborne.<sup>30</sup>

It was not long before Osborne attempted to rectify the "malicious," "grossly exaggerated," and "wholly misleading" allegations of "wholesale murders and cannibalism in the James Bay Country" that were "going the rounds of the American press" and which "correspondents for yellow journals [had] seize[d] upon to keep up the sensational news end of their respective papers."<sup>31</sup> The corrections, however, do not appear to have had much of an impact.<sup>32</sup>

Given the Canadian government's public admission of ignorance of the state of things in "a territory larger in extent than civilized Europe,"<sup>33</sup> it is little surprise that Sister Magdalene was highly sceptical of its ability to properly address the matter. Canada's claims to dominion were

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<sup>29</sup> The story in question was carried in newspapers in Chicago, New York, Washington, Vancouver, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Montreal, London (England), though this list is based on a limited search of what was available in several newspaper databases. For specific details and full references see the discussion of the Fiddler trial in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>30</sup> "Government Concerned Over Reports of Cannibalism Among Indians," *Cowansville Observer*, October 24, 1907. See also: "Cannibalism Among Indians Discredited," Cable from the Department of the Interior, LAC, R219-29-4-E, "Correspondence with Canadian and British Government Departments."

<sup>31</sup> "Cannibalism Does Not Exist: Fort Frances Editor Says Stories Published in American Papers Greatly Exaggerated," *Edmonton Bulletin*, November 2, 1907, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Exaggerated stories continued to be published, such as "Cannibals Found in Canada," *Morgan County Republican*, November 7, 1907, 3. The Library of Congress online newspaper archive was searched for the rebuttal story, but it was not found; whereas numerous articles were found of the exaggerated version.

<sup>33</sup> "Government Concerned."

one thing; the reality was quite another. Despite being informed by the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies as well as the Assistant Director of Indian Affairs that the Canadian Government was addressing the matter,<sup>34</sup> Sister Magdalene pressed on. Finally, on October 26, 1913, she met and raised her concerns with King George V and Queen Mary. She wanted the King to “make some law which the Indian could understand, to protect the young of the game [animals]” and to “insist upon the Hudson Bay Company giving double the price it now gives – three or four times as much would not hurt them.”<sup>35</sup> Although it had ceded to Canada its weak claims in and beyond the Hudson Bay watershed, the HBC was still the primary or sole British presence in much of it.<sup>36</sup>

Shortly afterwards, on November 6, the Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote to the Duke of Connaught, then Governor General of Canada, communicating the King’s “hope that the question of alleged cannibalism among the Indians may be thoroughly investigated” and that the Duke “call the special attention of your Ministers to the matter, and obtain a report in reply to my despatches which I can submit to His Majesty.” By December 3, the Department of Indian Affairs had submitted a report showing disbursements made to both the HBC and its rival, the Revillon Frères Company, for relief given to Inuit and Cree during the two previous years. Appended to the nine-page report was “a map showing the Diocese of Moosonee and a series of

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<sup>34</sup> Her initial letter was referred to the Canadian Government and she was informed of this. Henry Lambert, for the Under Secretary of State, to Sister Magdalene, August 19, 1913. When she replied on September 10 that the Canadian Government could not be relied upon to address the matter, she was promptly informed that “Mr. Harcourt [Secretary of State for the Colonies] can only repeat that he feels assured that the Canadian Government will take any necessary steps in the interest of the Indians. Under Secretary of State to Sister Magdalene, 16 September 16, 1913. Later that month, the Assistant Deputy and Secretary of Indian Affairs, J.D. McLean wrote Sister Magdalene informing her that “relief is extended to any Indians in the district mentioned who are in need of assistance.” LAC, RG 10, vol. 3174, file 432,659.

<sup>35</sup> Sister Magdalene to Lord Stamfordham, August 5, 1913, LAC, RG 10, vol. 3174, file 432,659. She may have raised other matters in her meeting with the King and Queen.

<sup>36</sup> See John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an imperial factor, 1821-1869* (Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1957).

photographs illustrating the fur-trading posts and the Indians of the district mentioned.”<sup>37</sup> These photographs portrayed scenes of everyday life that counterbalanced the heart-wrenching tales of privation in Sister Magdalene’s plea to the King, and contrasted with the unflattering newspaper portrayals of “shocking barbarism.” Duncan C. Scott had earlier waxed poetic about the “tragic savage,”<sup>38</sup> but the report he signed as Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs sought to discredit such images.

Yet, if the readers of North American papers were horrified by accounts of cannibalism in the Canadian Northeast, so also were Cree and other Algonquians. The abhorrence of cannibalism, in fact, was the very first point raised in the December 1913 report: “Cannibalism is abhorrent to the Indians as it is associated by them with ... Wendigo ... an insane person who has a tendency to commit murder and to devour the flesh of his victim.”<sup>39</sup> Contrary to insinuations made by many of the 1907 newspaper accounts, the Crees’ abhorrence of violent and non-violent cannibalism was likely more intense than that of Euroamericans.<sup>40</sup> Harold Cardinal, in contrasting Aboriginal and European “life values,” argued that although “there were occasional instances of [it] ... cannibalism was never an approved practice among Aboriginal peoples.” In contrast, he pointed out that even into the late 1800s, European theologians “gave ...

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<sup>37</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, to W.H. Walker, Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG 10, vol. 3174, file 432,659. For the photos, see NA (National Archives [UK]), CO 1069/279 “Indians of the Moosonee District, Ontario, c.1913.”

<sup>38</sup> Duncan Campbell Scott, “Onondaga Madonna” (1898), in *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Russell Brown, Donna Bennett and Nathalie Cooke (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), 165.

<sup>39</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG 10, vol. 3174, file 432,659.

<sup>40</sup> This was clear from most accounts of *wihtiko* scares, such as one which was widely published in 1912, and which Sister Magdalene would have been aware of as well. “Indians in State of Panic: ‘Windigo’ is Abroad in Bush Near Fort William,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, September 13, 1912, 3; “Indians Fear Cannibals,” *Tacoma Times*, September 13, 1912, 7; “Indian Tribe in State of Panic,” *Evening Standard* (Ogden, Utah), September 12, 1912, 7. For another 1912 scare, see: “Elephant Breaks Up Poor Musk Ox: Hit in Solar Plexus – Indians Thought A Windigo Had Arrived,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, August 13, 1912, 1.

their blessing” to cannibalism on the open seas, in contexts of starvation: “More often than not, the crew member who saved other crew members would happen to be a cabin boy.”<sup>41</sup>

Cardinal was referring to an infamous case from 1884 in which three English survivors of the *Mignonette*, shipwrecked off the South African Cape of Good Hope, eventually killed and ate the weakest among them, a lad. Upon being rescued and brought back to Falmouth, Cornwall, England, they openly admitted what they had done. After twenty days adrift, acknowledged one survivor, they had “agreed with the Master that it was absolutely necessary that one should be sacrificed to save the rest.” The Master had chosen the boy Richard Parker, “being the weakest” of condition and least likely to survive. With the agreement of the others, the Master had then “killed the lad.”<sup>42</sup> The sailors assumed themselves to be immune to prosecution on the basis of what the London *Spectator* described, unsympathetically, as “the hideous tradition of the sea which authorizes starving sailors to kill and eat their comrades ... a practice as directly opposed to human as it is to divine law.”<sup>43</sup> The *Spectator* continued:

So complete is the belief of sailors in their right to eat their comrades that Captain Dudley, believed to be a most respectable man and certainly with an excellent record, who spoke most kindly to his victim and asked God’s pardon before he took his life, without any compulsion voluntarily related the whole story to the Custom House officers at Falmouth in all its details ... with the straightforward truthfulness with which a sailor usually describes any noteworthy incident of a voyage. He apparently had no idea whatever that he was liable to legal proceedings and when arrested expressed nothing but astonishment. ... He was in fact obviously originally a decent man of the ordinary type under the influence of the

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<sup>41</sup> Harold Cardinal, “Okimaw Win and Post-Colonial Nation-Building,” *Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity*, ed. Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), 196.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 178. See also: NA, MT9, Board of Trade and Ministry of Transport and successors: Marine, Harbours and Wrecks, file 257, “Case of cannibalism of Master and Crew.” This is from a statement deposited with the Customs House.

<sup>43</sup> Cited in Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 172. See also: Allan C. Hutchinson, *Is Eating People Wrong?: Great Legal Cases and How they Shaped the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), chapter 2 “Is Eating People Wrong? The Law and Lore of the Sea”; A.W.B. Simpson, *Cannibalism and the Common Law: The Story of the Tragic Last Voyage of the Mignonette and the Strange Legal Proceedings to Which It Gave Rise* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). As Simpson points out, most cases of cannibalism at sea involved the eating of corpses of the deceased, but there were cases of killing and eating others as well. The first such incident on record was obtained from eyewitnesses by Nichololaus Tulpius, who published an account in *Observationem medicarum* (1641). In this case, lots were cast among seven English sailors to determine who should be killed and who should be the executioner. When the survivors were eventually cast up on an island and sent home, they were accused of homicide but were pardoned “their crime being ‘washed away’ by ‘inevitable necessity.’” *Ibid.*, 123.

traditional feeling of his profession that cannibalism is excusable in a starving sailor and that even killing a man in order to eat him is, if all alike perishing in an open boat, not an act amenable to human justice.<sup>44</sup>

Apparently, “half the journalists” who wrote about the case shared the opinion of the Falmouth public.<sup>45</sup> Although there was initially some doubt among the seafaring public because the men had failed to draw lots,<sup>46</sup> this gave way to support for the men as the Crown pursued a prosecution “with no fewer than four counsel, led by the attorney general himself, Sir Henry James.”<sup>47</sup>

The accused were tried, found guilty of murder and sentenced to death, but were recommended for clemency, which they received.<sup>48</sup> In the end, they served only six months.<sup>49</sup> “To preserve one’s life is generally speaking a duty,” stated the judges, “but it may be the plainest and the highest duty to sacrifice it.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore:

It would be a very easy and cheap display of commonplace learning to quote from Greek and Latin authors, from Horace, from Juvenal, from Cicero, from Euripides, passage after passage, in which the duty of dying for others has been laid down in glowing and emphatic

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<sup>44</sup> Cited in Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 172-173.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Simpson lays out evidence from a popular myth and history to argue as follows: “Though to a mind focused solely on the law reports, the case was indeed more or less unprecedented, contemporary attitudes cannot be understood simply on that basis . . . maritime survival cannibalism, preceded by the drawing of lots and killing, was a socially accepted practice among seamen until the end of the days of sail.” Simpson, *Cannibalism*, 111 & 145.

<sup>46</sup> Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 171. This was a point that the judges emphasized: “In this case the weakest, the youngest, the most unresisting, was chose. Was it more necessary to kill him than one of the grown men.” *R v. Dudley and Stephens* [1884] 14 QBD 273 DC, accessed November 26, 2014, [http://www.justis.com/titles/iclr\\_bqb14040.html](http://www.justis.com/titles/iclr_bqb14040.html). This case was the first of ten in an Incorporated Council of Law Reporting *Special Issue: 135 Years of The Law Reports and The Weekly Law Reports* by Justis Publishing. “Justis Publishing is pleased to publish this special collection of ten landmark cases on Justis. It marks the relaunch in 2001 of *The Law Reports* and *The Weekly Law Reports* in a new format for the 21st century, and celebrates the achievements of the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting for England and Wales (ICLR) since its inception nearly 136 years ago. The reports were chosen from a long list of nearly fifty cases nominated by the Council’s own reporters.” [http://www.justis.com/titles/iclr\\_index.html](http://www.justis.com/titles/iclr_index.html). Simpson points out that when the case first arose, its unique character “heightened the fascination” for the lawyers involved; “although the law books were ransacked to find similar cases, the operation met with little success.” Simpson, *Cannibalism*, 111.

<sup>47</sup> Simpson, *Cannibalism*, 225.

<sup>48</sup> Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 279-280.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 286.

<sup>50</sup> *R v. Dudley and Stephens*.

language as resulting from the principles of heathen ethics; it is enough in a Christian country to remind ourselves of the Great Example whom we profess to follow.<sup>51</sup>

The judges' duty was to determine the law as best they could, even if it "appeared too severe on individuals." Rather, as the Constitution laid out, they were to entrust the exercise of the "prerogative of mercy" to the Sovereign, but they made it clear they agreed with the recommendation of mercy.<sup>52</sup> The judges were carefully nuanced in pronouncing their decision:

It must not be supposed that in refusing to admit temptation to be an excuse for crime it is forgotten how terrible the temptation was; how awful the suffering; how hard in such trials to keep the judgment straight and the conduct pure. We are often compelled to set up standards we cannot reach ourselves, and to lay down rules which we could not ourselves satisfy. But a man has no right to declare temptation to be an excuse, though he might himself have yielded to it, nor allow compassion for the criminal to change or weaken in any manner the legal definition of the crime. It is therefore our duty to declare that the prisoners' act in this case was wilful murder, that the facts as stated in the verdict are no legal justification of the homicide; and to say that in our unanimous opinion the prisoners are upon this special verdict guilty of murder.<sup>53</sup>

The decision was praised in the leading national papers. *The Times* editorial acknowledged that the

situation was terribly trying and the temptation only too likely to deaden conscience, but we protest against the notion that in the extremity of hunger or thirst, men are to be considered as released from all duties towards each other. ... Our columns in 1836 contained an account of the perils of a shipwrecked crew who suffered hardships as cruel as befell the survivors of the *Mignonette*, but no one among them suggested the idea of killing any of their number, and the dead, we are told, were cast overboard lest the living be tempted to forget their misery in a horrible repast.<sup>54</sup>

"Up until the eighteenth century," writes Avramescu in his intellectual history of cannibalism, "the open sea belonged to the vast domain of natural law, and its sole sovereign was necessity," but the rule of necessity – easily conflated with the rule of 'might is right' – was by no means

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> The sentencing judge omitted the normal protocol of putting on the black cap for sentencing and told the accused: "You have been convicted of the crime of wilful murder, though you have been recommended by the jury most earnestly to the mercy of the Crown; a recommendation in which, as I understand, my learned brother who tried you concurs, and in which we all unanimously concur. It is my duty, however, as the organ of the Court, to pronounce on you the sentence of the law ... that ... you be ... hanged by the neck until you be dead." Cited in Simpson, *Cannibalism*, 239.

<sup>53</sup> R v. Dudley and Stephens.

<sup>54</sup> Cited in Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 281.

undisputed. Simpson points out that the “task of bringing ships under the rule of law has ... been a long uphill task, never fully completed.”<sup>55</sup>

Cardinal’s ambivalent wording in referring to the ‘custom of the sea’ suggests that Christian theologians as a whole condoned not only non-violent starvation cannibalism, which they did condone, but also violent cannibalism, which they did not. As Avramescu points out, “theories of the legitimacy of cannibalism have ... covered the entire spectrum of opinions, from the *inflexibility* of divine commandments to the revolutionary consequences of late-Enlightenment *jus naturalis*.”<sup>56</sup> In 1682, for example, Struys depicted a “debate between ... two castaways unveils ... a conflict between a traditional idea of natural law and a radical interpretation.”<sup>57</sup> One argues that the law of nature demands the weakest among them be sacrificed for the others. The other opposes him: “False reason, false principles. The interdiction to kill is formulated with such clarity by the law that no reasoning can exempt us from respecting it. The words *Thou shalt not kill* are clear and admit no exception.”<sup>58</sup> In one perspective, explains Avramescu, the cannibal is “the eminent incarnation of a crime against nature.” In the other perspective, where cannibalism – even violent cannibalism – is “excused by absolute necessity, the cannibal is the very man of nature, and as such is governed by the laws of nature.”<sup>59</sup> Questions of moral competence under duress – evoked for Algonquians by the *wihtiko* – were not new to modern Europeans.

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<sup>55</sup> Simpson, *Cannibalism*, 107; Cătălin Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, trans. Alistair Ian Blyth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009; first published in Romanian in 2003), 25.

<sup>56</sup> Emphasis added (first italics). Avramescu, *Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, 23. It is not clear if Avramescu is referring in this line to “theories advocating the legitimacy of cannibalism,” in which case the only examples of divine commandment in this regard come from an impersonal Deistic God not the personal Christian God. He may be referring simply to “theories about the (il)legitimacy of cannibalism,” which included condemnations by Christian theologians.

<sup>57</sup> Avramescu, *Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Jean Struys, *Les Voyages de Jean Struys en Moscovie, Tartaire, en Perse, aux Indes & au plusieurs autres Pais étrangers* (Lyon, 1862), 323-324, translated and cited in Avramescu, *Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Avramescu, *Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, 20.

As Avramescu shows, the Western intellectual history of cannibalism has long appeared in debates about natural law, human nature and moral competence. Cardinal's binary comparison of Native and European approaches to cannibalism and human life depends on distortions of both: omission of other kinds of cannibalism once practiced and sanctioned among Algonquian and non-Algonquian peoples in North and South America,<sup>60</sup> and omission of more predominant and inflexible condemnations of violent cannibalism in Western Christian traditions.<sup>61</sup> But Cardinal was himself responding to other distortions – more common in his time – that placed the Cree and other Native people near the edge of the human race.<sup>62</sup> Overstatements aside, these examples confirm that Cree abhorrence of all forms of cannibalism was indeed greater.

Yet the abhorrence of cannibalism among the Cree and other Algonquians was greater not only because of its “association with a form of homicidal insanity,”<sup>63</sup> but also because this “homicidal insanity” resulted from possession by, or transformation into, a monstrous being that was seen as the antithesis of humanity and morality – the epitome of evil. Even non-violent cannibalism in times of starvation could make one susceptible to *wihtiko* possession or transformation. As discussed earlier, the resulting loss of mental and moral competence, moreover, threatened the heart of Cree and Anishinabe society. The nature and circumstances of cannibalism at sea was far less of a threat to a typical English family than the *wihtiko* was to a typical Algonquian family.

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<sup>60</sup> See George Franklin Feldman, *Cannibalism, Headhunting and Human Sacrifice in North America: A History Forgotten* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Alan C. Hood & Co., 2008); Anderson, *Betrayal of Faith*, 39; Thomas S. Abler, “Iroquois Cannibalism: Fact Not Fiction,” *Ethnohistory* 27, no. 4 (autumn 1980): 309-316. People suspected of violent cannibalism in times of starvation were not always punished with death, even by the Cree.

<sup>61</sup> Avramescu, *Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, 23; Richard Stephen Charnock, “Cannibalism in Europe,” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* 4 (1866): xxii-xxxi. There were other forms of cannibalism that were condoned in Western Christianity. Karen Gordon-Grube, “Anthropophagy in Post-Renaissance Europe: The Tradition of Medicinal Cannibalism,” *Anthropologist* 90, no. 2 (June 1988): 405-409.

<sup>62</sup> Christon I. Archer, “Cannibalism in the Early History of the Northwest Coast: Enduring Myths and Neglected Realities,” *Canadian Historical Review* 61, no. 4 (1980): 453-479.

<sup>63</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659.

Those who sought to abolish the ‘custom of the sea’ saw it as a reprehensible and cowardly custom that undermined the moral foundation of English society; others were more forgiving of it as an exception pardoned, if not justified, by extreme necessity. Although national newspapers were the most critical of the seafaring public for condoning or forgiving this practice, the majority ultimately read the *Mignonette* case as a repulsive exception to the norm, provoked by abnormal circumstances. They were less likely to misread this exception as the norm in English seafaring society.

For those who had little or no knowledge of Algonquians, in contrast, incomplete and sensationalist reports of violent cannibalism among them were more likely to feed into prejudices that placed or confirmed them as a people of “Shocking Barbarism” among whom “human life [was] held in little esteem.”<sup>64</sup> Ironically, if allegations of violent cannibalism could be used to misconstrue Algonquians as mentally and morally deficient, so too could their protective measures against such cannibalism. Not everyone described these practices in the neutral terms found in Scott’s 1913 report destined for the King:

When an Indian shows signs of having become a Wendigo, songs and incantations are used by the Medicine Men to effect a cure, but, when this does not have the desired result, the Indians feel justified, with a view to self-preservation, in taking the life of the Wendigo in accordance with their tribal customs.<sup>65</sup>

Such frank recognition of the reasoning behind *wihtiko*-killings, however, was often absent, muted or hidden, in efforts to suppress the practice.

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<sup>64</sup> “Cannibalism Practiced,” *San Francisco Call*, October 11, 1907, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659.

### ‘FULL PENALTY OF THE LAW’? WIHTIKO TRIALS, 1870-1914

When John Chakason’s case came to public attention in 1909, Scott had explained to a journalist: “In the old days ... this insane Indian would have been killed off without delay, but in recent years the Indians have come to realize that they will suffer the full penalty of the law if they carry out any such course of action.”<sup>66</sup> “This custom has fallen into desuetude,” echoed a 1911 newspaper article, “for, since the advent of the mounted police, the perpetrators are treated as murderers and accordingly hanged.”<sup>67</sup> Further, in his 1913 report, Scott described two such cases that had occurred in 1899, one of them at Cat Lake, just north of Lac Seul (northwestern Ontario), the other at the Bald Hills, just west of Lesser Slave Lake (northern Alberta). In the first case, a man named Choosenaun “was tried for the murder of another Indian named Unbahsh who was turning Wendigo.” Convicted of manslaughter, Choos-e-naun was sentenced to four months in prison.<sup>68</sup> In the second case, two Cree men, Payiu and Nepisosus, were charged for the murder of Moostoos, who they feared to have turned *wihtiko*. Payiu was acquitted but Nepisosus was convicted and sentenced to two months in prison.<sup>69</sup> According to the witnesses, Moostoos himself had expressed a fear of turning *wihtiko* and had asked to be killed lest he harm his

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<sup>66</sup> Scott, cited in “Windigo in the Tribe,” *Montreal Gazette*, August 2, 1909.

<sup>67</sup> “The Hero Priests of the North,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 25, 2011, 8.

<sup>68</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659. *The Moose Jaw Herald* reported on an 1899 case involving two men from Cat Lake who were brought to Winnipeg to be tried for the murder of their chief, named Ahwahaskehmg who had ordered them to kill him lest he turn into a *wihtiko*. It is not clear if this refers to the same case. “Killed a Wendigo: Two Cat Lake Indians to be Tried in Winnipeg for Murdering Their Chief,” *Moose Jaw Herald Times*, November 3, 1899, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659. For more detailed analysis of the second case, see: Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 93-103; Cornelia Schuh, “Justice on the Northern Frontier: Early Murder Trials of Native Accused,” *Criminal Law Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (December 1979): 78-79; Lou Marano, “Windigo Psychosis: the Anatomy of an Emic-Etic Confusion” (PhD thesis, University of Florida, 1981), 135-148; Sidney L. Harring, “The Wendigo Killings: The Legal Penetration of Canadian Law into the Spirit World of the Ojibwa and Cree Indians,” chapter in *Violent Crime in North America*, ed. Louis A. Knafla, 75-103 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 83-85; Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 379-380; “Indian Cannibals: Aborigines Caught by Mounted Police in the Act of Eating Human Flesh,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 14, 1899, 50. The judge who tried this case had earlier tried the case of Charlebois, Dressy man and Bright Eyes and gave them harsher sentences because of the connection with the 1885 resistance (see below).

children and others.<sup>70</sup> In citing this second case, Scott did not mention that the NWMP had arrived on the scene just in time to prevent the killing of another alleged *wihtiko* named Napassis. According to the *Edmonton Bulletin* account, Napassis had “also turned weitigo and attempted to kill and eat a 10 year old Indian girl, who was with the party.”<sup>71</sup> The NWMP took Payiu, Nepisosus and Napassis into custody, and brought them to Lesser Slave Lake:

The return journey was made in company with the Indians who, thoroughly panic stricken, sought the protection of the police. ... At the lake Nap-as-sis, who had recovered his mental equilibrium, was examined by a doctor and pronounced perfectly sane. He was therefore discharged.<sup>72</sup>

Yet these were not – as Scott alleged in his report – the “most recent cases” to come to his department’s attention.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, although several *wihtiko* executioners had been sentenced to hang, the “full penalty of the law”<sup>74</sup> had never been applied; all death sentences had been commuted. The most recently convicted *wihtiko* killer (in the Fiddler case, detailed below) had been pardoned, though he had succumbed to illness in a prison infirmary before receiving the news.

One of the earliest appearances of the *wihtiko* in a Canadian court of law involved not a killer of *wihtikowak* but a murderous *wihtiko*. Swift Runner was a Cree trapper who lived north of Edmonton. In 1879, when he returned from his winter hunting grounds without his family, his wife’s family reported him to police. Swift Runner was apprehended, confessed to the killings and led police to the remains. On August 8, 1879, he was tried for murder.<sup>75</sup> According to an account given by an elder some 25 years later:

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<sup>70</sup> Schuh, “Justice,” 79.

<sup>71</sup> “Indian Murder,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, April 20, 1889, 4.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659.

<sup>74</sup> Scott, cited in “Windago in the Tribe,” *Montreal Gazette*, August 2, 1909.

<sup>75</sup> “Murderer and Cannibal: Execution of Swift Runner at Fort Saskatchewan,” *Daily Globe*, January 14, 1880, 3; LAC, RG13, vol. 1417, file 138, “Ka-ki-si-kut-chin ‘Swift Runner’”; Teicher, *Wihitiko Psychosis*, 85-88;

Just as he was about to be convicted he came back to his senses. He asked the judge why he was there. The judge told him that he had eaten up his family. The judge couldn't convict him because he didn't have his mind. He started to cry. "You might as well hang me because I'm going to kill lots more." Then he told what happened right from the start. ... He said he went on a moose hunt and on his return was close to camp when all he could hear were young moose, nothing but moose. That's when it started on him. He had to be hung. He said, "It's nothing for me to kill myself."<sup>76</sup>

Swift Runner was convicted and sentenced to hang. Carlson comments that his confession, recorded by Father Hippolyte Leduc after the sentencing, shows "fatalism toward the *wihtiko* condition."<sup>77</sup> He killed his first victims for food, but his last victim for a different reason. In his words (translated from the Cree): "The devil suddenly took possession of my soul; and in order to live longer far from people, and *to put out of my way the only witness to my crime*, I seized my gun and killed the last of my children and ate him as I had done the others."<sup>78</sup> Swift Runner's execution, according to one newspaper report, was much celebrated by the "Indians throughout the district ... [who] unanimously approved." Just before the sentence was carried out, a NWMP officer "attempted to read a prayer, but his voice was drowned by the jeers and shouts of the Indians." Afterwards, "the Indians held a grand feast, rejoicing at being well rid of a most accomplished villain" or the *wihtiko* that had possessed him.<sup>79</sup>

A year later, in 1880, Ontario's Stipendiary Magistrate, E.B. Borron, reported on two *wihtiko* cases in northern Ontario. One incident involved an Abitibi man alleged to have killed and eaten his wife and children fifteen or sixteen years previously. More recently, in the same

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Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1981), 124-135; Brightman, "Windigo in the Material World," 352-353; Haring, "Wendigo Killings," 94-95; Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 376-378.

<sup>76</sup> Adolpheus Hudson, "The Man Who Ate His Family," transcribed in Honigmann, "European and Other Tales," 328-329. Hudson was an English-speaking Cree man whom Honigmann met and befriended in 1943 while in Fort Nelson, BC. Honigmann notes that Hudson had learned this story from an "old blind man, a 'real Cree Indian' [in Hudson's words], whom he was looking after at the Anglican Mission in Grouard [where Hudson was from] about 1905."

<sup>77</sup> Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 376.

<sup>78</sup> Emphasis added. Swift Runner, transcribed and translated from Cree (and French), cited in *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> "Murderer and Cannibal," *Daily Globe*, January 14, 1880, 3. The depiction of the celebration in this account contrasts with the story told to and by Hudson, but there is no reason to conclude that responses were unanimous.

vicinity, “a wretched man, having exhibited some signs of insanity, was knocked on the head and thrust through a hole in the ice as being, in the opinion of his friends, the best mode of disposing of him.”<sup>80</sup> In January 1883, *The Daily Globe* of Toronto reported on a case of “Horrible Cannibalism by an Indian Chief,” according to which a chief from White Bear band had eaten his wife and six children, their supplies having failed.<sup>81</sup> None of these reports referred to the *wihtiko* or any subsequent prosecution.

The earliest *wihtiko* execution case to be tried in Canadian courts appears to have occurred in 1884, involving the killing of an old woman alleged to have turned *wihtiko* and cannibalized others. According to a single account of this incident, by Oblate missionary Emile Petitot, those deemed responsible for the killing were tried and hanged in Winnipeg.<sup>82</sup> It seems likely that Petitot confused the date and details of this case, which closely resemble an 1885 case that is reported in greater detail. This latter case involved three Cree men from Chief Big Bear’s starving and distressed band, during the 1885 Northwest Resistance. On April 13, two weeks after escalating tensions had led to the killing of nine Canadians at Frog Lake and the capture of forty-four others,<sup>83</sup> a Cree woman from Big Bear’s Cree band apparently announced that she would soon turn *wihtiko* unless she were killed. After getting some of the Euro-Canadian captives to carry her away from the camp, three Cree men, Charlebois, Dressy Man and Bright Eyes, decapitated the woman, threw away her head and buried her body. In the aftermath of the Resistance, these three men were tried at Battleford alongside more than 200 hundred others.

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<sup>80</sup> Borron, “Report,” 35.

<sup>81</sup> “Horrible Cannibalism by an Indian Chief,” *Daily Globe*, January 24, 1883, 2.

<sup>82</sup> “The Cree almost always kill the cannibals or Windigos. In 1884, they beat to death with an axe an old woman guilty of this crime. However, as these Indians live under British law, these judges were captured in turn and hanged at Winnipeg. There are no mitigating circumstances with our neighbors the British.” Émile Petitot, *Autour du Grand Lac des Esclaves* (Paris: Albert Savine, 1891), 334, translated and cited in Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 83-84.

<sup>83</sup> A. Blair Stonechild, “The Indian View of the 1885 Uprising,” in *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, ed. J.R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 286.

Bright Eyes was convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to twenty years in prison. The other two were convicted of murder and sentenced to hang, but their sentences were commuted to life in prison. As Harring points out this case received little attention in the midst of all the other rebellion trials.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the sentencing was critiqued by some, including the editors of *Le Manitoba*, who argued that the “desire for human flesh is a disease which sometimes comes upon Indians, and which is attributed to being possessed of a devil and ... [that] the Indians should not have been sentenced to death for killing such a one.”<sup>85</sup>

In 1887, Michel and Cecil Courtereille were tried in Edmonton for the murder of Marie Courtereille, near Lesser Slave Lake; she was the wife of Michel and the stepmother of Cecil. The *Edmonton Bulletin* reported on the case in detail. The sole witness testified that Marie, fearing she was about to “turn cannibal,” had asked to be killed. Her family initially refused: “We can’t kill you, we love you too much.” She became progressively more threatening, however, and at one point tried to attack her husband. “She was asked then if she wanted to leave the world and said she did.” Her husband and stepson then told her “that if she wished to die they would pray and pay for [masses to be said for] her when they came to the first church.” Then they killed her.<sup>86</sup> The prosecutor expressed disbelief in the existence of a Native “custom of doing away with lunatics,” and argued that this was merely a case of a husband getting rid of a troublesome wife.<sup>87</sup> The defence attorney countered that one witness was insufficient, and that

An ignorant savage should not be judged on the same grounds as a civilized white man. These men had acted according to their lights. There was nothing to show that they had acted unkindly or with wrong intentions towards the woman ... She had been the first to suggest her own death, but the prisoners had replied at once that they could not kill her for they loved

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<sup>84</sup> Harring, “Wendigo Killings,” 82-83. See also Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 88-89.

<sup>85</sup> Reported by *Edmonton Bulletin*, October 31, 1885, and cited in “Twenty-Four Years Ago,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, October 30, 1909, 3.

<sup>86</sup> “Supreme Court,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, October 22, 1887, 4. See also Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 379, and endnote 39.

<sup>87</sup> “Supreme Court,” *Edmonton Bulletin* (October 22, 1887), 4.

her. They had borne with her as long as it was possible, and they only did what they did when they and the whole camp were paralyzed with fear.<sup>88</sup>

The judge, the same who had heard the 1885 case, instructed the jury on key factors: “the gravity of the offence, the degree of civilization possessed by the prisoners, and the punishment to be inflicted.” In the 1885 trial, he explained, the accused had been found guilty and sentenced to death, but their sentence had been commuted. Yet three additional cases had occurred more recently, and “certainly such a practice should be checked.” The accused were found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to six years of hard labour.<sup>89</sup>

In another 1887 incident, Anglican missionaries at Fort Vermillion gave shelter to an alleged female *wihtiko* from Little Red River, on the Peace River. Anglican Bishop Richard Young later stated that the woman had resorted to violent cannibalism only once, at the end of a dire famine, and had shown up in the middle of winter in a half-starved, half-insane state. The local Cree and Metis claimed she had turned *wihtiko* several years previously, wilfully killing and cannibalizing at least twelve victims, many of them outside famine conditions.<sup>90</sup> “Indians and half-breeds ...” reported the *St. Paul Daily Globe*, “are asking why the government, which arrested and punished the Court d’Oreilles for killing such a one, does not take measures against this woman.”<sup>91</sup>

It is unlikely that nine years passed without further incident, but the next *wihtiko*-killing to come to attention of Canadian courts occurred in 1896, at Trout Lake, in present-day northern Alberta.<sup>92</sup> A year earlier, in 1895, a shaman in the neighbouring vicinity of Moose Lake had

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 362-363.

<sup>91</sup> “Cannibalism in Manitoba,” *St. Paul Daily Globe*, March 15, 1888, 4. According to Carlson, “there is no known account of this woman’s arrest, incarceration or trial,” “Reviving Witiko,” endnote 39.

<sup>92</sup> Carlson gives the most thorough account of this incident, which he first heard about from his late grandmother, Marie Anne Marguerite Carlson (née Beauchamp, 1921), who used to accompany her father, Edouard Beauchamp, when he worked at the HBC Trout Lake outpost from 1920 to 1930. It was there that Beauchamp

prophesied that those who did not follow him would be vulnerable to a *wihtiko* attack. Many were afraid, but Napanin, also known as Felix Auger, was apparently not among them. That same year, he asked a missionary about raising his children as Christians.<sup>93</sup> He did not live, however, to see it happen. On New Year's Day 1896, he and his family left Wapiska Lake to visit his father at Trout Lake. On the second night of the journey, Napanin became frightened by something he saw in the woods, and began to act strangely. On the last night, according to Holmes, Napanin

suddenly said to his wife 'See look at that!' 'It is coming to me!' He cowered under his blanket and from that moment was a lunatic. He told his wife that one of the children looked to him like a spring moose & he wanted to kill and eat it. The poor woman sat up all night not daring to lie down lest he should kill the children or her.<sup>94</sup>

After some difficulty, they finally reached Trout Lake the next day, where they encountered Francis Work Beatton, the Orcadian clerk of the HBC outpost. Beatton recorded in his journal that Napanin believed he had seen the devil and that "someone [had] put medicine on him, and that was the reason he was going to be a cannibal."<sup>95</sup>

Initially, the people of Trout Lake tried to cure Napanin, but as his condition worsened, they began to fear he was the *wihtiko* prophesied by the Moose Lake shaman. According to Beatton, Napanin pleaded for death:

He wants them to kill him all the time before he gets worse. ... I read a few prayers out of the prayer book. He seemed to be getting worse all the time. He does not look like a human being. He seems to be terribly swollen in the body and face. I do not know how this will end. The sight of him is enough to frighten any person. The poor Indians slept very little here for the last 19 days. Since he arrived they have been watching him all the time.<sup>96</sup>

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learned of a particular *wihtiko* killing. Carlson then uncovered newspaper reports and archival records for a major research project, which led to his article. *Ibid.*, 357-358.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 366-368.

<sup>94</sup> Holmes, cited in a letter by Bishop Richard Young, cited in Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 368.

<sup>95</sup> Beatton, cited in Carlson, "Reviving Witiko," 369.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

On January 21, Napanin was in worse condition, “calling like a wild bull.” After helping the men tie him down with rope, Beatton went to get more rope, but could not find any of sufficient strength. The lines were breaking when he returned, wrote Beatton: “The Indians asked me what we should do. They said that when he got up he would kill us all. I told them if they was to do anything to do it as I had no more lines to tie him with.”<sup>97</sup> They then struck Napanin with an axe on the head (it was believed that bullets were ineffective against a *wihtiko*), and his body was burned, buried, and covered with trees to prevent the *wihtiko*’s return. The locals remained “terror stricken” for some time afterwards, the *Manitoba Free Press* reported, “believing that he might re-appear and destroy them.”<sup>98</sup> Writing to the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, a local Anglican missionary reported that “at these times if anything unusual happened or a strange Indian was seen he might be shot.”<sup>99</sup> He suggested:

even a letter would be a good thing if it was put pretty strongly, telling the thing is untrue and warning them to be very careful ... It would give them a fright and prevent any more harm being done. As it is, they think they can do as they like, for even one of the free traders remarked that they could do as the liked, ... for he said, they are out of the reach of the law here.<sup>100</sup>

In 1896, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the North-West Territories forwarded this letter to Lieutenant Governor of the Territories and “recommended strongly” that action be taken “of a nature calculated to impress unmistakably upon the natives of the unceded territory the fact that they are amenable to the laws of the Dominion, any statements by interested persons to the contrary notwithstanding.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>98</sup> “A Wehtigo Murdered,” *Manitoba Morning Free Press*, April 20, 1896, 7. Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 358-359, 369.

<sup>99</sup> Rev. Charles B. Weaver, St. John’s Mission, Wapuskow, to Hayter Reed, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, August 11, 1896, LAC, RG10, vol. 3961, file 145,263.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Commissioner of Indian Affairs, North-West Territories, to Hayter Reed, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, September 8, 1896, LAC, RG10, vol. 3961, file 145,263.

In the meantime, several weeks after Napanin's killing, his brother Samuel had become disturbed by dreams of his deceased sibling. Driven out of the camp by relatives who feared he too might go *wihtiko*, he found shelter in an Anglican Mission.<sup>102</sup> To protect him, the NWMP brought Samuel to Stony Mountain Asylum in Manitoba where he soon recovered and was eventually sent home.<sup>103</sup> Although the NWMP intervened in Samuel's case they did not charge anyone for the killing of his brother.<sup>104</sup>

The nineteenth-century *wihtiko*-killing that received most attention – one of two such cases that appeared in official law reports<sup>105</sup> – occurred the same year as Felix Auger's execution. It involved Machekequonabe, an Anishinabe man from the Lake of the Woods district in northwestern Ontario. He and seven other men had taken up night-time sentry duty to protect the people of Sabascon Lake, who believed they were under the imminent threat from a *wihtiko*. In a moment of fear, Machekequonabe had accidentally shot his own father, one of the other sentries. Machekequonabe was then arrested, tried and convicted of manslaughter, and sentenced to six months in jail. The Department of Indian Affairs appealed, arguing the “common law defense of reasonable mistake of fact,” but in a very short ruling, the superior court upheld the original verdict.<sup>106</sup> Haring observes that many Euroamericans “defended Canadian jurisdiction over the criminal activity of Indians, [but] were troubled by the case's failure to take any

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<sup>102</sup> “The Hero Priests of the North,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, March 25, 2011, 8. George Holmes was also at St. John's Mission in Wabasca at this time and had helped take care of Samuel Auger before he was sent to the asylum.

<sup>103</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 364.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 369. The Commissioner of Indian Affairs for the North-West Territories noted in his letter to the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, of September 8, 1896, that he did not have any particulars of the crime other than “what was noticed in a paragraph regarding it in a recent issue of the ‘Edmonton Bulletin.’” LAC, RG10, vol. 3961, file 145,263.

<sup>105</sup> “Regina v Machekequonabe,” *The Ontario Reports*, vol. 28 (1896), 309-311. See also Schuh, “Justice,” 77; Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 79-81.

<sup>106</sup> Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 79-81. Robert Leikmd contrasts the treatment of the *wihtiko* belief in the Machekequonabe case with an accidental killing in England, of a man by his wife who mistook him for an intruder. Leikmd, “Regulating the Criminal Conduct of Morally Innocent Persons: The Problem of the Indigenous Defendant,” *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 6 (1986): 161-184, at 175-176. Glanville L. Williams points out, in contrast, that this case resembled other cases in England that involved beliefs seen as unconventional. Glanville L. Williams, “Homicide and the Supernatural,” *The Law Quarterly Review* 65 (October 1949): 491-492.

cognizance of the subjective fear held by an Ojibwa band of the wendigo.”<sup>107</sup> It was a point that would continue to trouble students of the law.<sup>108</sup>

Inaction was no easy alternative. An 1897 petition to Indian Affairs from the Chief and Council of Berens River Anishinabe band, shows that there were concerns among Algonquians themselves about the continuation of *wihtiko* executions. Thirty miles from Berens River, a man had killed his delirious wife who was suffering from typhoid fever. Although the nuances of this petition may reflect the fact that it was drafted and witnessed on their behalf by a Methodist missionary, there is no reason to dismiss the general intention:

It is well known that before the advent of the [rule of British] law it was the practice of the Indian to put to death any person who became crazy. We have reason to believe that the case in question is one of this kind, and should the Government fail to investigate it completely, we very much fear that many of the Indians will lose their respect and fear of the law, and the consequences may be serious.<sup>109</sup>

A.E. Forget, Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories consulted his superiors in Ottawa on the matter. Given that the Department of Indian Affairs was “particularly interested in repressing” the custom and was therefore urging an investigation into this case despite the “absence of direct evidence,” the Provincial Attorney-General was of the view that the Department should cover most or all of the proceedings’ associated costs.<sup>110</sup> In Forget’s view, the investigation was worth the expense: “too much stress can hardly be laid on the advantage to be gained by enforcing the law against a barbarous custom ... as it is in the interests of the Indians to have an end put to, is therefore a duty incumbent upon the

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<sup>107</sup> Harring, “Wendigo Killings,” 81.

<sup>108</sup> Andrew S. Watson cited this case alongside *Regina v. Dudley and Stephens* (the case of the *Mignonette*) as two examples that raised difficult questions among law students. Watson, “Reflections on the Teaching of Criminal Law,” *University of Detroit Law Journal* 37 (1959-1960): 705, 707, 708, 717.

<sup>109</sup> Petition from J. Berens and A. Gouin to W.J. Short (signed with marks by the petitioners and witnessed by J.A. McLachlan) to W.J. Short, Indian Agent, December 4, 1897, LAC, RG10, vol. 3984, file 164,851, cited in Schuh, “Justice,” 77-78.

<sup>110</sup> A.E. Forget, Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, to the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, December 15, 1897, LAC, RG10, vol. 3984, file 164,851, cited in Schuh, “Justice,” 78.

Department.”<sup>111</sup> Minister Sifton agreed.<sup>112</sup> Soon afterwards, the accused man was arrested and charged with murder.<sup>113</sup> Further information on the outcome of the case has yet to be uncovered,<sup>114</sup> but in 1898, another alleged *wihtiko*-killing was reported near Berens River. Once again, the police went to investigate, but this time returned without a prisoner on account of lack of evidence.<sup>115</sup>

In 1899, two men from Cat Lake were brought to Winnipeg to be tried for the murder of their chief, Ahwahsakehmig, who had ordered them to kill him lest he ‘turn’ *wihtiko*.<sup>116</sup> Given the discrepancy of names provided in the documentary record, it is not clear whether this is the same 1899 Cat Lake incident to which Scott refers in his 1913 report; if so, the case resulted in one man’s conviction for murder and a commuted sentence of four months in prison.<sup>117</sup> According to one report, special legislation was passed to try the case, given that the accused men were non-treaty Indians.<sup>118</sup>

This confirmed the Department’s intention to move towards greater intervention, though not with inflexible rigor. In November 1899, the Deputy Superintendent Smart requested a

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> Schuh, “Justice,” 78.

<sup>113</sup> “Superstition Causes Murder: An Indian, Thinking His Wife Would Become a Cannibal, Kills Her,” *Times* (Philadelphia), December 15, 1897, 12. The story originated with Indian Agent Short, and it was stated that “The Indian was taken into custody on a charge of murder.” “Twisted Her Neck: An Indian Kills His Wife in a Brutal Fashion,” *Ottawa Journal*, December 15, 1897, 2.

<sup>114</sup> Schuh notes that Indian Affairs records contain nothing further on the case, but other records may contain information. Schuh, “Justice,” 78.

<sup>115</sup> “Probably Not Murder: Chief Elliott Returns from his Trip to Investigate an Alleged Indian Murder,” *Winnipeg Tribune*, February 21, 1898, 1. According to this article, Police Chief Elliott had gone to investigate an alleged *wihtiko* killing 30 miles from Berens River and had returned without a prisoner because evidence was lacking.

<sup>116</sup> “Killed a Wendigo: Two Cat Lake Indians to be Tried in Winnipeg for Murdering Their Chief,” *Moose Jaw Herald Times*, November 3, 1899, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Scott to Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659. A man named Choos-e-naun “was tried for the murder of another Indian named Unbahsh who was turning Wendigo.” Convicted of manslaughter, Choos-e-naun was sentenced to four months in prison.

<sup>118</sup> “Killed a Wendigo,” *Moose Jaw Herald Times*, November 3, 1899, 2.

commuted sentence for Paul Sabourin, a convicted murderer deemed insane, and possibly a disguised *wihtiko* executioner:

I submit for your consideration the impossibility of judging only by the white man's methods, the conduct of a savage governed by superstitions and whose habits are entirely opposed to those of civilization ... the enforcement of the extreme penalty might create an impression, amongst the Indians with whom the accused is connected, that contact with civilization imperiled their existence. Such an impression would defeat the object ... [of] gradually ... inculcate[ing] in them habits of thought similar to those of the white population in this country.<sup>119</sup>

With such objectives in mind, however, the Department continued to insist that *wihtiko* executions be investigated and prosecuted. In 1906, it was reported that Tushwegeh, an Anishinabe man, had strangled his brother-in-law Geeshingoose, at their Cat Lake camp. As Haring observes, there is little doubt it was a *wihtiko* killing. When a preliminary investigation returned little evidence, provincial Justice officials wanted to drop the case, but Indian Affairs insisted it be pursued “even though prospects of seeing conviction are extremely weak, as it is necessary that the Indians should understand they are within reach of the strong arm of the law.”<sup>120</sup> Tushwegeh was arrested in November 1905 and brought to trial the following summer. Insufficient evidence led to an acquittal, but he had served time in the interim. As Haring observes, “the symbolic reach of the law was the object, showing Native people that they must defer to Canadian power, and that was more important than convictions and prison sentences.”<sup>121</sup> These assertions of legal authority, however, were not mere acts of imperialism.

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<sup>119</sup> James Smart, deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, to the Minister of Justice, November 15, 1899, LAC, RG10, BS, file 90, 194, cited in Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 93. Haring suggests that this case, dating from 1899, may have been a *wihtiko*-killing case, but that is not clear. His conjecture is based on the fact that the killing was not explained – the accused man stated he was out of his mind – and evidence that witnesses in *wihtiko*-killing cases often distorted what happened in order to protect themselves. In this case, however, Paul Sabourin was a Slave Indian from the Northwest Territories, not an Algonquian or in contact with Algonquian people, who had the *wihtiko* tradition.

<sup>120</sup> Deputy Minister of Justice to Deputy Attorney General of Ontario, March 15, 1906, AO (Archives of Ontario), RG3, file 181, cited in Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 82.

<sup>121</sup> Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 85.

In 1907, the Department learned for the first time of at least three other cases that had occurred in the 1880s, as well as one in 1902 or 1903, and in 1906, respectively.<sup>122</sup> This information came to light during the examination of witnesses in the trial of Joseph Fiddler for a 1906 *wihtiko* execution. In covering this trial, newspapers also reported on at least two other *wihtiko* incidents that occurred in 1876 near Lake Winnipeg, in 1888 near Edmonton, and in 1892 at Lesser Slave Lake.<sup>123</sup> The Fiddler trial, held in 1907, involved the most important, controversial and documented *wihtiko* case that Scott omitted from his 1913 report.<sup>124</sup>

#### **1907 FIDDLER CASE: *WIHTIKO* TRIAL THAT RESONATED ACROSS CENTURY & OCEAN**

In 1907, *The Times* of London published the following account from its Canadian correspondent:

The chief and medicine-man of a band of Crees are now under arrest at Norway-house, the old Hudson's Bay post at the north end of Lake Winnipeg. Under the law of the land they are charged with murder. Under their tribal law their offence, which they quite frankly admit, was a public duty. A woman ... went out of her mind. These Indians retain, it seems, the old idea that delirium indicates demonical possession. ... To avert this public calamity and save their tribe, the chief and medicine-man were chosen to strangle the woman ... The two men consented, performed their task, ... [and] are now to be tried under white man's law, for their lives. It is perhaps neither desirable nor likely that they will be hanged.<sup>125</sup>

Despite its headline – “Treatment of Lunacy by Murder” – *The Times* showed more sympathy for these shamans and their defence than it had shown in 1884 for the English crew of the

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<sup>122</sup> The first incident involved the killing of an alleged *wihtiko* named Ahkamekaseecowiniew, by members of the Crane tribe, in the 1880s, near Red Deer Lake. The second incident was the killing of David Meekis in 1902-03. The third incident involved the killing of Menewascum, a Crane tribe member, in 1906, at Sandy Lake. See Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 63-66, 74-75.

<sup>123</sup> “Treatment of Lunacy by Murder,” *Times* (London), October 28, 1907, 14. This article mentions three cases: an incident from 1876, near lake Winnipeg, where three sons killed their delirious mother; in incident from 1888, near Edmonton, referred to by Carlson (“Reviving Witiko,” 362), and another at Lesser Slave Lake in 1892.

<sup>124</sup> Schuh and Haring both identify this case as the most publicized of Canadian *wihtiko* cases. Schuh, “Justice,” 79-80; Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 85.

<sup>125</sup> “Treatment of Lunacy by Murder,” *Times* (London), August 21, 1907, 2. (There were two articles published in the *Times*, both with the same title.)

*Mignonette* and their defence.<sup>126</sup> A follow-up article under the same headline recorded the argument of the defence:

the religious belief of the Cree is that a delirious person is possessed by a devil, and, if allowed to live, becomes a raving maniac and cannibal. For the safety of the tribe, therefore, the victim of we-te-go must be put to death; and the executioner is no more criminal than the hangman who carries out the sentence of a white Court.<sup>127</sup>

Although close geo-cultural neighbours to the western Hudson and James Bay Cree, the two men accused of murder were, in fact, Anishinabe brothers, leaders and shamans from the Sucker clan of the upper Severn River watershed. Their Anishinabe names were Miscenawenineew and Pesequan, but they were also known as Jack and Joseph Fiddler.<sup>128</sup>

This case is significant not only because it received international media coverage or was well documented. As Harring points out, it was the first time – outside the context of the 1885 Metis Rebellion – that Canadian officers of the Crown sought and delivered a harsh sentence for the killing of an alleged *wihtiko*. It may be for this reason that Scott excluded it from his report – hoping, despite the media coverage it had received, that it might remain unknown to the King. Or perhaps, as Harring suggests, it was an embarrassment that such practices were not yet suppressed.<sup>129</sup>

In 1971, James Stevens, an independent scholar and writer, visited Sandy Lake, in northwestern Ontario, where he met with Chief Thomas Fiddler, grandson of Miscenawenineew. Soon afterwards, they began a co-investigation of the 1907 arrest and trial of Chief Fiddler's great uncle and grandfather. Fiddler and Stevens wanted to show how the repercussions of this

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<sup>126</sup> Cited in Hanson, *Custom of the Sea*, 281. See the first section of this chapter.

<sup>127</sup> "Treatment of Lunacy by Murder," *The Times* (London), October 28, 1907, p. 14.

<sup>128</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 37 & 88. Other sources spell their names as Maisaninnine and Pesequan. Patrick Laflèche, "Case Study," 15-16. The historical records refer to them sometimes as "Cree" or "Saultaux," but they were Anishinabe who had moved northward among the Cree. They are sometimes referred to as Oji-Cree. Note that some secondary sources the name Pesequan is often erroneously attributed to Jack Fiddler instead of Joseph Fiddler.

<sup>129</sup> Harring, "Wendigo Killings," 90.

trial had echoed over the century for the Sucker clan. They also sought to demonstrate the true qualities of Miscenawenineu, maligned by some as a “banal and devilish person,” and the many appeals for Pesequan’s pardon. The results of this investigation, which drew on oral tradition and documentary records, were published in 1985.<sup>130</sup> More recent studies have criticized this trial as an example of the “legal penetration of Canadian law into the spirit world of the Ojibwa and Cree” and the “suppression” of “Anishinabe medicine.”<sup>131</sup> This present re-examination of the 1907 arrest and trial of the Fiddlers confirms the merits of such critical scrutiny, but it also suggests that quests for understanding and moral competence were a more significant part of these *wihtiko* trials than some have recognized, just as they were a more significant factor in the original *wihtiko* execution itself.

As noted already, the *wihtiko*-killing for which the Fiddlers were tried occurred in the summer of 1906. Pesequan’s daughter-in-law, Wahsakapeequay, had fallen ill and her condition only worsened. Her husband and family members restrained her only with great difficulty as she succumbed to successive bouts of agitated delirium. Finally, her mother, fearing Wahsakapeequay was going *wihtiko*, requested that she be killed before it was too late.<sup>132</sup> Miscenawenineu and Pesequan carefully prepared and carried out this request. It was not their first *wihtiko* execution. Miscenawenineu, the elder brother (about 70 years old at this time), was well known as a powerful *wihtiko*-killer, having been trained by their father in Anishinabe customary law and medicine.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, vii-viii. See also: M.T. Kelly, “Justice and a tale of sorrow,” a review of *Killing the Shamen*, by Fiddler and Stevens, *Globe and Mail*, August 9, 1986, D18.

<sup>131</sup> Haring, “Wendigo Killings”; Laflèche, “Anishinabe Medicine.”

<sup>132</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 79. Laflèche, “Anishinabe Medicine,” 16-17; Commissioner Perry to the Minister of Justice, October 30, 1907, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 2.

<sup>133</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 50-53, 70-71; Laflèche, “Anishinabe Medicine,” 16.

Such *wihtiko* incidents were talked about among the people, including local fur traders like William Campbell at Island Lake. Stopping in at Norway House on route from Winnipeg back to Island Lake in the summer of 1906, Campbell had an informal story-telling session with RNWMP Sergeant Daisy Smith, in which he revealed that he had heard of *wihtiko*-killings among the Sucker clan some seven years earlier. Smith reported this conversation to his superiors, noting that the band was believed to have frequently killed those who became delirious “through superstitious belief not through malice,” but that the only case he had any proof of had transpired seven years earlier.<sup>134</sup> Due to his absence that summer, Campbell had not yet heard about the Wahsakapeequay’s killing. According to Sergeant Smith, however, Campbell later informed him that Wahsakapeequay “had pleaded with these men [the Fiddlers] to spare her life.” Other evidence, however, suggests the contrary.<sup>135</sup>

In the meantime, Smith was ordered to arrange an investigation, which he did. By April, constables J.A.W. O’Neill and William J. Cashman reached the Clan’s territory. Meeting Miscenaweninew’s sons at Narrows Lake, O’Neill arranged for a council, and it was agreed that the Sucker clan would come for June 1, or as soon as the ice melted. But it was a cold spring and some waterways remained partially frozen well into June. Members of the Crane clan were the first to arrive at Narrows Lake. Questioned by O’Neill, one of them, named Norman Rae, revealed the recent *wihtiko*-killing. When only some of the Sucker clan arrived the next day, the RNWMP constables decided to follow them back to their camp rather than wait. There, they found Miscenaweninew and others working on birch-bark canoes; Pesequan was away from the

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<sup>134</sup> Cited in Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 85-86. See also: Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 71. Note that the North West Mounted Police had become the Royal North West Mounted Police in 1904.

<sup>135</sup> This is what Smith reported in a letter to the Commanding Officer, RNWMP, Regina, July 8, 1907, LAC, RG10, vol. 347, file 42. If this allegation were true, Campbell could only have learned it from others. As detailed below, Campbell later signed a petition in support of Pesequan.

camp.<sup>136</sup> As O'Neill later reported, they were welcomed with hospitality: "Men, women and children came to shake hand with us." Some of the people had never seen a white person before, and they had no idea that these men were intent on imposing not merely a very different rule of law.<sup>137</sup>

When Pesequan returned to the camp, on June 15, O'Neill and Cashman called the two Fiddler brothers into their tent. O'Neill recorded the events as follows:

Called Jack Fiddler and Joseph Fiddler into our tent and explained to them the crime they had committed, and that they must come with us to Norway House. Warned them not to speak to anyone about the murder, not even to us, until questioned at Norway House.<sup>138</sup>

According to Godsell, Miscenawenineu allegedly responded:

What has your Great Father to do with the Sucker people? This is the country of the Anishinapek who do as they please in their own hunting grounds. The soldiers wish to take me away and put us in their stone house but I have twenty young men who do not wish that I should go ... What is to stop them killing you?<sup>139</sup>

Cashman allegedly replied that this would only bring many other soldiers.<sup>140</sup>

Although there was no treaty relationship between the Crown and the people of the upper Severn River, Miscenawenineu and Pesequan agreed to leave in order to avoid repercussions for their people. Before they left, a council was held at Sandy Lake, at which all the Sucker clan men were present. Here O'Neill explained, through an HBC interpreter, James Kirkness, that Miscenawenineu and Pesequan were being brought to Norway House. The others were distressed to learn this, especially the newly elected chief, Robert Fiddler, who asked that his father, Miscenawenineu, be taken care of, as he was already old. O'Neill promised that he would

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<sup>136</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 72-75.

<sup>137</sup> O'Neill, cited in *ibid.*, 74. See also: Schuh, "Justice," 74.

<sup>138</sup> O'Neill, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 75.

<sup>139</sup> Philip H. Godsell, *The Arctic Trader* (Toronto: 1943), 83, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 75. Godsell's account is somewhat suspect. See Godsell's "Overcoming Competition: the Story of the Home-made Weetigo," *The Beaver* 1, no. 11-12 (August-September 1921), 5-7. He refers to the fear evoked by the *wihtiko* in 1907 in interior of the Hudson Bay lowlands, and his manipulation of it for his own interests.

<sup>140</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 75.

forward their request for treaty to Ottawa. The two Mounties then left for Norway House with James Kirkness, the Fiddler brothers, and two others who had witnessed the *wihtiko*-killing: Norman Rae and Angus Rae, sons-in-law, respectively, to Pesequan and Miscenaweninew.<sup>141</sup>

At a preliminary hearing in Norway House, Miscenaweninew asked Inspector Pelletier “not to punish ... [him] too hard because [he] ... did not know [he] ... was doing wrong and that if [he] ... had known [he] ... would not have done the deed.”<sup>142</sup> The suggestion that he had acted with ill intent evidently troubled him greatly. “There would appear to be no doubt,” wrote Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White on July 30, “that, whilst the murder was a most brutal one, it was apparently in accordance with the customs and superstitions of the Indians.”<sup>143</sup> One morning, two months later, the prisoners went down to the river to cook their breakfast under the watch of Constable Arthur Wilkins. Miscenaweninew quietly slipped into the woods and hung himself.<sup>144</sup>

By this time, news of the pending trial had circulated across the continent and the Atlantic. Dropping the charges of murder against Pesequan would not be without consequence. Within a week of Miscenaweninew’s suicide, the HBC council chamber was transformed into a temporary courthouse. The court had come north to impress upon the people the power and authority of the law.<sup>145</sup> The *Manitoba Free Press* reporter who attended the one-day trial on October 7, 1907 described it as having the “pomp and circumstance of a military tribunal combined with the powers of a civil court.”<sup>146</sup> Commissioner Aylesworth Bowen Perry transitioned from decision-maker in the original investigation, arrest and indictment, to the role

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-78.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>143</sup> Fred White, RNWMP Comptroller, Ottawa, to the Deputy Minister of Justice, Ottawa, July 30, 1907, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

<sup>144</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 78-82. Wilkins was later charged with negligence. W.H. Routledge, RNWMP Superintendent, Norway House, to Commissioner Perry, RNWMP, October 1, 1907, in LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

<sup>145</sup> Harring, “Wendigo Killings,” 87; Schuh, “Justice,” 74.

<sup>146</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 87.

of stipendiary magistrate, or judge. Constable Daisy O'Neill acted as court clerk, with other officers assisting in other court functions. Prominent Liberal and Winnipeg lawyer D.W. McKerchar acted as prosecutor. Despite being asked to provide counsel for the accused, Indian Affairs only sent C. Crompton Calverly as an "observer." Pesequan was unrepresented – despite an intervention by Calverly – and had to rely on James Kirkness for a translation of the culturally and linguistically foreign proceedings. Six jurors, mostly traders, were drawn from the small local population, with Charles Wilkins as jury foreman.<sup>147</sup>

Constable Cashman was the first witness to take the stand. He testified about the arrest as well as the social and legal isolation of the Sucker Clan. Norman Rae, who had held down the delirious Wahsakappequay while the Fiddlers had strangled her with a cord, confirmed the killing, stating it was consistent with traditional law. He also confirmed that he knew nothing of 'white' law before this.<sup>148</sup> The most significant testimony was given next by Angus Rae. He confirmed Norman's testimony about the killing and their ignorance of 'white' law, but under examination he also revealed earlier *wihtiko* killings. He also clarified that the custom was grounded in the belief and fear that a delirious person, if not killed, would go *wihtiko*. He also stated, on further questioning, that something bad would have happened to him had he not obeyed the shamans, but did not specify what.<sup>149</sup> The last to testify was Reverend Edward Paupanakiss, a Norway House Cree. A former HBC employee, he had been a Methodist missionary for the last 26 years, 18 of them as an ordained minister. As a missionary, his contact with the Fiddler brothers and their clan had been limited. He had only met Miscenawenineu

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<sup>147</sup> Harring, "Wendigo Killings," 87. Harring points out that the "trial process was incestuous," but, as Lou Marano's reading of them suggests, it could be no different in the context of traditional Algonquian *wihtiko* trials. Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 385. Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 87.

<sup>148</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 88-91.

<sup>149</sup> "His Majesty the King vs. Joseph Fiddler," court transcript, 20-45, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1. This is transcribed in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 91-103.

three times, and not in the last decade. They had discussed religion, but not *wihtiko* beliefs or practices. What Paupanakiss knew about both came from his own people. After a supper break, Pesequan declined an invitation to offer a defense, but asked that someone speak on his behalf. Calverley defended Pesequan's actions on the grounds that they had been consistent with tribal custom. The prosecutor, as expected, argued for a conviction.<sup>150</sup>

Commissioner Perry then addressed the jury. He began by pointing out that the "Counsel for the Crown has been hampered in his dealing with this case because of his desire to treat the accused fairly ... [and] represent the prisoner's side." He also acknowledged Calverley's "very eloquent" explanation of the "condition of "the Red man and of his superstitions [sic] and fears." He then reviewed the facts of the case and instructed the jury if the evidence showed the accused had killed with an intent to do so, that they were obliged to find him guilty of murder, unless the accused could offer an explanation that might allow them to "reduce the crime to justifiable homicide or manslaughter." Three verdicts were possible: "Guilty, Not Guilty, or Guilty of Manslaughter."<sup>151</sup> Perry also argued against a "customary law" defense:

To my mind the evidence is not clear on the customs of the Sucker Tribe. ... Paupanakiss was unable to give us any evidence ... about the treatment of the insane and the hopelessly sick [or] ... the actual belief of Joseph, the prisoner, and Jack. ... The only thing we have is the evidence of Angus Rae ... that the accused told him that if the woman was not killed she would become a cannibal and therefore a menace to the band.

If you believe that you will have to accept it all, you will then believe that this accused man was in the belief that if this delirious woman was not put out of her misery she would become a menace to the tribe by becoming a cannibal?

Does pagan belief justify murder? You have to answer that. You cannot find anything but that Joseph Fiddler killed this woman.

Was he justified in killing her because she might have turned into a cannibal? This might possibly be urged as a defense. ... [but] if you find that the accused is justified in killing

<sup>150</sup> Haring, "Wendigo Killings," 87-88. Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 103-106.

<sup>151</sup> Perry, in "His Majesty the King vs. Joseph Fiddler," court transcript, 49-53, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1. See also Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 106-109; Haring, "Wendigo Killings," 89-90.

because of his pagan belief, where will it land us if we accept such a belief? What the law forbids no pagan belief can justify. The law says: “Thou shalt not kill.” ...

However, you have a perfect right in spite of what I say, if you think that pagan belief would justify him, to say so, but consider first what the result would be. For as to his ignorance of the law that is a matter for executive clemency.<sup>152</sup>

After retiring to deliberate, the jury soon returned to the court to request clarification on the definitions of manslaughter and self-defence, which Perry provided. On further questioning Perry also confirmed that only three verdicts were possible, but clarified that a recommendation could be added to any of them. When requests for further questioning of the prisoner were denied, the jury foreman responded: “Then the jury cannot come to any decision.”<sup>153</sup> On Perry’s insistence, however, the jurors retired again and returned with a “Verdict of guilty, with a strong recommendation for mercy, on account of the prisoner’s ignorance and superstition.” Thanking the jury for their “careful consideration” of “a very difficult case,” Perry stated: “I shall take great pleasure in forwarding your recommendation to the proper authorities.” Before formally pronouncing sentence, Perry informed Pesequan of the verdict, recommendation and asked if he had “anything to say why the sentence of the Court should not be passed upon you according to law.”<sup>154</sup> Pesequan stood up and addressed the court, with James Kirkness translating: “I did not know better. I was angry. I was in hopes I would be let off without being punished. I do not want my life to be taken away until my death comes. I wish that God had blest me. I have no wish to say any more.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Perry, in “His Majesty the King vs. Joseph Fiddler,” court transcript, 50-53, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-56.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

Perry then formally delivered the sentence, speaking directly to Pesequan. Like the judges who delivered sentence in the 1884 case of the *Mignonette*,<sup>156</sup> Perry stated the ruling of the law and its consequences. On the other hand, he did not offer as much hope of mercy or acknowledge to the same degree the exceptional circumstances.<sup>157</sup>

The law does not permit me to exhibit any mercy toward you. ... It rests with the Governor-general-in-council, representing the Great Father, the King, to extend toward you mercy. He alone can pardon you in this world. I can hold out no hope that a pardon will be extended to you.

You have been found guilty of the murder of Mrs. Thomas Fiddler by a jury of six men who have given you a fair and impartial hearing.

The evidence which has been given before the Court disclosed that this is not the only case in which human beings have been done to death by yourself and other members of the Sucker band.

The law says that this must not be. The object of punishing you is not to revenge a death so much as it is to be a warning to the other members of your tribe that human life is sacred and cannot be taken.

The sentence of the Court is upon you ... that you be taken ... and ... hanged by the neck until you are dead: and may God Almighty have mercy on your soul.<sup>158</sup>

In forwarding the proceedings to headquarters some nine days later, Perry pointed out that other similar killings had come to light. Two HBC chief factors had also informed him “that the same disposal was made of the insane and the sick people, as far East as Moose Factory on James Bay.”<sup>159</sup> It was crucial, his view, that the conviction serve to prevent further killings of

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<sup>156</sup> See the first section of this chapter.

<sup>157</sup> In the *Mignonette* case, the sentencing judge omitted the normal protocol of putting on the black cap for sentencing and told the accused: “You have been convicted of the crime of wilful murder, though you have been recommended by the jury most earnestly to the mercy of the Crown; a recommendation in which, as I understand, my learned brother who tried you concurs, and in which we all unanimously concur. It is my duty, however, as the organ of the Court, to pronounce on you the sentence of the law ... that ... you be ... hanged by the neck until you be dead.” Cited in Simpson, *Cannibalism*, 239.

<sup>158</sup> Perry, in “His Majesty the King vs. Joseph Fiddler,” court transcript, 57-58, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

<sup>159</sup> Commissioner Perry to Lieutenant Colonel Fred White, RNWMP Comptroller, Ottawa, October 16, 1907, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

this nature. Later, in his annual report, Perry called for increased funding to establish more posts in the Keewatin district in order to help eradicate this custom “in the interests of humanity.”<sup>160</sup>

Nevertheless, two weeks after the trial, in a letter to the Minister of Justice, Perry firmly advocated for the jury’s recommendation of mercy, though he “recognize[d] that these inhumane practices must be put down with a strong hand.” Pesequan’s sentence was quickly commuted to life imprisonment and the Department of Justice soon confirmed that it would not authorize proceedings against Angus Rae and others who had been implicated in this or earlier *wihtiko* killings.<sup>161</sup> In recommending clemency to the Minister of Justice, Perry also revealed his honest assessment of Anishinabe customary law:

The accused knew it was wrong to take life under ordinary circumstances. He believed, however, that insane persons were dangerous to the well being of his tribe and that unless they were strangled they would turn into cannibals. ... *It is clear that it has been the custom of the tribe from time immemorial to put to death members of their band, and other bands, who were thought by them to be insane or incurable.*<sup>162</sup>

As Haring, Fiddler and Stevens have pointed out, Perry misled the jurors in order to secure a prosecution. This contrasted sharply with the *Mignonette* case, where the judges acknowledged the existence of a ‘custom of the sea,’ even if they ruled against it.<sup>163</sup>

Perry did not only mislead the jury. The trial outcome lent support to malignment of the Fiddlers and their clan in newspapers. They were singled out as “hated and feared for hundred of miles” by other Indians who had a “repugnance to ... [a] custom” that was “confine[d] ... to one or two tribes and even to one or two people in a tribe.”<sup>164</sup> The *Montreal Gazette* published an

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<sup>160</sup> RNWMP *Annual Report* for 1907, in Sessional Papers, vol. XLII, no. 14, cited in Schuh, “Justice,” 77.

<sup>161</sup> P. Pelletier, Acting Under-Secretary of State to the RNWMP Commanding Officer, Norway House, November 28, 1907, and Deputy Minister of Justice to RNWMP Comptroller, December 23, 1907, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 2.

<sup>162</sup> Emphasis added. Commissioner Perry to the Minister of Justice, Ottawa, October 30, 1907, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

<sup>163</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 109; Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 90-91.

<sup>164</sup> “Cree Chiefs on Trial for Murder ... The Rite of We-te-go; Horrible Cruelties – Twenty Similar Crimes in 25 Years by Same Chief,” *Manitoba Free Press*, August 7, 1907.

article entitled “Dread Rites of Devil Worship among the Fiddler Indians in Keewatin,” which suggested the killings were part of a “horrible cult of fratricide” aimed at appeasing a demonic spirit:

A wild orgy lasting all the next day was all that was needed to complete the revolting ceremony of the We-te-go. ... the police [desire] to make this an example for stamping out the centuries-old practice of we-te-go, and the ... punishment meted out ... will have a salutary effect upon the bloodthirsty members of the tribes.<sup>165</sup>

References to devil worship, barbarian customs, and bloodthirsty cruelty were echoed in stories carried by other papers, in Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, New York, Chicago, and Washington.<sup>166</sup> The Toronto *Globe* suggested that the “superstition that the victims were possessed of evil spirits was not played up very strongly by the Indians giving evidence,” that the “principal object ... was to get rid of sick and useless friends, and ... that the executioners were paid for the job by the interested parties.”<sup>167</sup>

These views contrast sharply with British officer T.R. Preston’s 1840 account, some 70 years prior to the Fiddler trial, of a similar *wihtiko* killing:

Whatever may be thought of the resolution of the Council to deprive the poor Indian of his life, it must be conceded that there is something extremely touching in the circumstance of the victim’s most intimate friend being selected to perform the deed, as though he were acquitting himself of an act of brotherly kindness; but more touching still, is the contemplation of the mode of propitiation (a common Indian custom, I believe,) practised towards the deceased’s father, as well by the individual whose hand had deprived him of a

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<sup>165</sup> “Dread Rites of Devil Worship among the Fiddler Indians in Keewatin,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 8, 1907.

<sup>166</sup> “Cree Chiefs on Trial for Murder ... The Rite of We-te-go; Horrible Cruelties – Twenty Similar Crimes in 25 Years by Same Chief,” *Manitoba Free Press*, August 7, 1907; “Devil Worship among the Crees,” *Edmonton Journal*, August 27, 1907; “To Stop Devil Worship: British Law Executes Indian Medicine Man in Wilds of Canada,” *Washington Post*, October 20, 1907, E16 (this was based on a story printed by the *New York Times*); “Atrocious Murders by some Salteaux Indians,” *Ottawa Evening Journal*, October 16, 1907; “Crimes of Most Revolting Nature Committed by Keewatin Indians; Chief’s Brother Sentenced to Hang,” *Ottawa Free Press*, October 16, 1907; “Indian is Doomed to Die for Murder of a Squaw,” *Daily Mail and Empire* (Toronto), October 16, 1907; “Indians Murder Through Ignorance,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1907, B3; “Woman Victim of Tribal Custom,” *Vancouver Daily World* August 2, 1907, 1; “Was Choked to Death to Preserve the Game,” *Ottawa Journal*, August 1, 1907, 1. Other headlines, cited by Fiddler and Stevens, include: “Barbarian Custom Among Indians,” “Strangler Chief,” “Devilish Indian Cruelty,” “Woman Victim of Tribal Custom,” and “Chief and Medicine Men Choked Out the Evil Spirit.” Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, vii.

<sup>167</sup> “Dark Deeds of Keewatin Indians: They Strangle and Burn Sick Friends,” *Globe* (Toronto), October 16, 1907.

son, as by the tribe at large, whose council by their mandate had invested that hand with a sort of legal authority.<sup>168</sup>

The opinions expressed in newspapers in 1907 also contrasted strongly with those expressed in public by people who knew the Fiddlers or other Algonquians well, and were quick to defend the intentions of *wihtiko* killers in this case no less than earlier ones. At the 1899 trial of Nepisopus and Payiu, for example, Bishop Vital Grandin, of Saint-Albert, “gave evidence for the defence to the effect that the Indians were fully convinced that Moostoos had become possessed with an evil spirit which would lead him to kill and eat their children.”<sup>169</sup> Similar views were expressed from the very beginning of the process with regard to Miscenawenineu and Pesequan. When the two Sucker Clan leaders arrived in Norway House in 1907, for example, Inspector E.A. Pelletier conducted a preliminary hearing and reported as follows to the Commissioner in Regina:

I feel sure that like all the Natives about here, they are obedient and only too ready to obey the White man's Laws. As it is these people know none of our laws. They have never been taught any, as no white man ever went in that Country, that is for the last century or thereabouts.<sup>170</sup>

In late July, Lieutenant-Colonel Fred White expressed the view that this was “a case for leniency, with a warning not to do it again.”<sup>171</sup> Similarly, RNWMP Superintendent C.E. Saunders “strongly” recommended in late August:

that if possible the prosecution be dropped, the Indians be given a talking to by some Officer of the Force and sent back to their homes ... they are most anxious to comply with any instructions they may get, and it is not at all likely that a repetition of their custom of disposing of insane people will occur.

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<sup>168</sup> T.R. Preston, *Three Years' Residence in Canada, from 1837 to 1839* (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), vol. 2: 236-237.

<sup>169</sup> D.C. Scott to W.H. Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659. See also “Canadian Indian Cannibals,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 14, 1899, 50. This article cited missionary testimony in support of the defense position, which was that “They [the Indians] consider it a solemn duty as well as a simple set act of self-preservation to kill at sight, if possible by a stealthy blow from behind, any one known to have practiced anthropophagy.”

<sup>170</sup> LAC, RG18, vol. 1044, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 78.

<sup>171</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Fred White, RNWMP Comptroller, Ottawa, to J.D. McLean, Secretary, Dept. of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, July 30, 1907, LAC, RG 18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

I had a talk with Kirkness, the interpreter, and the witnesses and they quite understand that this custom cannot continue, but as something had to be done, and they have no means whatever of looking after lunatics the tribe had always been in the habit of killing them off. Now they will endeavour to bring them to the Police and have them cared for.<sup>172</sup>

Sergeant Daisy B. Smith was also of like mind.<sup>173</sup>

RNWMP officers were not alone in urging mercy. Papanakiss had regularly visited the Fiddlers with another missionary, J.A. Lousely, who wrote of Miscenawenineu:

He has not the slightest sign of enmity or hatred towards men nor God, no rebellion or unbelief, he is a quiet dignified man who has lived his life with a clear conscience, doing nothing because of which Kitche Manitou will bar his existence to the Happy Hunting Ground.<sup>174</sup>

Fur traders J.K. McDonald and L.R. McKay wrote letters to the editor to defend the Fiddlers in August and October, 1907.<sup>175</sup> As former Chief Factor at Norway House McDonald knew Miscenawenineu and his personal qualities well and had been greatly helped by him in difficult times.<sup>176</sup> He offered one of the most incisive and sympathetic defences of *wihtiko* killings:

A moment's reflection will, I think, show anyone the position, the trying position, of those living in an Indian tent where an insane or delirious person is. There is a fire in the centre; kettles of boiling water hanging over it; young children and helpless infants lying around – this particularly is a night picture. In the tent there is no place to lie down for such a one. The Indian as a rule has to hunt for his daily food for himself and family and often for aged friends and weaklings. When an unfortunate member of the band is stricken as above, the hunter dare not leave to procure food. ... Under such circumstances what is to be done? ... Again be it remembered for the good of the many, they are hundreds of miles away from doctors and asylums. Again what is to be done?<sup>177</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Superintendent, Regina District, RNWMP, to Assistant Commissioner, RNWMP, Regina, August 26, 1907, LAC, RG 18, vol. 347, file 42, part 1.

<sup>173</sup> Saunders to the Assistant Commissioner, Regina, August 20, 1907, LAC, RG 18, vol. 347, file 42, part 2. Sergeant Daisy B. Smith to the Commanding Officer, Regina, September 17, 1907, LAC, RG 18, vol. 347, file 42, part 2.

<sup>174</sup> J.A. Lousely, "Memoirs of Fourteen of Norway House, Manitoba 1907-1917," unpublished manuscript, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 81.

<sup>175</sup> J.K. McDonald, "Defends Indian Custom," letter to the editor, *Manitoba Free Press*, October 16, 1907; L.R. McKay, "In Defense of Indian Custom," letter to the editor, *Manitoba Free Press*, August 31, 1907; cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 79-80.

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Fiddler and James R. Stevens, *Killing the Shamen* (Moonbeam, Ontario: Penumbra Press, 1985), 56-57.

<sup>177</sup> J.K. McDonald, "Defends Indian Custom," letter to the editor, *Manitoba Free Press*, October 16, 1907, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 79-80.

As Pesequan languished in prison after the trial, McDonald petitioned for his full pardon. Joining him in this petition were others from Norway House, including fellow HBC traders, Donald C. McTavish, A.A. Sinclair, E.J. Bivington, Donald Flett, John Taylor, and William Campbell; jurors James Begg, James Garson, Henry T. Wright; Indian Agent Crompton Calverly; Methodist missionaries Edward Paupanakiss, Thomas Ferrier and Alex Cunning; and Donald A. McIvor, a private trader. The actions of the Fiddler brothers, they argued, were

the very opposite of what we call murder being undertaken sometimes at the earnest solicitations of one who has been delirious and regained consciousness for a time, when they would beg, even implore relatives to kill them, if they should relapse rather than leave them to run and risk of turning a wretched creature and a terror to men, never allowed to enter the Happy Hunting Ground. That condition is the hell of those Indians.<sup>178</sup>

Despite a warning that Pesequan's health was poor and he had little chance of living through another winter, Perry recommended that this petition be "favourably consider[ed] ... but not until such time has elapsed as will be calculated to impress the Sucker tribe." Regardless, at this late season, he pointed out, it was not possible for him to go home. "His release would not be advisable before 1 July 1909 when arrangements could be conveniently made for his return."<sup>179</sup>

By the end of July, however, Pesequan was still in prison. With the help of a translator he himself requested a pardon in a letter to the Minister of Justice:

Dear Sir – I desire to lay my case before you and ask that a pardon be granted me. I am fifty three years old and if I am confined here longer I will die ... I desire to ask you not to look upon me as a common murderer. I was the Chief of my tribe, we had much sickness, and the sick ones were getting bad spirits and their friends were afraid of them and sent for me to strangle them. This was *not* a common killing ... If you let me go back to my place I will teach my family and people the white man's law. I am sick now and can't walk ... I wish you to consider that I am a poor Indian and don't know anything. I beg of you to remember your

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<sup>178</sup> Petition to the Minister of Justice, Ottawa, 1908, LAC, RG13, B15, vol. 92, file 386A, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 111-113.

<sup>179</sup> Commissioner Perry, RNWMP, to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, October 28, 1908, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 2.

promise of last fall and send me back to my people before I die, and I will tell my people that the white man's Government always speaks true.<sup>180</sup>

It was not until the receipt of a third petition, this time from Anglican Archdeacon Robert Phair (a missionary among the Anishinabe and Cree since 1865, and Superintendent of Indian Missions in Ruperts Land) that a pardon was finally obtained for Pesequan. It was delivered on September 4, 1909. Sadly, Pesequan had died three days earlier in the prison hospital where he had spent the previous 18 months.<sup>181</sup> Pesequan was an old man when arrested. In such cases, as Harring points out, “[e]ven a short prison sentence often became a death sentence.”<sup>182</sup>

Given the outcome of this trial, it is perhaps little surprise that it was omitted from Scott's 1913 report, written for the King in response to concerns raised by Sister Magdalene's personal testimony. Scott stated that missionaries and Crown officials alike had “impressed on the Indians that they must not take upon themselves the duty which devolves upon the law officers of the Crown, and that they must hand over such insane persons to be incarcerated in asylums and properly cared for.”<sup>183</sup> He did not state, however, just what measures had been taken to ‘impress on the Indians’ such a change.

In the London *Times* article published shortly after the beginning of the Fiddler trial, it was noted that “the general feeling among the Indians as well as the whites [was] ... in favour of an attempt to stamp out the practice.”<sup>184</sup> Ostensibly, this was motivated by a desire to save lives. In the Fiddler case, “an attempt to stamp out the practice” had itself cost the lives – and not entirely inadvertently – of two Anishinabe leaders. It was perhaps for this reason that Sister

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<sup>180</sup> Joseph Fiddler, to the Minister of Justice, July 26, 1909, LAC, RG13, B15, vol. 92, file 386A, cited in Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*,

<sup>181</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 115-116; Deputy Minister of Justice, Ottawa, to Fred White, RNWMP Comptroller, Ottawa, September 7, 1909, LAC, RG18, vol. 347, file 42, part 2.

<sup>182</sup> Harring, “Wendigo Killings,” 96.

<sup>183</sup> D.C. Scott, to W.H. Walker, December 3, 1913, LAC, RG10, vol. 3174, file 432,659.

<sup>184</sup> “Treatment of Lunacy by Murder,” *Times* (London), October 28, 1907, 14.

Magdalene avoided any mention of the *wihtiko* in her 1913 letters, and that she appealed directly to the King – bypassing his Canadian ministers. The “general feeling among the Indians as well as the whites,” was perhaps neither so unanimous nor so uniform – with respect to method and motive alike.<sup>185</sup>

### STRUGGLES FOR UNDERSTANDING & CONTROL OF THE WIHTIKO

*The Times*' claim of a consensus in favour of suppressing the practice of *wihtiko* executions nevertheless seems more obviously valid with regard to Newcomers than with regard to Natives.<sup>186</sup> Harring argues that “few areas of tribal custom [were] more inherently at odds with Canadian law than the wendigo killings,” and that “the traditional religious motivation for them defied the moral sense of White Canadians.”<sup>187</sup> A similar emphasis on cultural difference is echoed more subtly in Carlson's insistence that the *wihtiko* can only be understood if “analyzed *from within*,” not merely contextualized within, Algonquian culture. It is also implied in his explanation of the *wihtiko*'s disappearance as a consequence of the Western economy and legal institutions that were introduced, but also “*a conformity to Christian values and cosmology.*”<sup>188</sup> “Conformity with,” like the term “conformist,” implies a change that is at the level of ‘form’ rather than ‘substance’ – it is superficial, or prompted or motivated by something other than compelling reasoning. This contrasts with his suggestion that if Francis Work Beaton and other Euroamericans found the *wihtiko* a compelling concept, it was not merely because they were

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<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>186</sup> There are many who examine some of the *wihtiko* incidents looked at in this chapter, but I have only considered here those who have addressed more precisely the question of the appearance of the *wihtiko* in Western (i.e. European and Euroamerican) courts of law, or law and public opinion.

<sup>187</sup> Harring, “Wendigo Killings,” 96.

<sup>188</sup> Emphasis added. Carlson, “Reviving Wetiko,” 355 & 381. “From within” is far stronger than “within” or “in the context of.” As it turns out, however, Carlson means the latter more than the former. See discussion in chapter 6.

immersed in an Algonquian cultural context, but because they were faced with compelling evidence of the *wihtiko*.<sup>189</sup> For Laflèche, the 1907 Fiddler trial constituted a “clash with Euro-Canadian law and values,”<sup>190</sup> and exemplified “the *inability* of the broader Canadian public to sympathise with an aboriginal health paradigm (and more generally with aboriginal cultures).”<sup>191</sup> Schuh observes, in more neutral language, that the “response of white society to the Wendigo belief ... illustrates many of the problems of culture contact,” and notes that there “was little doubt among white authorities that Wendigo killings were murder.”<sup>192</sup> Melançon is more critical, arguing that the prosecution of Indigenous *wihtiko* killers is evidence of a monological colonial state view that ceased to recognize Indigenous law, denied its existence or reduced it to a collection of primitive customs that needed to be eliminated.<sup>193</sup>

*Wihtiko* trials, in this view, reveal not merely a clash between two cultures, but one initiated and exacerbated primarily by Western imperialism. “At one level,” writes Harring, “the windigo trials can be understood as an exercise in legal imperialism,” in which the objective was “to control and socialize Native people,” to show them “that they must defer to Canadian power” and to assert “Canadian hegemony over tribal customary law.”<sup>194</sup> Carlson writes that the cases are “reminiscent of the Salem ‘witch’ trials.”<sup>195</sup> For Smallman, the “windigos became a legal issue, as the Canadian state sought to assert its authority over the region *by* trying and convicting

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<sup>189</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 374, 375, and endnote 71, which reads: “Marano (incorrectly) argued that Beaton was likely of Métis ancestry, and thus his testimony was fabricated in part by his own belief in Windigo; ... Brightman argued that even if Beaton was Métis, his writing demonstrated a Euro-Canadian cultural background, and that his writings should exhibit consistent fabrications was only ‘marginally tenable’ ...”

<sup>190</sup> Patrick Laflèche, “Windigo: First Nations’ medicine on trial” [DVD] (Ottawa: The Hannah Chair of the History of Medicine, University of Ottawa, 2011). Summary on DVD.

<sup>191</sup> Laflèche, “Anishinaabe Medicine, 30.

<sup>192</sup> Schuh, “Justice,” 76-77.

<sup>193</sup> Melançon, “analyse pluraliste,” 173-174.

<sup>194</sup> Harring, “Wendigo killings,” 95, 82, 85.

<sup>195</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 360. From the Canadian perspective, trials of *wihtiko* executioners aimed to control ‘extra-legal’ authority and were quite distinct from witch trials.

people of killing windigos.”<sup>196</sup> For Fiddler and Stevens, the 1907 Fiddler trial “would appear to have been a justification of the Mounties’ presence” in the Northwest Territories.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, Laflèche asserts that the prosecution and imprisonment of Pesequan was “more of a political matter than a concern for justice.”<sup>198</sup> For Laflèche – echoing Fiddler and Stevens – this trial also reveals the “impacts of the resulting legacy of cultural suppression on Aboriginal health and wellbeing.”<sup>199</sup>

Nevertheless, as Haring, Laflèche, Fiddler, Stevens, Carlson and others show, this analysis of the *wihtiko* trials tells only part of the story. These trials also shed light on the “fundamentals of the Anishinaabe medical tradition”<sup>200</sup> and “the legal world of the Cree and Ojibwa communities beyond the frontier at the turn of the century.”<sup>201</sup> More precisely, they reveal medical practices and “legal mechanisms designed to let small hunting bands make difficult [medical and] legal decisions involving life and death.”<sup>202</sup> As such, they show that *wihtiko* killings cannot be dismissed as witchcraft or superstitious paranoia.

In contrast, Laflèche describes as “nearly paranoid” the warning made by the *Manitoba Free Press* in 1907 to those who might sympathize with these medical and legal practices: “Any too tender hearted person in that savage district who sympathizes with the prisoner is in a somewhat false position, for if the rite is allowed to continue he never may know when he, the

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<sup>196</sup> Emphasis added. Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 590.

<sup>197</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, vii.

<sup>198</sup> Laflèche, “Anishinabe Medicine,” 19. See also Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, 19-20: “Some of those involved in the trial seemed sympathetic to the medicine man’s situation but believe that a strict disposition towards the aboriginal leaders would placate the rest of the tribe for later negotiations. Commissioner Perry, for example, expressed his belief that the medicine man had acted according to custom and without knowledge of the white man’s law, but hoped that a prolonged prison sentence would “impress the Sucker tribe of Indians” and thus make them more cooperative with the Canadians.”

<sup>199</sup> Laflèche, “Windigo,” summary on DVD.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 95.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

sympathizer, may get a taste of the ceremony himself.”<sup>203</sup> The *wihtiko* trials also reveal Native resistance to “legal imperialism,” as evidenced by some witnesses’ attempts to obscure the facts and protect traditional leaders and customs.<sup>204</sup>

These important considerations highlight the persistence of Native agency in the face of Canadian imperialism, and Natives’ concerns for intellectual and moral integrity. Yet the analysis still falls short without consideration of equivalent concerns for intellectual and moral integrity among Canadians. One has to turn to the earliest historiography to find them given due consideration. Although her account contains some inaccuracies, Stephenson, in her 1924 history of Canadian Methodist missions, gives a very sympathetic view of both the Fiddlers and of those who came to their defense:

There was a belief among the Suckers that the delirium of fever, insanity, and the forgetfulness of old age were unmistakable symptoms that the persons so affected were about to become “wodigo,” that is, possessed of an evil spirit whose power could destroy whole bands of Indians while the persons possessed became invulnerable. What could be done but put to death those who might endanger hundreds of lives? To save many, the few were destroyed by [the] Chief ... and his assistant. Without a thought of murder in their hearts, they carried out a time-honoured custom for the safety of their people, but the law called it murder and the Royal North-west Mounted Police arrested the two chiefs. Both men were sentenced to be hanged the following January. One hanged himself at Norway House, the other was removed to Stoney Mountain. Mr. Lousley and Mr. Ferris [Methodist missionaries] took up his case with the Minister of Justice, and his sentence was commuted. The following summer they requested his discharge ... based on the following: 1. He was tried by a law that was written in a language that neither State nor the Church had taught the people. 2. They were simply carrying out a custom of dealing with the insane or the childishness of old age, and were no more to be classed as murderers than our sheriff. 3. The State or the Church had never taught these people the wrong of taking human life.<sup>205</sup>

Among the more recent scholarship, Schuh gives the most attention to this in her 1979 article on “Justice in the Northern Frontier.” For example, she cites internal government correspondence

<sup>203</sup> “Strangler Chief Dies at New Year,” *Manitoba Free Press*, October 16, 1907, cited in Laflèche, 20.

<sup>204</sup> Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 75, 80, 85, 94.

<sup>205</sup> Mrs. Frederick C. Stephenson, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Methodist Missions: 1824-1924*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Missionary Society of the Methodist Church, 1925), 124-126. Even if her account does not tell the entire story of the relationship between the Methodists and the Sucker Clan and even if it contains inaccuracies regarding dates and names, it is an account close enough to the origin incident that *itself* shows a sympathetic view of the Fiddlers and their beliefs. This was cited by Teicher, but his analysis of this event did not delve into questions of Western responses to the original *wihtiko* killing. Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 70-71.

about the “advantage to be gained by enforcing the law against a barbarous custom which as it is in the interests of the Indians to have an end put to, is therefore a duty incumbent upon the Department.”<sup>206</sup> Schuh also cites the 1897 petition to the Department of Indian Affairs from the Berens River chief and council, informing of a suspected *wihtiko*-killing and requesting that the government “investigate it completely.”<sup>207</sup> In their 1985 book, Fiddler and Stevens reserve their harshest criticism for “the duplicity of Aylesworth Bowen Perry and his cruel handling of this [Fiddler] case,” but assert that the Canadian public formed a negative view of the Fiddlers and their clan only because they were *misinformed or misled*. “What also remained away from public scrutiny,” moreover, “were several [Euro-Canadian] appeals for freedom for Joseph Fiddler [Pesequan],” which they cite at length. Referring to Methodist missionary, Frederick Stevens, they point out that “His dedication to Adam Fiddler and the clan folk at Sandy Lake ... is the primary reason the United Church exists there, today.”<sup>208</sup>

The most recent studies also acknowledge some Canadian concerns for intellectual and moral integrity. Despite criticizing the “inability” of the Canadian public to appreciate Algonquian medicine, Laflèche cites “more sympathetic responses by a minority of Euro-Canadians who defended the custom and the prisoners.” As he elaborates, these people had had extensive “exposure to the situation and culture” of the Anishinabe and “were more likely to be empathetic.”<sup>209</sup> This suggests that understanding was more dependent on opportunity than ability. Haring, for his part, acknowledges the “popular letter-writing campaign to spare Fiddler’s life,” the existence of an initially more lenient government policy, as well as

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<sup>206</sup> A.E. Forget, Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, to the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Ottawa, December 15, 1897, LAC, RG10, vol. 3984, file 164,851, cited in Schuh, “Justice,” 78.

<sup>207</sup> Petition from J. Berens and A. Gouin to W.J. Short (signed with marks by the petitioners, LAC, RG10, vol. 3984, file 164,851, cited in Schuh, “Justice,” 78.

<sup>208</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*, iv, 209.

<sup>209</sup> Laflèche, “Anishinabe Medicine,” 21.

sympathetic Canadian interventions in the 1897 case of Machekequonabe. Yet Harring's conclusion makes no reference to such considerations and seems to reduce the motivations and objectives of "Canadian authorities" to the "impos[ition of] their law on Native communities."<sup>210</sup> Rather than acknowledge concerns that allowing self-defence arguments might have encouraged continued *wihtiko* killings, Harring suggests that such a reasoning was either never raised, or that there is no evidence of it: "It might have been argued that to recognize a wendigo killing as the reasonable exercise of self-defense would have encouraged the continuation of the practice, rather than have permitted justice in individual cases." This was in fact, one of the *principal* arguments given by Perry in his instructions to the jury – albeit in a somewhat veiled manner. "Nothing in Canadian Indian law was concerned with justice in individual cases," continues Harring; "greater policy goals colored every issue."<sup>211</sup> Harring is correct that getting a murder conviction for Fiddler "reflected a policy decision to retreat from the leniency in sentencing shown Machekequonabe because the wendigo killings had persisted." Contrary to what Harring implies, however, their persistence into the twentieth century was not merely "an embarrassment to the Indian Department."<sup>212</sup> Rather, as Perry argued in his annual report for 1907, it was "in the interests of humanity" to abolish *wihtiko* killings – a view shared by at least some contemporary Algonquians.<sup>213</sup> Without such interventions, as Scott observed in 1909, mentally ill individuals like Chakason would often have been killed.

Harring also questions the clemency that was exercised in these cases. The commutation of death sentences, he argues, was more a matter of a general late nineteenth-century policy than a particular expression of concern for convicted *wihtiko* killers. Harring also argues that if Swift

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<sup>210</sup> Harring, "Wendigo Killings," 85, 81 & 95.

<sup>211</sup> Harring, "Wendigo Killings," 96.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>213</sup> RNWMP *Annual Report* for 1907, in *Sessional Papers*, vol. XLII, no. 14, cited in Schuh, "Justice," 77.

Runner alone was executed, it was because “Canada rarely executed Indians for intra-Indian killings.”<sup>214</sup> Rather, as noted, Swift Runner was singled out for execution because he was a killer-*wihtiko*, not the killer of a *wihtiko*. Moreover, his execution was fully supported by Indigenous law and public opinion. Haring also suggests Smart’s concerns about “judging only by the white man’s methods” and “the enforcement of the extreme penalty” – were merely aimed at (in Haring’s words) “convey[ing] an impression of the humanity of Canadian justice” in order to help ensure successful treaty negotiations.<sup>215</sup> Similarly, Strange acknowledges that some Euroamericans understood the “culturally distinct context” of *wihtiko* killings, that “some show was made” by arresting and prosecuting *wihtiko* killers, and that the few who were convicted of capital offences had their sentences commuted. Clemency, however, “was not less racially informed or politically hued. ... Show trials, followed by mercy, reinforced the broader agenda of racist assimilation.”<sup>216</sup> Melançon also argues that clemency was granted because trials met the objective of showing indigenous peoples that they were henceforth subjected to Canadian law.<sup>217</sup>

These late-modern inquiries into the Canadian suppression of Algonquian *wihtiko* practices emphasize Canadian imperialism and the disruption of Algonquian quests for mental and moral integrity. Recent scholarship shows limited recognition that desire for mental and moral integrity also challenged, mitigated, or lay hidden within Canadian assertions of legal and political authority – even, perhaps, in Commissioner Perry’s intentionally misleading instructions to the jury in the Fiddler case. Yet the importance of this critical emphasis on Canadian and Western imperialism is obvious when one considers what it aims to correct: ongoing

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<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>215</sup> Smart (cited in Haring) and Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 93-94.

<sup>216</sup> Strange, “The Lottery of Death: Capital Punishment, 1867-1976,” *The Manitoba Law Journal* (1995): 604-605. She also points out that leniency had its limits when whites were killed or white interests were threatened.

<sup>217</sup> Hughes Melançon, “Une analyse pluraliste des conceptions juridiques autochtones devant les tribunaux de juridiction pénale au Canada,” *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 12, no. 2 (1997): 174-175.

misperceptions grounded in an earlier historiography exemplified by Lucas' introduction to the first volume of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, published in 1929. In this text, Lucas emphasized “‘the capacity to rule, which is among the Englishman’s best qualities’ and ‘a sense of trusteeship for coloured races.’”<sup>218</sup> Lucas assumed, suggested or asserted that the British Empire was not, *or perhaps subtly advocated that it should not be*, grounded primarily in quests for power, but in quests for understanding and moral competence. More crudely, in his 1939 history of the NWMP, Godsell depicted the 1907 arrest and trial of the Fiddlers as a step towards the abolition of “rule of ... witch-doctors.”<sup>219</sup> In correcting one set of distortions, however, it is possible to inadvertently create or foster others; in critiquing meta-narratives of Western superiority, it is possible to inadvertently construct equally problematic meta-narratives of Western moral inferiority. Even if they do not prompt a hunt for a scapegoat, such meta-narratives can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of a much-needed critique of past and present quests for power – inadvertently lending support to new quests for hegemony.

Even if only inadvertently, much post-colonial and other late-modern scholarship on Canadian *wihtiko* trials supports – in varying degrees – a problematic meta-narrative founded on three largely implicit assumptions or suggestions. First, the appearance of *wihtiko* in modern Western courts of law and public opinion illustrates great differences, if not incommensurabilities, between fundamental Native and Newcomer practices and understandings. Tied to this are implicit suggestions that there are no universal criteria upon which to define mental or moral competence, or that only a radical relativism can defend the value of Native cultures. Second, *wihtiko* trials in Canadian courts of law and their coverage by newspapers

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<sup>218</sup> Charles Lucas, cited in P.J. Marshall, “First British Empire,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, ed. William Roger Louis, Volume 5, *Historiography*, ed. Robin W. Winks & Alaine Low (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 51.

<sup>219</sup> Philip H. Godsell, *They Got Their Man: On Patrol with the North West Mounted* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1939), 96-108.

expose little more than a struggle between the Canadian government's quests for power and Algonquian quests for understanding and moral competence. Tied to this is the suggestion that Euroamerican influences on Algonquian *wihtiko* concepts stem primarily from imperialist impositions, and that post-contact continuities in these concepts result from Algonquian resistance to imperialism and quests for mental and moral competence. Also tied to this is the idea, not unfounded, that recovering Native authenticity requires a deconstructive *exposé* of Western imperialism, especially where it has been disguised as an exercise of mental and moral competence. Third, in their encounters with each other and the *wihtiko*, Algonquians faced very difficult decisions, but Euroamericans did not; rather their position of power and monological vision blinded them to Native quests for understanding and integrity or their own quests for power. Even at the peak of Western imperialism such analysis falls short.

If Algonquian trials of potential or confirmed *wihtikowak* posed difficult quests for understanding and moral competence, so too did modern Western trials and their late-modern retrials. In all three cases, ideals of mental and moral integrity have been susceptible to usurpation by quests for mere control, and desire for mental and moral competence have been present amidst assertions and positions of power. Despite differences and changes, a recurrent intercultural conviction consistently resurfaces, that reducing others and reality to objects of control leads to mental and moral failure.

When Canadian courts of law and Euroamerican newspapers maligned Algonquians for their *wihtiko* beliefs and practices, fur traders, missionaries and even officers of the Crown stood up to defend Algonquian beliefs and practices, asserting that they were also grounded in quests for understanding and moral competence. If Sister Magdalene de-emphasized cultural difference in her 1913 mission to England, and subtly asserted that the Indians had not learned to "kill and

eat man” and avoided discussion of *wihtiko*, it was perhaps because of the Fiddler trial. Avoidance of cultural difference, in this case, appears grounded in primarily pragmatic sensibilities. When the *wihtiko*, and Algonquian cultures with it, were pulled into Western courts of law and public opinion, missionaries took a different tack and asserted differences in order to show affinities.

In later decades, as the *wihtiko* began to appear more frequently in modern academia, this sharp juxtaposition recurred, exemplified by the interpretation of the *wihtiko* as culture-bound “psychosis,” a term that first appeared in a 1933 academic article by Cooper.<sup>220</sup> He and his student Flannery conducted research among the James Bay Cree only two decades after Sister Magdalene’s petition. Although they gathered many contemporary *wihtiko* stories, they did not publish any of them at that time. When, in 1981, Flannery finally published the stories she and her mentor had collected, she noted the reticence with which many Cree had shared them, on account of the threat of prosecution.<sup>221</sup> *Wihtiko* cases were still being investigated in the mid-1930s.<sup>222</sup> Flannery’s comment and the late publication of their stories suggests that she and Cooper shared Hallowell’s view of these prosecutions, and the Fiddler trial in particular:

two men from Sandy Lake were arrested for murder ... because they had participated in the disposal of a women reputed to be a windigo. From the standpoint of native customary law, the strangling of a cannibal obviously is not illegal. It is a communally sanctioned defensive act, rationally justified in the premises.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 21-24.

<sup>221</sup> Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59. Cooper’s 1933 article mentions none of the contemporary accounts he had collected.

<sup>222</sup> “Lone Winter Patrol,” *Wainwright Record*, January 1, 1934, reports on a *wihtiko* case under investigation in the north by the RCMP.

<sup>223</sup> Hallowell, “Fear and Anxiety,” 34. In 1936, Hallowell had requested a copy of the court transcript from the Department of Indian Affairs, which had shared it on condition that he not publish any part of it without prior permission. J.W. Spalding, Deputy Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa, to A.I. Hallowell, September 21, 1936, and Hallowell to G.L. Jennings, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, RCMP, Ottawa, October 15, 1936, LAC, RG18, file 347, file 42, part 2. A copy of the proceedings was also sent to the Superintendent of the Provincial Museum in Toronto: RNWMP Comptroller to Deputy Minister of Justice, November 4, 1907, LAC, RG18, file 347, file 42, part 2.

Hallowell and Cooper have since been criticized for their interpretations of the *wihtiko* phenomenon as a “psychosis,” and not without reason, but the history of such interpretations also needs to be better understood.<sup>224</sup> As Smallman observes, “an imperial context shaped both the discursive and practical responses of non-Algonquians to the windigo.”<sup>225</sup> A historical analysis of modern and late-modern *wihtiko* scholarship shows how it has remained an object of struggles for understanding and control.

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<sup>224</sup> Brown and Black-Rogers in Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 399. Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 383-384, endnote 2.

<sup>225</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 571-572.

## CHAPTER 5

### *WIHTIKO* IN MODERN ACADEMIA

#### MANLIKE MONSTER OR ‘REDMAN,’ LIKE MONSTER, ON TRIAL?

As Avramescu’s *Intellectual History of Cannibalism* makes clear, the *wihtiko*’s appearance in Western public opinion and law at the turn of the century was not the first time a cannibal figure had animated debates about human difference and change. The anthropophagus (human-eater) had long been the subject of public, legal and scholarly debates about human nature and natural law, but it was not until 1492 that the synonym “cannibal” entered Western vocabulary, raising the cannibal to greater prominence in such debates.<sup>1</sup> Although the cannibal faded from rationalist philosophical debates along with the sciences of natural law in the nineteenth century, it quickly returned to academic prominence with the simultaneous rise of anthropology and other social sciences.<sup>2</sup> It was in this latter context that the *wihtiko* began to attract greater Western intellectual interest.<sup>3</sup> Western social sciences aimed – usually emphasizing empirical more than rationalist methodologies – to “achieve some understanding of the variability and stability of human nature ... to identify the laws governing human behavior.”<sup>4</sup> This was the stated objective of the first lengthy study, in 1956, of the cannibal *wihtiko* or “windigo psychosis,” as its author, Martin

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<sup>1</sup> Avramescu, *Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, 3, 10, 20-21 & 250-253. Cannibal is a name applied by Columbus to a reputedly human-eating tribe in the Carribean.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 250; Rémi Brague, *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007; first published in French in 2005), chapter 14; Hulme, “Introduction,” in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-39.

<sup>3</sup> Avramescu’s *Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, the scope of which ends in the early nineteenth century, makes no mention of the *wihtiko*.

<sup>4</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis,” 2.

Teicher, referred to it.<sup>5</sup> Teicher compiled the largest collection to date of *wihtiko* stories – over 100, covering the spectrum between myth and history.

These *wihtiko* stories were not new to Euroamerican popular or academic culture. By the late nineteenth century Native-Newcomer interculturality and *métissage* had brought the *wihtiko* into British and especially French North American folklore and vocabulary.<sup>6</sup> Western folklorists and ethnologists – amateur and professional – were among the first Western scholars to follow Algonquian knowledge-keepers in collecting and transmitting *wihtiko* stories, though they did not rely on only human memory and the spoken word to retain and transmit them. By the late nineteenth century, collection, preservation and publication were becoming a priority for them, as it later became for many Native knowledge-keepers if they saw a weakening of their oral traditions.<sup>7</sup> Collaboration between knowledge-keepers, scholars, amateur folklorists and elders – though frequently on unequal terms – exemplified the continuum that still remains between popular and intellectual cultures, in Indigenous and Western contexts alike.

In recent decades, amidst a resurgence and encouragement of intercultural relationships between Indigenous and Euroamerican cultural centres of gravity, quests for mutual understanding in many quarters have been aided by shifts from inquiry about each other to

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Podruchny, “Werewolves and Windigos”; Colombo, *Windigo*. Alexander F. Chamberlain, “Algonkian Words in American English: A Study in the Contact of the White Man and the Indian,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 15, no. 59 (Oct-Dec 1902): 266. He includes an entry for “*Wéndigo (windigo)*. A monster, a cannibal-giant of Indian story, an Indian turned cannibal. A word still in use in northern and northwestern Canada, and the literature of that region. From Ojibwa and Cree *windigo*, ‘a fabulous giant.’”

<sup>7</sup> Greg Spence, an Omushkego Cree culture and language expert, points out that he once felt Western ethnographers were appropriating and Westernizing Indigenous traditional knowledge, but is now immensely grateful to them for having preserved so much that would otherwise have been lost. Spence, personal communication, September 24, 2010. See also Cree elder George Diamond’s introductory remarks in George and Louise Diamond, “Hannah Bay Massacre,” 10. See also the examples of Iroquois knowledge-keepers, cited in Anthony Wonderley, *At the Font of the Marvelous? Exploring Oral Narrative and Mythic Imagery of the Iroquois and Their Neighbors* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), xxi.

inquiry with each other.<sup>8</sup> Yet these quests for mutual understanding of human nature and difference are still fraught with difficulty, for they remain entangled in struggles for control and the legacy of imperialism. This is evident in the continued sharing, appropriation, transmission, recording, interpretation and re-articulation of *wihtiko* stories, especially where this overlaps with the *wihtiko*'s appearance in modern academia.

As Preston points out, Algonquian knowledge-keepers and audiences have long had the advantage of being grounded in the same cultural framework as the *wihtiko* stories themselves, despite variations in Algonquian cultures. Yet *wihtiko* stories, Preston adds, have never been merely received and retold by Algonquians.<sup>9</sup> They have also been continually refined and reshaped by the same quests for understanding that originally generated them and by new experiences and encounters with other cultures and societies – both Indigenous North American and Euroamerican. On the other hand, as Marano suggests, an emic or insider vantage point gives a unique but not necessarily better grasp of any deeper or more universal reality that the *wihtiko* concept might illuminate.<sup>10</sup> Lack of critical distance from any particular cultural vantage point can be a disadvantage. Algonquian knowledge-keepers and audiences, like any other “insider” groups, have sometimes been more inclined to interpret *wihtiko*-associated phenomena in ways that reinforce their preconceived understandings. Some have heard and repeated *wihtiko*

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<sup>8</sup> The Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) states that its research “strategy emphasizes research by and with Aboriginal Peoples.” SSHRC, “Fact Sheet: Aboriginal Research,” accessed December 3, 2014, [http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/news\\_room-salle\\_de\\_presse/fact\\_sheets-fiches\\_information/PDF/Aboriginal\\_fact\\_sheet\\_e.pdf](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/news_room-salle_de_presse/fact_sheets-fiches_information/PDF/Aboriginal_fact_sheet_e.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 122 & 124. Preston cites the example of “Weipust’s skeptical attitude towards the more marvelous accounts,” and suggests that “we should assume that he was also more critical than suggestible, aware of wrongness and wrong-headedness on the part of Indians as well as white men, when they are wondering about such terror-inspiring topics.”

<sup>10</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis,” 385. Marano does not make quite the same point as I make here, but he does point out the problems with focusing on an emic perspective.

stories and interpretations without questioning the ideological frameworks in which they have received them or opening their minds to the possibility of radically new interpretations.<sup>11</sup>

Western scholars, in comparison, have benefited from exposure to a greater diversity of cultural and intellectual counterpoints against which to compare, in this case, *wihtiko* stories and associated phenomena. They have also had access to more specialized epistemological and methodological tools. Western culture, in fact, is one of the most extensive and diverse intercultural exchanges in human history. Yet the collective strength – real and perceived – of dominant currents in this Western intercultural exchange, has also proven a weakness for those who have cultivated little appreciation of other epistemological vantage points or awareness of the debt owed to them.<sup>12</sup> As Hallowell pointed out in 1936:

Among ... educated classes, the mental habit of viewing the external objects of what we call the natural world in terms of established scientific knowledge about them, has so completely divorced our minds from other possible attitudes that we are even apt to attribute our point of view to innate intelligence or common sense, instead of to a traditionally acquired mode of thought. *Hence the charge of stupidity, childishness or naiveté sometimes flung at primitive man, is a boomerang that may some day be found at our own feet.* Whatever the ultimate status of scientifically defined reality may prove to be, the psychological fact remains that just as we act in accordance with this pattern of reality, or its derivatives, so primitive man acts with respect to his concepts of reality.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter examines the *wihtiko*'s appearance in modern academia. It echoes comments by Hallowell, Preston, Marano and others, that overconfidence in, or assertions of the superiority of, one mode of thought has closed some scholars off from venturing beyond their familiar

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<sup>11</sup> Preston points out that “many Algonkians and Algonkianists prefer to simplify this variance down to concrete kinds of person (monstrous, symbolic, or other) and condition.” Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 127.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, chapter 6, “Secularizing Knowledge.” What Thomas d’Andrea points out – echoing Alasdair MacIntyre and John Haldane – with regard to Thomas Aquinas and Thomists, applies across cultures and disciplines: some Thomists are so fixated on Aquinas’ insights that they cut themselves off from the very mode and disposition of inquiry that led to these very insights in the first place. Thomas D. D’Andrea, review of *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy*, by David M. Gallagher, *The Review of Metaphysics*, 49, no. 4 (June 1996): 922-923. Although he does not necessarily highlight the point, Berger’s assessment of the writing of Canadian history in English shows that the most innovative historians have tended to be those working at the borders of their discipline or who do not assume new methods and questions to be so much better that they stop looking again at older methods and questions. Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*.

<sup>13</sup> Emphasis added. Hallowell, “Psychic Stresses,” 1295.

epistemologies, methodologies and cosmologies. Ironically, despite an unwillingness to consider the “possibility of the monstrous,” some “created intellectual monsters by imposing elegant arguments upon dubious data” while remaining “at a distance from the bush, the feelings, the culture, the phenomenal world of the Algonkians.”<sup>14</sup> They have interpreted the *wihtiko* within preconceptions of human nature and difference without first understanding the phenomenon in its own context or allowing for the possibility that it might challenge their preconceptions. They perhaps have been too quick to offer conclusions about a phenomenon that remains elusive. Or the *wihtiko* has provoked questions about mental and moral incompetence, placing the “Redman,” like the *wihtiko* monster, “on trial” in courts of academia.

Many of these points were articulated by Preston in 1976, in “The Witiko: Algonkian Knowledge and Whiteman Interest,” a paper later developed into a chapter for *Manlike Monsters on Trial*.<sup>15</sup> Two decades had passed since Teicher’s 1956 study, and the *wihtiko* was making ever more frequent appearances in academic debates, as Preston put it with a dose of humour:

The monstrous person of the Wiitiko ... inhabits the forests of eastern subarctic Canada and the pages of the Algonquianist literature. Algonquianists have worked bravely without first-hand experience or evidence, describing and (usually at a safe remove from the Boreal Forest) trying to analytically categorize and explain the phenomena.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, those scholars who have been immersed in the bush and in Algonquian culture have been far more likely to take Algonquian *wihtiko* beliefs and responses seriously. As Brown pointed out, Marano’s 1982 article failed to provide an unbiased, non-adversarial and

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<sup>14</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 386; Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 127, 120-121. The first quote is from Marano, the rest is from Preston.

<sup>15</sup> Preston’s 1976 paper was published the following year. As noted already, the 1980 chapter was entitled: “The Witiko: Algonkian Knowledge and Whiteman Knowledge,” and it also incorporated points first articulated by Preston in two other papers: “Dominance, the Double Bind and the Witigo” (unpublished paper presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Canadian Association for Physical Anthropology, Banff, Alberta, 1977), and “Ethnographic Reconstruction” (1978), 61-67.

<sup>16</sup> Preston, “Wiitiko” (1977), 101. The “windigo” had “become common anthropological currency” to the point that Dennis Tedlock listed it in 1979 among several poorly understood and overused terms that scholars “might wish to purge [from their] discourse.” Dennis Tedlock, “The Analogical Tradition and the Emergence of a Dialogical Anthropology,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 35, no. 4 (winter 1979): 390-391.

contextualized study of early *wihtiko* scholarship.<sup>17</sup> Not long afterwards, she and Brightman published an 1823 fur-trade journal-letter by George Nelson, which includes one of the earliest and most extensive ethnographic studies of the *wihtiko*.<sup>18</sup>

*Wihtiko* stories, observed Nelson, were as “devoutly believed by these [Cree and Sauteaux] ... as the Gospel is by the most orthodox among us,” provoking among them “the greatest dread and horror; and certainly not without the very great[est] cause.” If some or most cases originated in starvation and deprivation, Nelson asserted nonetheless that few peoples so patiently endured starvation without resorting to cannibalism. Although he recorded various Indigenous accounts and explanations, Nelson himself offered two explanations of the *wihtiko*. On the one hand, it was “a kind of disease (or distemper rather, and of the *mind* I am fully persuaded) peculiar to the Crees and Sauteux’s.” Nevertheless, his experience and the stories he had heard left Nelson weighing other possibilities:

There is such a singular, strange, incomprehensible contradictoriness in almost all these cases, and many I have heard, that I do most verily believe they are denunciations, witch or wizardisms: in any other manner they are not rationally to be accounted for, unless we suppose all those who feed on human flesh to be thus possest – then it is natural to man in those cases; but why then not the same with us as with these people?<sup>19</sup>

As Brown and Brightman later pointed out, Nelson’s “writings testify to his willingness to listen seriously with an open mind to what his Ojibwa and Cree associates had to tell him, and to his attention to detail and eagerness for accuracy.”<sup>20</sup> Native scholars Cuthand and LaRocque came to similar conclusions. Cuthand found “no reason to doubt that he [Nelson] saw what he describes. It is possible that he did not understand the background ... but ... the events and

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<sup>17</sup> Brown, in Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 399. Also commenting on this same article, M. Jean Black (Mary Black-Rogers) wrote “I would like to have seen some additional discussion of why this belief was so attractive to our ethnographic forefathers.” *Ibid.*, 399.

<sup>18</sup> Nelson served with the XY Company from 1802-1804, the North West Company from 1804-1816, and 1818-1821, and the HBC from 1821-1823. This journal-letter was written (addressed to his father) while he was at Lac la Ronge in Northern Saskatchewan. Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Nelson, in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 85, 88-90.

<sup>20</sup> Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 3.

stories he relates are compelling.”<sup>21</sup> Although LaRocque found Nelson’s terminology and classification reflected a “civilization/savagery dichotomy,” and his grasp of Algonquian nuance and context limited, she agreed that he was “remarkably open-minded and seems to have been genuinely interested in presenting correct information.” She was amazed that her “Plains-Cree Metis community in northeastern Alberta was still living and reciting in the 1950s and 1960s essentially the same religion, legends, and myths discussed in the manuscript!”<sup>22</sup> It was not until its posthumous publication more than 160 years later, however, that Nelson’s ‘amateur’ ethnography had an impact upon Western academic literature. In the meantime, other Western scholars independently encountered the same challenges of understanding. Some echoed his explanation of the *wihtiko* as a “disease ... of the mind”; others echoed his explanation of the *wihtiko* as a “denunciation.” For others, however, the *wihtiko* phenomenon signalled a more general mental or moral incompetence.

In 1839, Schoolcraft recounted a story of “The Weendigoes” as evidence of “blind adherence to ... idolatrous customs and superstitions” on the part of one Algonquian people: “Without farther allusion to their history, it may be observed, that the Saginaws have never made the least advances in education or religion.” Although Schoolcraft was married to an Anishinabe woman, he dismissed her peoples’ beliefs as “idolatrous customs and superstitions.”<sup>23</sup> In a similar vein, Parkman referred, in 1851, to tales of “*weendigoes*,” told to the “credulous circle

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<sup>21</sup> Cuthand, “On Nelson’s Text,” in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 197.

<sup>22</sup> Emma LaRocque, “On the Ethics of Publishing Historical Documents,” in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 199-203.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, *Algic Researches, Comprising Inquiries Respecting the Mental Characteristics of the North American Indians*, First Series, *Indian Tales and Legends*, volume 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1839), 105-118. Schoolcraft was an American Indian Agent and was married to the daughter of an Ojibwa chief.

around an Ojibwa lodge-fire,” as “faithful reflections of the form and coloring of the national mind.”<sup>24</sup>

Schoolcraft and Parkman’s dismissive accounts contrasted sharply with those of Kohl, a German geographer, ethnologist and travel writer who spent four months with the Ojibwa of Wisconsin in 1855 and published *Kitchi-gami: Wanderings Round Lake Superior* in 1860.<sup>25</sup> Kohl acknowledged that before he had “shaken hands with them,” when he “knew them only in books,” he considered Indigenous North Americans to be “rude, cold-blooded, rather uninteresting people.” After meeting them, however, he discovered “‘men and brothers’ ... [with] warm blood and sound understanding, and I could feel as much sympathy for them as for any other human creatures.”<sup>26</sup> Kohl began his chapter on cannibalism and the *wihtiko* by observing that Europeans and Amerindians alike faced deprivation and that “cases of unnatural attacks on one’s own brethren, produced by unspeakable want, are only exceptions to a rule.” The *wihtiko*, in his view, was not the result of a greater occurrence or approbation of cannibalism but of a “decided aversion from those who have committed the crime” who are “give[n] ... the opprobrious name of ‘Windigo.’”<sup>27</sup> In his view, such censure ultimately fostered a transformation:

if a man has ever had recourse to this last and most horrible method of saving his life, even when the circumstances are pressing and almost excusable, he is always regarded with terror and horror by the Indians ... Any one that has once broken through the bounds does so easily again, or, at least, the supposition is rife that he can do so. Hence he becomes an object of apprehension, and must live retired from the rest of his fellow-men. He does not enjoy their fraternal assistance, and thus his hostile position towards society soon drives him back into

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<sup>24</sup> Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1851), cited in Colombo, *Windigo*, 26. Parkman was Professor of Horticulture at Harvard University, but is better known for his historical work.

<sup>25</sup> Kohl had plans for a book on the conquest of the Americas, which was never published. Robert E. Bieder, ed., introduction to Kohl, *Kitchi-gami*, xxv, xxix, xxxi. As Bieder points out, Kohl’s ethnography sharply contrasted that of Schoolcraft and his mentor, Lewis Cass, who aimed to “ferret out what in Indian culture made Indians so resistant to new ways, or what ... [they] called civilization.”

<sup>26</sup> Kohl, cited in *ibid.*, xxxi.

<sup>27</sup> Kohl, *Kitchi-gami*, 356-357.

the same difficulty and temptation. In this manner, or nearly so, a class of windigos is called into existence.<sup>28</sup>

Citing the case of a man who murdered his wife in a delirious state caused by deprivation, and was now “regularly hunted down,” Kohl offered an explanation that merged Nelson’s alternate explanations of the *wihtiko* as a “disease of the mind” or a “denunciation.” Kohl also saw other Algonquian beliefs as playing an important role:

It is very natural that in a country which really produces isolated instances of such horrors, and with a nation so devoted to fancies and dreams, superstition be mixed up in the matter, and that at last ... wonderful stories of windigos should be produced, as among us, in the middle ages, the belief in witches produced witches. ... There seems not a doubt that these poor people, persecuted and shot as windigos, are, like our witches, very often wretched persons driven to extremities by starvation.<sup>29</sup>

Kohl surmised that fear had engendered the belief that some people had turned *wihtiko*, a belief so strongly and widely held that alleged *wihtikowak* themselves believed they were “really windigos, and must act in that way.” Concern about *wihtiko* threats and isolated incidents or real cannibalism fostered dreams of the *wihtiko*, and “these dreams, here and there, degenerate to such a point that a man is gained over to the idea that he is fated to be a windigo.”<sup>30</sup>

Belief in witches, as Kohl observed, was part of Western civilization’s past. Whether Indigenous peoples could get beyond such beliefs, or why they had not already, were questions for other ethnologists. Whereas Kohl discovered, questioned and rejected certain prejudices of his time, other prominent scholars adopted and retained assumptions about the “inactivity of the savage intellect” and “conditions of the lowest races of men,”<sup>31</sup> or quickly gave credence to the

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 356-357.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 357 & 364.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>31</sup> These are headings in Sir John Lubbock’s book, *The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1870), xi. Lubbock was President of the Ethnological Society (based in the UK), from 1864-1865, and President of the Royal Anthropological Society from 1871-73. Trigger comments that it was Lubbock, in *Prehistoric Times* (1865), an earlier and very influential work, who championed the Darwinian idea “that as a result of natural selection human groups had become different from each other, not only culturally, but also in their biological capacities to utilize culture.” Lubbock also used this to explain the inferiority

sketchy evidence behind them. Differences in the development, “form and coloring of the national mind” was one of many questions raised by Hittell in his ambitious four-volume work, *A History of the Mental Growth of Mankind in Ancient Times* (1893).<sup>32</sup> Acknowledging that such questions had never been well answered, he hoped his own attempt might help advance the understanding of human nature, past and present. Expressing full faith in “the irrepressible progressiveness of humanity,” he posited divisions between three major “culturesteps”: “savagism ... the condition of the North American Indians” and other peoples lacking cities and national government; “barbarism,” the condition of peoples who had cities and national government but limited intellectual life; and “civilization,” which included only the ancient Greeks, Romans, and modern Christian nations. Hittell referred to the “Windigo clan of the Chippeways near Lake Superior” as one of several examples showing the existence of “gourmand cannibalism” on all continents – including pre-historic Europe, when it too was in the developmental stage of “savagism.”<sup>33</sup>

Bell, geologist and scholar, did not deem it necessary to retreat to pre-historic Europe to find similarities with Indigenous North Americans.<sup>34</sup> In his 1886 article, “The ‘Medicine-Man’; Or Indian and Eskimo Notions of Medicine,” he cautioned his audience that “while ... we may be disposed to laugh at their primitive ideas, ... many – perhaps the majority – of the doctrines

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of lower classes. “Thus a single explanation accounted for social inequality in Western societies and for the alleged superiority of European societies over other human groups.” Bruce G. Trigger, *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 115-116.

<sup>32</sup> John S. Hittell, *A History of the Mental Growth of Mankind in Ancient Times*, volume 1, *Savagism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1893), 3-8. This book begins with a six-page elaboration of questions relating to human nature, evolution and difference.”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-10, 67-68.

<sup>34</sup> Educated at McGill, Queen’s, Cambridge and Edinburgh, Robert Bell was Assistant Director of the Geological Survey of Canada, a medical doctor and multidisciplinary scholar who published more than two hundred reports or papers in diverse fields of geology, biology, geography, forestry and folk-lore. *Papers of Robert Bell*, 3.

once taught among our own people were absurd enough.”<sup>35</sup> Only then did he offer a critique of Algonquian “Notions of Medicine,” citing the *wihtiko* as one example:

Indian doctors do not understand the nature of delirium. When a patient becomes delirious, as in fevers, etc., they say he is about to ‘turn windigo’ – that is, to become possessed of an irresistible desire for cannibalism. It was then the doctor’s duty to knock the patient on the head. Many a life has been sacrificed in this way.<sup>36</sup>

Since Bell wrote this, most Algonquians have come to similar conclusions about such interpretations of delirium – a change that reflects a deeper continuity of culture. Although Bell never published any further critique or analysis of the *wihtiko*, he did collect many *wihtiko* and other stories told by the James Bay Cree and their Anishinabe neighbours, some of which were published.<sup>37</sup> It is by no means clear that he reduced the *wihtiko* to an explanation of delirium, even if he was critical of it in this regard.

Other scholars, civil servants and amateur ethnologists published comments on the *wihtiko* or recorded *wihtiko* stories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>38</sup> Hind recorded stories and explanations of the *wihtiko* or *atshem* (atchen) in 1860 and 1863.<sup>39</sup> Borron did not mention the *wihtiko* specifically in his 1880 report, but referred to historical incidents that

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<sup>35</sup> Bell, “Medicine-Man,” 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>37</sup> LAC, MG29, B15, box 54: “Subject Files: Indians. Legends ...” This contains numerous legends and many *wihtiko* stories. See also Robert Bell, “The History of the Che-che-puy-ew-tis,” *Journal of American Folklore* 10 (1897): 1-8.

<sup>38</sup> I have only listed those accounts that are published by academics or in academic publications.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Youle Hind, *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860), 65; Henry Youle Hind, *Explorations in the Interior of the Labrador Peninsula: The Country of the Montagnais and Nasquapee Indians* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1862), vol. 2, 102. In the 1860 publication, Hind records accounts of *wihtiko* incidents and the killing of an alleged *wihtiko* who was “put to death under the impression that those who have once fed on human flesh always retain a desire for it, which they are not unscrupulous in gratifying when the opportunity offers. ... Both voyageurs and Indians always spoke of these horrible deeds in subdued tones and with an expression of anxiety and alarm.” In the 1863 publication, he made reference to the “evil deity, ATSTEM, [who] is the terror and bugbear of the Nasquapees. They imagine that he assumes the form of one of the most celebrated and dreadful conjurors of olden times, or, as a frightful giant, wanders through the forest in search of human prey. Whenever the report spreads in a camp that his tracks have been seen near at hand, the poor creatures fly in consternation from the neighbourhood, and live for weeks and even months in continual terror.”

the Cree and Ojibwa would clearly have associated with it.<sup>40</sup> In 1884 and 1894, Leland and Rand published traditional Mi'kmaq stories of the *chenoo* (equivalent of the *wihtiko*).<sup>41</sup> In 1900 and 1902, Chamberlain briefly commented on the “windigo” term in Algonquian folklore and its adoption within American English vocabulary.<sup>42</sup> In 1911, Skinner published a number of Cree and Ojibwa *wihtiko* stories, noting that the “most characteristic of Eastern Cree tales are those concerning cannibalism, which may well have a foundation in fact, and those stories ... [about] the feats of rival conjurors.”<sup>43</sup> Between 1915 and 1925 Laidlaw collected and published several Ojibwa *wihtiko* stories from southern Ontario.<sup>44</sup> Jones and Jenness also published Ojibwa *wihtiko* tales in 1916 and 1935, Davidson and Bloomfield published Cree *wihtiko* tales in 1928 and 1934, and Close gave a brief description of the Naskapi *wihtiko* belief in 1930.<sup>45</sup>

### ALGONQUIAN HISTORY TO CULTURE-BOUND PSYCHOSIS?

In the 1930s, a series of academic publications appeared – four of them in a new journal entitled *Primitive Man* – that focused exclusively on the *wihtiko* or examined it in greater detail.

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<sup>40</sup> Borron, “Report,” 35. See previous chapter.

<sup>41</sup> Leland, *Algonquin*, 233, 247. Rand, *Legends*, 297-308. See discussion of Morrison’s use of these stories in Chapter One.

<sup>42</sup> Chamberlain, “Algonkian Words,” 266; Chamberlain, “Some Items of Algonkian Folk-Lore,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 13, no. 51 (Oct-Dec, 1900): 271-277, at 276.

<sup>43</sup> Skinner, *Notes*, 82 (citation), 88-89, 108-112, 114. Skinner worked at the Museum of Natural History.

<sup>44</sup> George E. Laidlaw, “Ojibwa Myths and Tales” (Toronto: William Briggs, 1915; reprint from the Annual Archeological Report, appended to the Report of the Minister of Education, Ontario, 1915), 12. For other *wihtiko* stories from southern Ontario that were published by Laidlaw between 1915 and 1925, see Colombo, *Windigo*, 119-123.

<sup>45</sup> William Jones, “Ojibwa Tales from the North Shore of Lake Superior,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 29, no. 113 (Jul. - Sep., 1916): 376; Jenness’ account of the *wihtiko* gives a brief description of the traits and modes of its appearance, and the means of opposing it. Diamond Jenness, *The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island: Their Social and Religious Life* (Ottawa: Department of Mines, 1935), cited in Colombo, *Windigo*, 125-126. Ethnologist D.S. Davidson makes a very brief mention of the *wihtiko* in his article “Some Tête de Boule Tales,” *The Journal of American Folk-Lore* (January-March 1928). The Tête de Boule are *Atikamekw*, closely related to the James Bay Cree of Quebec. Leonard Bloomfield recorded one *wihtiko* tale in *Plains Cree Texts* (New York: G.E. Stechert, 1934), 152-155. Charles Close briefly describes the windigo belief in “River Exploration in Labrador by Canoe and Dog Sledge: Discussion,” *The Geographical Journal* 75, no 2 (Feb 1930): 120.

Guinard (1930) and Saindon (1933) were missionaries; Cooper (two articles in 1933 & one in 1934) was also a Catholic priest, but published as a professor of anthropology; Hallowell (1934 and 1938), his thesis director Speck (1935), and Landes (1938) were also professional anthropologists; Bailey (1937) was a historian. In his 1934 article, “Witiko among the Tête-de-Boule,” Guinard offered a brief account of Attikamekw depictions of the *wihtiko* – “set ... in a rather melodramatic English translation” observes Preston – but did not attempt his own explanation.<sup>46</sup>

More importantly, Saindon and Cooper’s articles were the first publications to echo Nelson’s depiction of the *wihtiko* as a particular mental disorder or psychosis. Their analyses, however, were quite distinct. Saindon, who correctly pointed out that his “observations have not the value that those of a professional psychiatrist would have,” described various “cases of visions and obsessions” that he had observed, including one “under the form [of] ... ‘the Windigo sickness.’” A woman alleged to be suffering from this sickness was avoiding all but her family because everyone else appeared to her as dangerous wild animals, which she then wanted to kill in order to protect herself. Having only heard reports of this situation, Saindon visited the woman and without letting her describe her own symptoms he told her with firm assurance: ““You are going to get well. I am certain of it, absolutely certain. Go to Confession. Tomorrow receive Communion. Go out abroad as you used to do formerly.”” This apparently resolved the matter. Saindon attributed such cases to a combination of environmental, psychological and cultural factors, but above all an underdevelopment of the “powers of judgement” and an “undisciplined imagination” that yields to “the worst excesses, to the most foolish and most fantastic vagaries

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<sup>46</sup> Joseph E. Guinard, “Witiko Among the Tete-de-Boule,” *Primitive Man* 3, no. 3/4 (July-Oct 1930), 69-71. Guinard was an Oblate missionary based in Maniwaki. Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 113. The Attikamekw (meaning “whitefish”), also known as the Tête-de-Boule, are geo-cultural neighbours of the Eastern James Bay Cree and Montagnais.

... and block[s] rational thought and judgement.” For Saindon, this was not a matter of racial, but of cultural, psychological and religious formation: the Indian was “intelligent” but “credulous, impressionable, sensitive, imaginative” – like a “big child.”<sup>47</sup> His article lacked the influence Waldram later alleged, in his critique of the “transformation of windigo from fable to psychiatric disorder.”<sup>48</sup>

Cooper did not base his arguments on Saindon’s account, as some mistakenly assumed.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Saindon, Cooper did not attribute the *wihtiko* to underdeveloped “powers of judgement,” but, rather, to highly sensitive powers of judgement in the case of cannibalism: the “Eastern Cree, and most of the other northern Algonquians, had and have just as profound aversion to and horror of cannibalism in any form as we have.”<sup>50</sup> The primary cause of the windigo psychosis, in his view, was the trauma of having to resort to cannibalism despite this profound aversion:

*Cannibalism was resorted to by the Cree only in cases where actual starvation threatened. Driven to desperation by prolonged famine and often suffering from mental breakdown as a result thereof, the Cree would sometimes eat the bodies of those who had perished, or, more rarely, would even kill the living and partake of the flesh. This solution, however, of the conflict between hunger and the rigid tribal taboo often left, as its aftermath, an “unnatural” craving for human flesh, or a psychosis that took the form of such a craving. More rarely such a psychosis developed in men or women who had not themselves previously passed through famine experience.*<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Émile Saindon, “Mental Disorders among the James Bay Cree,” *Primitive Man* 6, no. 1 (January 1933): 1-12. Saindon also referred to this in an earlier text, Saindon, *En missionnant essai sur les missions des Pères Oblats de Marie Immaculée* (Ottawa: Imprimerie du Droit, 1928), 27-28.

<sup>48</sup> James B. Waldram argues that Saindon’s article was “highly influential,” but there is no evidence that this was the case. Attributing the genesis of “windigo psychosis” to what is probably the weakest argument for it seems a quick way to avoid dealing with some of the stronger arguments. *Revenge of the Windigo. The Construction of the Mind and Mental Health of North American Aboriginal Peoples* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 192. Hollowell’s 1934 article, discussed below, cites John M. Cooper’s work but makes no mention of Saindon. Hollowell, “Culture and Mental Disorder,” 2. Ernest S. Burch Jr. refers to Cooper’s 1933 article, discussed below, as seminal in the discussion, but makes no reference to Saindon’s article. Ernest S. Burch Jr., “The Ethnography of Northern North America: A Guide to Recent Research,” *Arctic Anthropology* 16, no. 1 (1979), 79.

<sup>49</sup> M. Jean Black, in response to Marano’s 1982 article, asks why “Cooper elaborate[d] on Saindon’s account in such a way?” Black, in Marano, “Windigo Psychosis,” 399.

<sup>50</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko Psychosis,” *Primitive Man* 6, no. 1 (January 1933), 21-24.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

“Witiko psychosis” was “derived *directly* from prevalent environmental and cultural conditions.” Given that winter was the season when famine threatened most, the idea of transformation into an icy-hearted *wihtiko* was “derived *indirectly*, through the Witiko folk-lore concept, from the same conditions.”<sup>52</sup> This exploratory article left a key question unanswered, as Marano put it: why would the trauma lead to a psychosis that either *included a craving for human flesh* or *took such a form*?<sup>53</sup> Cooper could not say which it was. Nor did he clarify whether the psychosis led to actual non-starvation cannibalism, but his initial assertion that the Cree resorted to cannibalism “*only* in cases where actual starvation threatened” suggests he did not think so.

Cooper provided no further answers when he reiterated his assessment of *wihtiko* ‘psychosis’ in a 1934 article on “Mental disease situations in certain cultures - a new field for research.” As the title implied and as he pointed out explicitly, however, his purpose was “to propose, not to solve, these problems, and to suggest more intensive field study of the facts among peoples of cultures different from our own.” In the interim, his “conclusions are of their nature hypothetical and provisional only.”<sup>54</sup> As he made clear in introducing the first issue of *Primitive Man*, a journal he co-founded in 1928, Cooper was wary of “reckless” theorization:

The realm of interpretation is and has been the happy hunting-ground of the reckless theorist. A sudden inspiration comes to some dreamer in his studio. The inspiration looks like an idea from on high. It seems at first blush to explain the whole sweep of human culture or of some phase thereof. Evidence is of course needed to buttress the theory. Finding such evidence in the vast storehouses filled with ethnological facts is often as easy as picking pebbles on the seashore. A score or two of facts are assembled, and behold a new doctrine born into an expectant world.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Marano, “Windigo,” 388.

<sup>54</sup> Cooper, “Mental Disease,” 14 & 17. Cooper summarized data relating to “the incidence, etiology, and types of mental disorder among” five different “primitive cultures,” including the Eastern Cree. He underlined these caveats in the introduction and conclusion to his article.

<sup>55</sup> John M. Cooper, “Present-Day Anthropology: Its Spirit and Trend,” *Primitive Man* 1, no. 1 (January 1928): 4.

According to Cooper, however, anthropologists had done a fairly thorough house cleaning, eliminating theories proven “premature and insufficiently grounded on facts.”<sup>56</sup> Ironically, Cooper’s 1933 treatment of the *wihtiko* as a ‘psychosis’ “set the tone for two generations of scholarship” of which Marano was highly critical for theorizing on weak evidence.<sup>57</sup>

Cooper may have been too quick to treat the *wihtiko* ‘psychosis’ as fact, but this was what Cree stories and histories had spoken about. To be fair to Marano, the field evidence that Cooper had relied upon was not published until 1982, after Marano had made his review of the literature.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Marano’s critique of Cooper, for describing “witiko psychosis” as “common ... among the eastern Cree and kindred tribes,” omitted evidence that Cooper was referring to the commonality of *wihtiko* reports *across* Algonquian geo-cultural space rather than its frequency over time.<sup>59</sup> In Cooper’s 1934 article – listed but ignored in Marano’s literature review – he stated specifically that “[t]his type of psychosis, while very *characteristic*, is naturally *not of frequent* occurrence.”<sup>60</sup> It was for cultural reasons, Cooper explained, that

[Cree] forms of mental disorder are almost exclusively, apart from the *rare* Wihtiko psychosis, of an introvert order. Suicidal and homicidal mania appears entirely absent. ... Murder is unknown among them; fighting, wounding and bodily violence, particularly bloodshed, are frowned upon by their cultural standards and are almost unknown.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 388.

<sup>58</sup> Marano writes that despite contending that his article was based on his field notes, “he did not present a single specific instance of windigo psychosis or any evidence of firsthand observation of such behavior.” *Ibid.*, 387-388. The stories collected by Cooper, however, were only published posthumously in 1981 by his student, Regina Flannery. Cooper published some field evidence relating to early conceptions of the *wihtiko* in a separate 1933 article, but did not publish any of the accounts considered by the Cree to refer to recent history. Flannery’s comment in the 1982 article, however, suggests that she and Cooper may have avoided publishing the accounts in the 1930s because of lingering Cree fears of prosecution for *wihtiko* killings. See discussion above and below. Flannery et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 59; Cooper, “Northern Algonquian.”

<sup>59</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko,” 20; Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 388.

<sup>60</sup> Cooper, “Mental Disease,” 15; Marano, “Windigo Psychosis,” 387-388 & 410.

<sup>61</sup> Emphasis added. Cooper, “Mental Disease,” 11 & 15.

If the “rare Wihtiko psychosis” was limited to Eastern Algonquians, it was not on account of “racial heredity or environment,” but culture.<sup>62</sup> Yet it was not a sign of the disorder, degeneracy or stagnancy that some associated with ‘primitive’ cultures:

Does the incidence of mental disease increase with the advance of material civilization? ... Are mental disorders *more frequent* among civilized than among primitive peoples? It would appear as if hysteria is no respecter of levels of material culture, and for that matter, of race, environment or culture. The graver psychoses – which are probably the disorders referred to as ‘insanity’ or ‘madness’ in the anthropological literature – are seemingly more rare. They are very rare, for instance, among the American Indian. A great many, probably the great bulk, of the psychopathic phenomena observed among primitive peoples are duplicated in our own civilization. We have almost nothing in the way of individual case investigation that would throw light upon the causes of these disorders.<sup>63</sup>

Cooper based his findings on both archival research and fieldwork, some of which were also published in a much longer 1933 article on “The Northern Algonquian Supreme Being,” in which he recorded and assessed Cree and Euroamerican statements about, or understandings of, the *wihtiko* (recorded by himself or drawn from Western historical documents).<sup>64</sup> The focus was on understanding the origin and evolution of Cree notions of good and evil spirits, and, above all, the Supreme Being or Creator God. The evidence he gathered suggested that the *Wihtiko*, like *Manitu*, was a pre-contact concept, but had nonetheless been influenced by Christianity. This finding was echoed four years later by Bailey in his ground-breaking, but largely ignored,

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<sup>62</sup> Cooper’s phrasing is a little confusing on this topic, because he refers to the Wihtiko psychosis and the “amok disorder of the Malay” as “genetically related to prevalent culture.” Nevertheless, by ‘genetically’ he was not referring to ‘genetics’ as understood today, but to “genesis” or “origins.” His conclusion makes this very clear. *Ibid.*, 15 & 17.

<sup>63</sup> Cooper, *Ibid.*, 14. Note that the original refers to “American Indidans” but I have corrected this obvious typographical error. Hysteria and phobias were more common, though “there is very little that is peculiar to such hysteria and phobias among the Eastern Cree as compared with phenomena commonly found in our own [non-Cree] civilization.” *Ibid.*, 11. A comment by Hallowell in a 1936 article explains the context of Cooper’s questions: “So far as the gross incidence of clinically recognized mental disorders is concerned, it has been casually asserted from time to time, that there is an increase in mental disease as a marked symptom of the stress and strain of modern life in western civilization in contrast to a relatively low incidence of such disorders among so-called primitive peoples.” Hallowell, “Psychic Stresses,” 1292.

<sup>64</sup> Cooper, “Northern Algonquian.”

cultural history, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700*.<sup>65</sup> Cooper and his student Regina Flannery also recorded many more recent *wihtiko* stories in the 1930s, but they were not published until the early 1980s, likely because some Crees had expressed reluctance to share these stories for fear of prosecution.<sup>66</sup>

Speck's treatment of the *wihtiko* was more tentative than Cooper's or Saindon's. Although he recorded a number of Montagnais-Naskapi accounts, he did not propose any firm interpretation of his own. He also expressed deep suspicion of allegations of actual cannibalism. Perhaps aware of the same fears that had been expressed to Flannery, or of how *wihtiko* stories had been misconstrued already, he stated that the only documented case he had heard of in the previous twenty years involved White perpetrators and an Indian victim.<sup>67</sup>

Speck's student, Hallowell, took up where Cooper and others had left off, with a 1934 article published in *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. Verifying Cooper's conclusion, according to Hallowell, required good data that was "woefully lacking ... [and] even a careful combing of ethnographic and historical literature will not supply it."<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, there were considerations and evidence from the Berens River Anishinabe that he thought could be brought to bear on the matter.

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<sup>65</sup> Bailey, *Conflict*. Bailey cited stories of the *chenoo* – an ostensibly equivalent Mi'kmaw variation for the *wihtiko* – as an example of Eastern Algonquian folklore that showed Euroamerican and Christian influence, but had pre-contact origins. He drew from folklore collections of Rand and Leland.

<sup>66</sup> Flannery et al., "Witiko Accounts," 59. The threat of prosecution was still real. See: "Lone Winter Patrol," *Wainwright Record*, January 1, 1934, which reports on a *wihtiko* case under investigation in the north by the RCMP.

<sup>67</sup> Speck, *Naskapi*, 36-39, 67-71. Citing several informants and one complete *wihtiko* story, Speck describes the appearance and nature of this being, and other variations on it, in Montagnais-Naskapi oral tradition. His observations are useful and cautious and he lets his informants speak rather than draw conclusions himself. He notes that "there is not one single authentic instance of anthropophagy within the area among the Indians themselves, although one actual case within the last twenty years is on documentary record where whites were guilty of it and an Indian the victim ... rumors of actual cannibalism have been confused with fact. The Indians feel that *wi'tigo* is a reality – therefore they believe cannibalism exists." *Ibid.*, 37. Marano omitted this comment by Speck in his 1982 review of the *wihtiko* literature. Marano, "Windigo Psychosis," 386. Note that Speck was likely referring to the incident recorded in "Trapper was Cannibal? Finding of Man Half Insane May Clear Up Mystery," *Detroit Free Press*, February 7, 1909, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Hallowell, "Culture and Mental Disorder," 2.

It made sense, argued Hallowell, that the etiology (causes), form, and frequency of mental disorders might differ from one culture to another. For example, the “same mental disorder ... may occur in different cultures but the particular *form* which its symptoms take may be a reflection of these cultural differences.” Conversely, if variations existed in the “temperament and personality types” that different cultures nurtured as normal or discouraged as abnormal, then one could expect cultural variations in “character and incidence of at least certain classes of mental derangement.” Regardless, one had to be careful to examine phenomena from the point of view of what the culture in question deemed within or beyond the “normal range of individual behaviour.” In the context of a culture that supported belief in certain experiences, belief that one was undergoing such an experience could not be deemed sign of a mental disorder, whereas in another culture it might well be a sign of hallucination or obsession.<sup>69</sup>

Applying this to the “wihtigo psychosis,” Hallowell “seriously question[ed] whether all such cases can be considered as pathological in character, although some of them undoubtedly are.” Among the Berens River Anishinabe, he explained, certain physical symptoms such as “distaste for ordinary types of food, nausea and perhaps vomiting” were associated by the individual and his community with early stages of *wihtiko* transformation, possibly as the result of witchcraft; if such symptoms persisted, the anxiety of both the individual and his community would increase.<sup>70</sup> Compounding this was the

failure to rationally consider alternative causes of the physical symptoms, a possibility unconsidered on account of the cultural attitudes engendered by the positive emphasis imposed by the witchcraft belief and the association of the symptoms with the *wihtigo* concept. Individual experience is immediately shunted into a vicious circle of belief patterns from which there is no escape. The individual affected is usually watched day and night by some relative and, in former times, a medicine man would probably be consulted. If there

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-6. This appears to be a criticism of Saindon’s assessment. These arguments were reiterated by Hallowell in 1936 in “Psychic Stresses.”

<sup>70</sup> Hallowell, “Culture and Mental Disorder,” 7-8.

were no improvement the afflicted one would often ask to be killed and this desire was usually gratified.<sup>71</sup>

Hallowell then distinguished between cases where the initial anxiety does not develop beyond its initial stage, and those where

the anxiety neurosis becomes progressive. In these latter cases (of which I have no specific records) the individual does not merely develop a fear of becoming cannibalistic but may exhibit a positive desire for human flesh, or even take steps to satisfy this desire. In such cases, it seems to me, we may have some type of homicidal obsession, conditioned in *form* by the peculiarities of the *wihtigo* belief pattern. But the cases of which I have knowledge were only in the initial anxiety stage and the persons affected were either killed or they recovered. ... If we had a well investigated series of case studies of the so-called “wihtigo psychosis” it might turn out that some of them could be relegated to a variety of generic types of mental disorders, comparable with those of other cultures, while others might prove to be only mildly abnormal, if pathological at all.<sup>72</sup>

Marano later critiqued Hallowell for taking his informants’ accounts “at face value,” and “quickly confirm[ing] the existence of the disorder,” and that it “would have been appropriate for him to have been more sceptical of its existence.”<sup>73</sup> Hallowell was, in fact, quite sceptical, even if he expressed it poorly when he referred to “one of those numerous cases of *cannibalistic desires* (the so-called ‘windigo psychoses’), which occur so typically among Cree and Ojibwa Indians.”<sup>74</sup> Despite this apparent conflation of “reports” and “cases” of “*cannibalistic desires*,” Hallowell elsewhere took great care not only to distinguish between emic (cultural insider) and etic (cultural outsider) perspectives, but also to show the limits of both. His argument on this point is worth quoting again:

the mental habit of viewing the external objects of what we call the natural world in terms of established scientific knowledge about them, has so completely divorced our minds from other possible attitudes that we are even apt to attribute our point of view to innate intelligence or common sense, instead of to a traditionally acquired mode of thought.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis,” 388.

<sup>74</sup> Italics in original. Hallowell, “Psychic Stresses,” 1308 and Hallowell, “Fear and Anxiety,” 25-47. Marano listed both these articles, but only briefly cited one of them.

<sup>75</sup> Emphasis added. Hallowell, “Psychic Stresses,” 1295.

Hallowell reiterated this point in an 1838 article:

the Berens River Indian *is* responding to a *real* danger when he flees from a cannibal monster or murders a human being who is turning into a windigo, or when he becomes apprehensive in a certain disease situation. To act or feel otherwise would stamp an individual either as a fool or as a phenomenal example of intellectual emancipation. Furthermore, the Indians themselves are able to point out plenty of tangible empirical evidence that supports the interpretation of the realities that their culture imposes upon their minds (3). They are naive empiricists but not naively irrational.<sup>76</sup>

Ultimately, he rejected as a “fallacy” the idea that “the culturally constituted fears and defenses of primitive peoples are evidence of ‘cultural neuroses’ which are of the same order as the neurosis of individuals in Western civilization.”<sup>77</sup> Moreover, “further investigation will probably reveal that the cannibalistic pattern functions as a cloak for a variety of mental processes.” Echoing Cooper, he concluded by apologizing for “the fragmentary nature of my facts, and the extended inferences ... drawn from them,” but indicated that his purpose was “not the solving of problems, but the pointing out of the relevance of anthropological field data” to such questions.<sup>78</sup>

Landes was the next scholar to examine Ojibwa depictions and understandings of *wihtiko* at some length, in 1938, and advance her own psychological explanations. These explanations were also shaped by her interpretation – later heavily criticized – of Ojibwa society as highly atomistic.<sup>79</sup> The “*windigo* syndrome,” in her view, was a personality disorder that found particular expression among the Ojibwa and their geo-cultural neighbours.

<sup>76</sup> Hallowell, “Fear and Anxiety,” 37-38.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. As Hallowell pointed out, those who argued otherwise were guilty of the same “logical fallacy” that “Primitive peoples are sometimes accused [of making:] ... an inference that two phenomena are identical if one or more elements are shared in common.”

<sup>78</sup> Hallowell, “Fear and Anxiety,” 1309-1310. Hallowell prefaced his 1936 discussion of cases by pointing out that “the psychological interpretation in each case is sheer guesswork on my part ... for the most part, I have depended on hearsay evidence. ... it can hardly be considered a contribution towards the solution of the problem I have stated, but it does illustrate one angle of attack which a more systematic, detailed investigation might take. Its value can best be judged if this fact is borne in mind.” Hallowell, “Psychic Stresses,” 1298-1299.

<sup>79</sup> Joan A. Lovisek, Tim E. Holzkamm, and Leo G. Waisberg, cited and echoed Marano’s critique of the *wihtiko* psychosis in their own critique of Ruth Landes “atomistic Ojibwa,” which informed her interpretation of the *wihtiko*. “Fatal Errors: Ruth Landes and the Creation of the ‘Atomistic Ojibwa,’” *Anthropologica* 39, no. 1/2 (1997): 133-145. The “atomistic Ojibwa,” they write, was a “construct compounded almost equally of fatal ethnographic and historical errors.” *Ibid.*, 141.

Hunger-anxiety is a fundamental emotion which *windigo* sufferers have seized upon for the path of their deviation. ... The human *windigo* shows characteristic and conventional mood disorders. Usually the first manifestation of insanity is a state of melancholia. ... People suffering from melancholia are simply arrested *windigos*. *Windigos* are simply melancholics whipped out of their apathy.<sup>80</sup>

Although the “windigo disorder” stemmed, in part, from “an exaggeration of the universal worry over starvation”, whether actual or imminent, culture rather than environment was the primary factor. This was evidenced, she argued, by the absence of a comparable phenomenon among neighbouring peoples like the Inuit, who faced no less of a threat of starvation, and the relative freedom of Ojibwa women from the disorder:

In men ideas of personal reference, distrust and fear of one’s fellows, and paranoid aggression towards others are culturally inculcated. A man unless he becomes non-participating, carries a terrific load of anxiety which only increases with success. A good hunter knows that because he *is* a good hunter, he is a mark for the sorcerer.<sup>81</sup>

The most vulnerable of men, however, was the shaman or sorcerer himself, especially the one who “exerts power over people for his own private ends”:

when he is successful, he is regarded not as having attained security, but as having become more vulnerable. The neuroses and psychoses which flourish in such soil are conditioned by this ethos. They are severe anxiety neuroses with special reference to food, and they manifest themselves in melancholia, violence and obsessive cannibalism. For all these manifestations the Ojibwa have one term: *windigo*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ruth Landes, *The Ojibwa Woman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 213-226 (citation from 214-215); Landes, “The Abnormal among the Ojibwa Indians,” *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 33, no. 1 (January 1938): 14-33. “The sufferer is torn between several ideas. One is his realization of starvation, and his dread of it. Furthermore, since there is no food, human food may be substituted. Of course this is not a spontaneous idea but has all the weight of legend behind it. The sufferer realized that it is horrible to eat human beings, and the conflict between the desire to do so and the repugnance at the idea, gradually resolves itself in the delusion that people ‘look like beavers,’ and therefore the eating of them is not cannibalism.” She acknowledges that not all *windigos* begin with starvation, but may arise from other disorders and other disorders may be attributed to *windigo*; there is a point after which the “*windigo* has ceased to rank as human.” Landes, *Ojibwa Woman*, 216-218, 222.

<sup>81</sup> Landes, “Abnormal,” 30-31. The “culturally inculcated masculine pursuit of power, the ideas of personal reference, the penalizing of success—those things which make a capable man only the more conspicuous target for envy, are the aspects of Ojibwa male ethos which underlie the marked neuroses and psychoses which are termed *windigo*.” *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 24. Landes reiterated, but did not elaborate on these arguments in her 1968 study of *Ojibwa Religion and the Midéwiwin* (Madison, Milwaukee & London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 7, 12-14, 31, 58.

Commenting on Landes' analysis in the 1938 *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, editor Allport observed that the "peculiar cannibalistic compulsions and the Windigo delusion from which the deranged Ojibwa suffers ... clearly demonstrate ... dependence of the morphology of insanity upon folklore and preestablished social attitudes."<sup>83</sup> Throughout the 1940s, and into the mid-1950s, arguments about "windigo psychosis" advanced by Cooper, Saindon, Hallowell and Landes were picked up in similar ways by other scholars in social sciences.<sup>84</sup>

#### **CULTURE-BOUND PSYCHOSIS TO ALGONQUIANIST 'MYTH'?**

Other scholars, however, continued to express great scepticism on account of the weak evidentiary record. In a 1952 review of *Psychoanalysis and Culture*, a book that made no mention of the *wihtiko*, the co-authors found themselves reminded "so much of all those papers I have read about windigo that do not contain a single description of one real Ojibwa afflicted with

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<sup>83</sup> "When a mind becomes disordered, its conscious content, the symbols it uses, its delusional mold, and the character of its compulsions, all show unmistakable dependence upon the pre-vailing ideology and practices within the culture." G.W. Allport, "An editorial," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 33, no. 1 (1938): 8.

<sup>84</sup> John Gillin, "Personality in Preliterate Societies," *American Sociological Review* 4, No. 5 (October 1939): 690. Gillin writes: "The witigio or windigow psychosis seems to be confined to the Algonkians of the northeast. According to descriptions by Cooper (35, 36), Hallowell (78, 79), and Saindon (181), the condition appears to have definite cultural components. These people are hunters who sometimes suffer from meat scarcity. Although a strong cultural tabu is placed upon cannibalism in any form, individuals occasionally resort to it in desperation. The witigo psychosis is characterized by an obsessive craving for human flesh and exaggerated delusions of traffic with cannibal monsters." Leonard S. Cottrell Jr. and Ruth Gallagher make a brief mention of Landes' explanation of the *wihtiko* in "Important Developments in American Social Psychology During the Past Decade," *Sociometry* 4, no. 2 (May 1941): 118. The goal of this broad review of anthropological literature was to show that questions of personality had not been entirely ignored. Green, "Culture," 225-237. Green cited *wihtiko* cases to show that "standards of normality are relevant only within a given cultural system." *Ibid.*, 225. Regina Flannery suggested that "one might check this hypothesis which is here offered with some hesitation: namely, that the cannibal giant, as this character functions in northern Cree and Montagnais folklore may serve as a release for the fear, anxiety and hatred which are fairly well blocked by social convention." Flannery, "Algonquian Indian Folklore," *The Journal of American Folklore* 60, no. 238 (Oct-Dec 1947): 397-401, citation from 400.

the windigo psychosis!”<sup>85</sup> The scepticism, moreover, was not limited to non-Algonquianist scholars. As an ethno-botanist who spent many months over several years immersed in the bush-life of the Mistissini Cree, Rousseau was not likely to reduce the *wihtiko*, as Underhill did, to a creature of imaginations immersed in “the gloom of the forest.”<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, he was quite sceptical of some *wihtiko* allegations:

Le windigo ... n'est pas un démon, mais un homme qui a mangé de la chair humaine. Cela lui confère des propriétés extraordinaires. Extérieurement, il ressemble aux autres hommes, mais on le fuit. J'ai connu un windigo; il fut même mon cuisinier dans la toundra. Il fabriquait un excellent pain, mais j'aimais moins ses sauces à la viande.”<sup>87</sup>

During this period, *wihtiko* stories or incidents were recorded and sometimes examined in longer articles on other topics. In a lengthy 1947 article on Cree-Naskapi law, Lips recorded and briefly examined one nineteenth-century *wihtiko* case, in which the killing of an alleged *wihtiko* appears to have been questioned by other Crees.<sup>88</sup> Scholars of Western law were also taking greater notice of the *Regina v. Machekequonabe* or Fiddler trial, discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>89</sup> Beck recorded three Maniwaki elders' brief accounts or explanations of the *wihtiko* in an article

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<sup>85</sup> Jules Henry and George Winokur, review of *Psychoanalysis and Culture: Essays in Honor of Geza Roheim*, by George B. Wilbur and Warner Muensterberger, *American Anthropologist* 54, no. 3 (July - September 1952): 413-414.

<sup>86</sup> Ruth Underhill, “Religion Among American Indians,” in *American Indians and American Life*, ed. George Eaton Simpson and J. Milton Yinger, 127-136, in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 311 (Philadelphia: American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1957), 130.

<sup>87</sup> Jacques Rousseau, *Persistances païennes chez les Indiens de la forêt boréale* (Montreal: Cahiers des dix, 1953; first published in 1952 as an article in *Cahiers des dix*, no. 17): 19-20. In this same article, Rousseau observed slight differentiations between “koukoudje” (a giant cannibal more man than manitu, but coming from both), “atchin” (giant cannibal) and “windigo.” Elsewhere, he described “windigo” as “un être promu à un rang démoniaque pour avoir mangé la chair de ses semblables.” Rousseau, “La malchance de Pitewabano,” 34. See also Jacques and Madeleine Rousseau, “Le dualisme religieux,” 119. Rousseau later explained to Teicher that the “cannibal” he knew had eaten the body of his brother who had died in a time of famine (about 300 miles north of Sept Iles, between 1935 and 1940). Teicher writes: “He (the windigo cook) was neither rejected nor feared; however, there was nevertheless a mental restriction towards him.” Cited in Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 80.

<sup>88</sup> Lips, “Naskapi Law,” 411-412.

<sup>89</sup> Watson, “Reflections,” 705. See also: Williams, “Homicide.” See previous chapter for more details.

on “Algonquin Folklore from Maniwaki.”<sup>90</sup> Barnouw made brief reference to the *wihtiko* in “A Psychological Interpretation of Chippewa Origin Legend,” describing it as an “expression of ... concern” about “the dangers of famine ... for people were said to turn into windigog (greedy cannibal giants) as a result of prolonged hunger.”<sup>91</sup> In a chapter on “Cultural Factors in the Structuralization of Perception,” Hallowell echoed his earlier argument against seeing perceptions of the *wihtiko* as evidence of psychosis; rather, culture shaped the structures of what could be considered a normal perception.<sup>92</sup> These arguments were later republished in his 1955 collection of essays entitled *Culture and Experience*.<sup>93</sup>

It was only in the mid-1950s that significant new research began to appear on the question of the “windigo psychosis.” In 1953, Honigmann cited an oral tradition on the Swift Runner case as evidence that the “so-called *wiitiko psychosis*” extended beyond the “classical area of this specialized psychopathology ... between Lake Winnipeg and Labrador.” Although accounts were “rarely clear, apparently because no anthropologist has as yet interviewed a native affected by this malady,” the frequency of the theme in their stories was “evidence that the idea of cannibalism constitutes a ‘focus’ in Cree culture.” The Athapaskan (Dene) and other northern peoples experienced and expressed concern about both starvation and cannibalism, but had no equivalent “pattern of cannibalistic psychosis encountered among the eastern Cree,” who “[a]pparently ... took up this widespread concern and elaborated it into a subject of obsession, compulsion, and fancies of transformation.” Echoing Hallowell, however, Honigmann also

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<sup>90</sup> Horace P. Beck, “Algonquin Folklore from Maniwaki,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 60, no. 237 (July-September 1947): 261-262. Beck’s 1967 compilation of Mi’kmaw tales also included *wihtiko* stories. Beck, *Gluskap the Liar & Other Indian Tales* (Freeport, Maine: The Bond Wheel-Wright Company, 1967), 164.

<sup>91</sup> Victor Barnouw, “A Psychological Interpretation of a Chippewa Origin Legend,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 68, no. 269 (July-September 1955): 342.

<sup>92</sup> A. I. Hallowell, “Cultural Factors in the Structuralization of Perception,” in *Social Psychology at the Crossroads*, ed. John H. Rohrer and Muzafer Sherif, 164-195 (New York: Harper, 1951), 182-185.

<sup>93</sup> Hallowell, *Culture and Experience*.

acknowledged that “belief in the transformation itself,” given its support by the cultural community, was “not diagnostic of psychopathology.”<sup>94</sup>

In 1956, Hallowell’s implicit call – repeated now by Honigmann – for a “well investigated series of case studies of the so-called ‘wihtigo psychosis’” was answered by Teicher’s “Windigo Psychosis: A Study of a Relationship between Belief and Behavior among the Indians of Northeastern Canada.”<sup>95</sup> Teicher collected and analyzed 70 confirmed or alleged historical *wihtiko* cases and 33 stories from across North America. His “twofold purpose” was to “analyze and explain, if possible, the windigo concept and windigo psychosis” and to explore the “relationship between belief and behaviour, *particularly under conditions of mental instability*.”<sup>96</sup> Although he drew from Kohl’s work, Teicher’s interpretation mirrored but did not credit that of Kohl:

Cannibalism is a major element in both the windigo belief and the windigo behaviour, but the actual eating of another person is not crucial for assessing an individual as a case of windigo psychosis. The evidence suggests that an individual becomes a cannibal because he is considered to be a case of windigo psychosis, rather than developing windigo psychosis because of cannibalism. This is a significant demonstration of the causative impact of belief on behaviour.<sup>97</sup>

The concept and belief were “built up by inductions from actual experiences of starvation and cannibalism ... [and] embellished by fearsome stories until ... [they] became a fact of life.”

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<sup>94</sup> Honigmann, “European and Other Tales,” 328-330. He cited Saindon, Cooper and Landes as well as his own field notes. Citing Cooper in another 1953 article, Honigmann commented: “Perhaps our definition of psychopathology provides a new perspective from which to understand the relationship of group membership to psychiatric abnormality. For example, crudely speaking, it is much more likely that we would find ourselves saddled with an obsessive fear of cannibalism had we been bred as members of a Cree Indian band in northern Canada rather than as members of rural or urban American communities.” Honigmann, “Toward a Distinction between Psychiatric and Social Abnormality,” *Social Forces* 31, no. 3 (Mar 1953): 276. Honigmann reiterated many of these same points in his 1954 monograph *Culture and Personality* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), 380-381.

<sup>95</sup> Hallowell, “Culture and Mental,” 8; Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1956). As noted already, this thesis was published in 1960. The 1956 and 1960 texts are essentially identical.

<sup>96</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 1-3.

<sup>97</sup> Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 1-3. As Fogelson points out in his review of the 1960 publication of Teicher’s thesis, it was “somewhat surprising that Kohl, whose windigo case material is reprinted [by Teicher], is not given due credit for having clearly anticipated by a hundred years Teicher’s principal thesis of the primacy of belief over behavior.” Raymond D. Fogelson, review of “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), by Teicher, *The Journal of American Folklore* 75, no. 297, *Symposium on Obscenity in Folklore* (July-September 1962): 267.

Belief in spirit possession was also an important factor.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, *wihtiko* psychosis was “a relatively rare phenomenon,” and a culture-bound psychosis only insofar as it was the sole Algonquian explanation for a wide array of deviant behaviour, mental disturbances, psychological and sometimes even physical ailments that could affect any human population. The “belief system channelled the nature of the disturbance, the way in which it was perceived and the accompanying behavior ... any unexplained form of deviant behavior was seen in the light of the windigo belief.”<sup>99</sup> In his introduction, however, Teicher had presented the *wihtiko* as an ideal case study of a “particular form of mental illness, peculiar to a particular culture.”<sup>100</sup> This is the characterization that was retained by many.

Teicher’s study provided much information and many insights but did not distinguish sufficiently between different Algonquian traditions and was flawed by determinist and reductionist tendencies, both with regard to Algonquians’ personality, and their *wihtiko* beliefs.<sup>101</sup> He attributed great flexibility of interpretation to the *wihtiko* belief itself and almost none to those who held it. On the contrary, he claimed that for a fairly wide range of symptoms, “the force of native belief is such that only one diagnosis is possible and, consequently, only one form of treatment is appropriate.”<sup>102</sup> His determination to “identify the laws governing human behavior” – his assumption that human behaviour is reducible to laws, however complex – may have determined or funnelled his conclusions in much the same way he suggested Algonquian

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<sup>98</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1956), 380, 382-383.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 373 and 380. “The form and expression of mental illness was channelled by the culture with its focus on the windigo concept as a central theme. The underlying forces which converged on the individual to produce a breakdown in living are ultimately not dissimilar from the biological, psychological, social and cultural forces which are found in man all over the world. But the conscious content of the illness, the symbols used, the delusional mold, the distortions of reality and the character of the compulsions are unmistakably dependent on the prevailing belief system and the traditional practices within the culture.” *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Teicher argued that “Anxieties were undoubtedly created by the cultural demand that feelings be restrained ... personality structure was extremely rigid ... the typical personality was highly introverted; feelings were not expressed and the need for affection was muted.” *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 & 220. In this, he echoed Hallowell’s view that “Individual experience is immediately shunted into a vicious circle of belief patterns from which there is no escape.” Hallowell, “Culture and Mental Disorder,” 7.

actions were rigidly determined by their beliefs.<sup>103</sup> It was this problem that Eleanor Leacock highlighted in her review of his study:

Teicher's [description of Algonquian personality] is easily drawn from the literature – if one selectively ignores additional material which shifts the significance of these characteristics and rounds the Indians out into the whole people one comes to know in the field. One must ignore their gaiety, banter and horse-play, their sudden outbursts of irritation, their deep and quiet expressions of love and closeness, their intense sorrow over lost loved ones sometimes expressed over an evening fire. One must ignore the Indians whose culturally defined admonition is not restraint, but the achievement of good feeling.<sup>104</sup>

To be fair to Teicher, he did not suggest that such rigidity applied to all members or aspects of Algonquian culture or that it was peculiar to Indigenous North Americans. He indicated that such rigidity occurred during “rare” incidents that evoked great fear and anxiety. In such contexts, there would certainly be a greater tendency to conserve old interpretations, especially in more isolated geo-cultural contexts where alternative interpretations were neither readily available nor easily processed because of language and other barriers. Teicher's thesis received much attention on account of its extensive collection of cases.<sup>105</sup>

That same year, Vandersteene, an Oblate missionary and amateur ethnologist, published *Wabasca: dix ans de vie indienne*, in which he transcribed and analyzed a number of Woodland Cree traditions and legends.<sup>106</sup> Vandersteene had collected a number of stories, among them the

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<sup>103</sup> Teicher, “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), 2.

<sup>104</sup> Eleanor Leacock, review of “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), by Teicher, *Ethnohistory* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1962): 208. She argues that Teicher's “formulation of the relationship between belief and behaviour is too monistic and oversimplified,” but her criticism does not stop here. She shows how his analysis of Algonquian personality traits draws too much from popular stereotypes and not enough from the historical and anthropological evidence available. *Ibid.*, 206-208. Fogelson was equally critical on this point, arguing that “belief and behavior are interdependent factors.” Fogelson, review of “Windigo Psychosis,” 267. Philippe Garrigue echoed their critique, pointing out that Teicher attempted to deal with this theme “in 20 lines of text.” Garrigue, review of “Windigo Psychosis” (1960), by Teicher, *Man* 62 (July 1962): 110-111.

<sup>105</sup> It was published in 1960 as a special addendum to the *Proceedings of the 1960 Annual Spring meeting of the American Ethnological Society*. Teicher returned to the topic with a 1962 article that summarized his findings: “The Windigo belief was built up by induction from actual experiences of starvation and cannibalism. It was embellished by fearsome stories until the belief became a fact of life.” Morton I. Teicher, “‘Windigo’ Psychosis among Algonkian-speaking Indians,” *International Journal of Parapsychology* 4 (winter 1962): 19.

<sup>106</sup> Roger Vandersteene, *Wabasca: dix ans de vie indienne*, trans. Jacques De Deken (Gemmenich, Belgium: Éditions OMI, 1960; originally published in Dutch). Nine years later, his transcription and analysis of these narratives was published in an academic journal. Vandersteene, “Some Woodland.”

second-hand account of a *wihtiko*-killing that had happened before his arrival, as well as the first-hand account of a woman who was suffering extreme anxiety for fear that she was ‘going *wihtiko*.’ She pleaded with Vandersteene to help her: “‘Man of prayer, help me! I don’t want to be a Witigo.’” Vandersteene had her placed in a hospital, and when the doctor could find nothing wrong, Vandersteene advised him to tell her that she was suffering from a physical illness and provide her with fake pills to convince her that she was not becoming a *wihtiko*.<sup>107</sup> “From many events,” he commented,

I think I can conclude that the Witigo is a pathological case, a kind of madness. The fear which it inspires, which is held from childhood, becomes an obsession in a weakened mind. Under obsessive pressure, the poor wretch, who in more civilized countries would be placed in an insane asylum, believes he has become a Witigo. His imagination sets in motion the instincts of the Witigo which force him to commit the acts which he has heard described since early childhood. ... I do not believe in the existence of the Witigo such as it has been fashioned by the imagination of the Indians, but I know that human beings have fallen victim to this imagination: human-Witigos which have killed and eaten other men and which have been killed in turn.<sup>108</sup>

Vandersteene’s article did not engage with the existing literature, but it was grounded in first-hand experience of some who engaged deeply with the Cree and their world, and who considered the Cree no less inclined to philosophical inquiry than any other people.<sup>109</sup> He provided additional first-hand evidence of the impact of the fear of *wihtiko* possession. It would be largely ignored, however, until Brightman cited it in 1988.<sup>110</sup>

If Vandersteene had much familiarity with Algonquians in the bush but little familiarity with the academic literature, Parker’s situation was just the opposite.<sup>111</sup> As Marano later observed, he was among those scholars who began to examine the *wihtiko* phenomenon without

<sup>107</sup> Vandersteene, “Some Woodland,” 53-58.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

<sup>109</sup> “In a way resembling every man, the Cree is a philosopher by temperament.” Elsewhere he writes: “I try to be ‘Cree among the Crees’ and share with them their most rich, poetic, and wise beliefs.” *Ibid.*, 40 and 54.

<sup>110</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 351.

<sup>111</sup> Seymour Parker, “The Wiitiko Psychosis in the Context of Ojibwa Personality and Culture,” *American Anthropologist* 62, no. 4 (August 1960): 603-623. Parker did not refer to Teicher’s whose work was only published that same year; he relied, instead on the work of Cooper, Landes, Hallowell and Honigmann.

ever having “see[n] a bush Indian in their lives.”<sup>112</sup> Responding to Hallowell and building off Landes, Parker argued in 1960 that “the wiitiko psychosis ... [was] not ... a complete and qualitative departure from normal personality, but ... an outgrowth (albeit a pathological one) from it,” in which frustrations of dependency needs were allegedly “cultivated and given form.”<sup>113</sup>

Fogelson was equally critical of both Teicher and Parker’s interpretations of the *wihtiko*, though he praised Teicher’s work in compiling *wihtiko* cases. He took up the question in 1965.<sup>114</sup> Although Fogelson considered physiological and genetic factors might help explain the *wihtiko*, insufficient data prompted him to focus on the psychological aspects of the windigo. The first part of his article delineated the “impressionistic observations and interpretations offered by travelers, missionaries, and anthropologists,” and the second part proposed “a simple model approach” to “define some of the parameters of a windigo disorder,” something he had found missing in Teicher’s study. This was to be “a first step in reconciling the native psychiatric classification with Euro-American systems of psychiatric diagnosis.” He suggested five basic types of disorders into which most *wihtiko* cases fell, but acknowledged that there might be others, and concluded that it was still “premature to attempt a direct translation of native-recognized windigo manifestations into Euro-American psychiatric equivalents.” His aim, ultimately, was to facilitate a “truly transcultural psychiatry.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis,” 389.

<sup>113</sup> Parker, “Wiitiko Psychosis,” 604, 619.

<sup>114</sup> Raymond D. Fogelson, “Psychological Theories of Windigo ‘Psychosis’ and a Preliminary Application of a Models Approach,” *Context and Meaning in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Melford E. Spiro, 74-99 (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 87-88. This was a festschrift in honour of Hallowell, Fogelson’s teacher.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 89-98. His model involved three states: “normal,” “upset” and “psychotic” (N U and P) The first type of windigo transitioned from a normal state, to a melancholic upset state, to a psychotic cannibal killer state (N-U-P); the second type was killed while in a melancholic upset state; the third type was the non-melancholic who killed and cannibalized without giving warning of any upset state; the fourth type involved people who began to transform as the result of a shaman’s curse, but then were cured; the fifth type involved shamans who began to transform as a result of another shaman’s curse, but fought off their enemy and returned to normality.

It was this kind of transcultural psychiatry that Bolman and Katz attempted in a 1966 article comparing a European case of “monosymptomatic schizophrenia” with the *wihtiko* psychosis, relying on descriptions of Landes and Parker.<sup>116</sup> By this time, scholars much more removed from the scant evidence were beginning to cite the *wihtiko* as an example of a “culture-specific disorder,” or a case of culture determining various mental disorders.<sup>117</sup>

Others, however, continued to express doubts about the alleged *wihtiko* ‘psychosis.’ Honigmann began a 1967 discussion of “*Wiitiko Psychosis*” by observing that “Cree and Ojibwa ... talk with nearly infectious conviction of ... the Wiitiko,” and they “also believe that people can acquire the Wiitiko’s repulsive craving for human flesh.” Nowhere in Teicher’s collection of cases, however, could he

find one that satisfactorily attests to someone being seriously obsessed by the idea of committing cannibalism. ... Hence I can’t help but wonder if in those executions the Indians, rather like Euroamerican witch hunters, didn’t simply suspect the victims, in conformity with their firm belief about compulsive cannibalism. Some instances are court cases involving men tried for murder, but the trial accounts don’t clearly prove obsessive-compulsive behavior.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> William M. Bolman and Alan S. Katz, “Hamburger Hoarding: A Case of Symbolic Cannibalism Resembling Whitico Psychosis,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 142, no. 5 (1966): 424-428.

<sup>117</sup> Citing A.I. Hallowell, P.M. Yap described the “‘The Wihtigo Psychosis’ ... [as] an illness confined to the Cree, Ojibway and Salteaux Indians of N. America. These people believe in the possibility of being transformed into a wihtigo, a giant creature with a heart of ice, who eats human flesh for food. During times of starvation, a man may suddenly develop a craving for human flesh, and also develop the delusion that he has been transformed into a wihtigo. This mythological creature is greatly feared, but sometimes actual cannibalism takes place, as though the patient were impelled towards the very behaviour that is feared.” Yap, “Mental Diseases Peculiar to Certain Cultures: A Survey of Comparative Psychiatry,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 97 (April 1951): 320. Citing Cooper and Landes, Alexander H. Leighton and Jane M. Hughes described the “‘Witiko,’ ... [as a] form of a homicidal spree during which the individual may kill and eat members of his own family ... In what could be called a delusional excitement the patient believes himself possessed by a spirit from his cultural mythology, the Witiko, a hoary cannibalistic monster with a heart of ice.” Leighton and Hughes, “Cultures as a Causative of Mental Disorder,” *The Milbank Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1961): 446-470, at 448. Note: this article was reprinted in *The Milbank Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (2005): 1-22. Later examples include: A. Kiev, *Transcultural Psychiatry* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), 44, 58, 84-85, 90-91. According to Wen-Shing Tsen, Kiev “dealt with the reports as though they were well-defined clinical entities with the diagnostic term witiko psychosis.” Tsen, “From Peculiar Psychiatric Disorders through Culture-bound Syndromes to Culture-related Specific Syndromes,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 43 (2006): 568.

<sup>118</sup> Honigmann, *Personality in Culture*, 399-403. He made this point in a comparative chapter on “The Long Reach of Patterning” in Western and non-Western cultures around the world. Honigmann also discussed the arguments of Landes and Parker. Although he suggested that Parker’s case was weakened by the apparent absence

As Marano later pointed out, Honigmann's comment was completely overlooked by others.<sup>119</sup> Hay's 1971 article, for example, considered only Honigmann's earlier work. Like Landes and Parker, Hay argued that the *wihtiko* was unique to northern Algonquian peoples not because of the environment but because of Algonquian personality and culture traits. These traits accentuated the "psycho-dynamic factors" behind stress-induced cannibalistic impulses that could be found in other societies, including the desire for reunification with a loved one, or extreme ambivalence towards someone. It was the particular "cultural and social conditions" that determined whether such impulses resulted in "psychotic cannibalism, in psychosis without cannibalism, or in ritualized cannibalism without apparent psychosis." According to Hay, Algonquians were more susceptible (than their Athapaskan or Iroquoian neighbours, for example) to psychosis with cannibalism because of their atomistic tendency to accentuate individual interpretation and obedience of dreams, with minimal social control, and the lack of socially acceptable alternatives "for displacing cannibal desires." Citing various cases, Hay also argued that the recovery of a potential *wihtiko* depended on the presence of someone who expressed, in word and deed, a fearless "confidence that the incipient windigo can and will maintain control of his impulses." In the socio-cultural context, however, such self-control and confidence would have been more difficult to find. The "typical personality of the Northern Algonkians," with its atomistic tendencies, was "such that most people should be expected to have deeply hidden cannibalistic impulses." And the capacity to remain calm when faced with

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of a similar disorder among peoples experiencing similar stresses on account of lack of nurture, he seems to have considered them plausible working hypotheses.

<sup>119</sup> Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 386. In contrast to Marano, however, Honigmann also left open the possibility that "individuals become unhappy prisoners of the obsession that they may commit cannibalism, like a *Wiitiko*, and so turn into a *Wiitiko*." In this regard, he cited the case of a woman who believed she was going to become a *wihtiko*, but later recovered when brought to a mission settlement. He saw the "firm belief about compulsive cannibalism" as shaping the behaviour of both alleged *wihtiko* and those who made or supported the allegations. He also noted that "we shall probably never know which historically came first, the obsession-compulsion or the notion of a forest-dwelling *Wiitiko*." Honigmann, *Personality in Culture*, 400-402.

“psychotics who display impulses similar to their own unconscious ones are rare in all societies.”<sup>120</sup>

Whereas Parker had followed Landes in downplaying the importance of starvation-induced stress, Hay went further. “To the Indians,” Hay argued, “the desire to eat human flesh was incomprehensible except as the result of sorcery or possession by the mythical windigo spirit.” This assertion can only seem reasonable if one ignores the pressing demands of necessity in contexts of starvation, which is what Hay did. He was so convinced of his theory, in fact, that he rejected starvation as an important catalyst and argued that Euroamerican recorders of *wihtiko* stories had likely distorted them in this regard based on their own assumptions, a criticism that applies much better to Hay’s own thesis and re-interpretation of *wihtiko* stories. As Preston later pointed out, some aspects of Parker and Hay’s arguments could have been pushed further, given the importance of love relationships between food-animals and humans, but the end result of their theorizing on inadequate data was the generation of “intellectual monstrosities.”<sup>121</sup>

Hay did not mention physiological and environmental factors, but a year earlier, Rohrl had already picked up on Fogelson’s suggestion that such factors could contribute to, but not supplant, other explanations. In a 1970 article, she hypothesized that Algonquians’ use of fatty meat – bear meat specifically – to cure people threatened with *wihtiko* possession or transformation, may have been reinforced by a real effect on a nutritional deficiency. She also noted the relative absence of *wihtiko* cases among southern Ojibwa, where starvation and malnutrition were less severe.<sup>122</sup> This hypothesis was immediately questioned by Brown on the

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<sup>120</sup> Hay, “Windigo Psychosis,” 1, 9, 14 and 17. Hay relied on Teicher’s data collection and the assumption that “the typical personality” of the Ojibwa was “applicable to the people of all the northern Algonkian-speaking groups.” He compared Algonquians with Athapascans and Iroquoians.

<sup>121</sup> Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 119-120.

<sup>122</sup> Vivian J. Rohrl, “A Nutritional Factor in Windigo Psychosis,” *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 1 (February 1970): 97-101. “It appears possible that deprivation of animal fat and its associated nutritional value is a contributory factor to the development of windigo psychosis. Thus, the ‘treatment’ of the condition which includes

basis that the evidence “does not now prove that [malnutrition] ... was the primary or precipitating factor in the majority of windigo cases”; moreover, the use of bear or any fat was not so widespread and it “emphasized disgorgement [of *wihtiko* ice surrounding the heart] rather than feeding.”<sup>123</sup> Rohrl responded by citing evidence suggesting that although malnutrition or starvation was indeed a major factor in many cases, there was a “need for differential diagnosis and analysis of all the conditions lumped together as ‘windigo,’” and that the feeding of fat to induce vomiting of the *wihtiko* ice should not necessarily be read literally.<sup>124</sup>

Brown’s critique of Rohrl’s thesis was reiterated and extended by McGee in 1972. Any explanation of “windigo psychosis” among northern Algonquians required an explanation of its absence among their neighbours when the latter underwent similar nutritional deprivation, though he expressed doubts about its absence among the northern Algonquians’ subarctic neighbours. Drawing from the Mi’kmaq, who also had a *wihtiko* equivalent in the *chenoo*, McGee also took issue with Hay’s thesis, pointing out that the Mi’kmaq had socially acceptable alternatives for displacing cannibalistic desires. He also pointed out that the cannibalism of near relatives more likely reflected the general absence of other options rather than a disordered attempt to reunite with deceased loved ones or secure neglected emotional needs. Future research might produce better results, he concluded, if it focused less on the deviant behaviour associated with the *wihtiko* and more on the attitude and behaviour of “the mentally balanced Northern Algonkian ... with reference to the windigo myth.”<sup>125</sup> In a subsequent article, McGee did just

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the ingestion of fat or fatty meat, most frequently of the bear-may reflect the result of long-term, not necessarily conscious, empirical observation by Chippewa and other northern Algonquian peoples.” *Ibid.*, 101. Rohrl also brought to bear a new case, received from an informant in 1967.

<sup>123</sup> Jennifer S.H. Brown, “The Cure and Feeding of Windigos: A Critique” *American Anthropologist* 73, no. 1 (February 1971): 20-22.

<sup>124</sup> Vivian J. Rohrl, “Comment on ‘The Cure and Feeding of Windigos: A Critique,’” *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 1/2 (February-April 1972): 242-244.

<sup>125</sup> Harold Franklin McGee Jr., “Windigo Psychosis,” *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 1/2 (February-April 1972): 244-246.

this, drawing on a story about the healing or taming and Christianization of a *chenoo* in order to show how “the windigo myth functioned to define the concept of human personness for the northeastern Algonkians.”<sup>126</sup>

Similarly, Paredes proposed that it might be fruitful to examine “the role of windigo belief in the psychic life of individuals who do not display the classic symptoms.” Using the life-history of an Ojibwa woman born in the late nineteenth century, and her dreams about the *wihtiko*, he argued that

in every society, belief, particularly as presented in the whole body of literature, provides the “adjusted,” the neurotic, and the psychotic alike with a kind of cognitive map for the unconscious. In dreams, visions, daydreams, and hallucinations most individuals successfully trace a safe psychological path through the fantastic labyrinth of collective folklore; few are lost.<sup>127</sup>

Parades also raised questions about variations between southern and subarctic *wihtiko* folklore, relationships between the *wihtiko* and other folklore characters or characterizations, the historical “effects of several centuries of acculturation,” and whether the *wihtiko* was “a character or a characterization.”<sup>128</sup>

A year later, Bishop presented a paper aimed at placing the *wihtiko* phenomenon “into historical perspective by relating it to cultural and ecological changes” so as to “gain perspective on existing psycho-dynamic, physiological, and functional interpretations.” Most of the examples cited by previous scholars, he argued, had been extracted from wide-ranging historical and environmental contexts, without any consideration of the problems this might pose.<sup>129</sup> He argued that in the Saint Lawrence valley and in the Hudson Bay watershed, Montagnais and Cree alike experienced a “decimation of game,” increasing “dependence on the trading post,” and

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<sup>126</sup> Harold Franklin McGee Jr., “The Windigo Down-East, or the Taming of the Windigo” *Proceedings of the Second Congress, Canadian Ethnology Society*, ed. Jim Freedman and Jerome H. Barkow, 110-132, National Museum of Man Mercury Series (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1975), 113.

<sup>127</sup> J.A. Paredes, “A Case Study of ‘Normal’ Windigo” *Anthropologica* 14, no. 2 (1972): 114.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>129</sup> Bishop, “Northern Algonkian Cannibalism,” 237.

“weakened cooperative bonds,” and that it was in these “new emergent conditions (which began in the late seventeenth century for coast Cree groups)” that “the belief in, and fear of, the Windigo expanded so that the potential of becoming one became very real.” The belief in cannibalistic non-human *wihtiko* may have been aboriginal, but it was only in this context that it became “extended to include situations arising out of famine cannibalism concomitant with the dreadful fear of starvation.”<sup>130</sup>

The principal flaw in this argument, as Waisberg pointed out in a responding article in 1975, was its assumption that the acute periods of starvation recorded in early commercial and missionary records constituted “new emergent conditions,” as if stressful changes in relationship between human beings and environment could only arise from ‘outside’ an environment context, or ‘outside’ the continent. Citing extensive studies of northern Boreal ecology, Waisberg showed, for example, that “[b]oth large and small game experience oscillations in numbers, frequently of great magnitude, over long and short periods of time.”<sup>131</sup>

In a 1976 article, Smith concurred with Waisberg’s critique of Bishop’s thesis, but also introduced new evidence, including early to mid-eighteenth century *wihtiko* accounts from the Western Woods Cree. The fact that one of these incidents occurred in an apparent time of plenty, in his view, suggested that the Cree acknowledged both starvation cannibalism and cannibalism resulting from transformation into a non-human person, “which could occur when game was abundant.” Smith also examined stories about the “departure and death of the Wittiko” from among the northern Manitoba and Saskatchewan Cree. According to Smith’s informants, the *wihtiko* had departed the Reindeer Lake region after the 1861 establishment of a mission, for the

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 244, 246.

<sup>131</sup> Leo G. Waisberg, “Boreal Forest Subsistence and the Windigo: Fluctuation of Animal Populations,” *Anthropologica* 17, no. 2 (1975): 170-171. Although Bishop’s sources “may indicate that the environment was rich, they do not show that it was stable before the increase in the numbers of people utilizing it. ... Simple magnitude of supply in any one year does not provide evidence for continuation of supply at similar levels.” *Ibid.*, 171 & 181.

“power of the Wittiko was not as great as that of the Church.” The last *wihtiko* was said to have been run over by a train about a hundred years later. Although stories of the *wihtiko* were still being told in the bush, the arrival of trading posts, missions, and modern technology and social services had “eliminated the threat of starvation except in the most unusual circumstances”: the *wihtiko* was dead, “killed by European civilization.”<sup>132</sup>

This suggested that starvation cannibalism was certainly a primary factor in the development of the *wihtiko* belief. On the other hand, the absence of anything but an acknowledgement or borrowing of the Cree *wihtiko* tradition among their northern Dene (Athapaskan or Chipewyan) neighbours, despite infrequent incidents of starvation cannibalism in a similarly unpredictable ecosystem, suggested that there was more at play than merely ecological factors.<sup>133</sup> Pointing to the presence of the *wihtiko* concept in southeastern and southwestern Algonquian traditions, Smith also argued that the “very widespread Wittiko concept cannot be accounted for by post-contact diffusion.” The *wihtiko* myth was undoubtedly aboriginal. It “seems,” concluded Smith, “to be a cultural phenomenon that functions to define the essence of humanness” and its acceptance by other geo-cultural neighbours suggests it has important intercultural significance.<sup>134</sup>

As Western scholars grappled with the ‘essence of humanness’ and the ‘cross-cultural’ meaning and origins of the *wihtiko* ‘myth,’ doubts persisted about the authenticity of a *wihtiko*

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<sup>132</sup> Smith, “Notes on Witiko,” 23, 26, 27.

<sup>133</sup> “Although in a severe environment,” Smith pointed out elsewhere, “the Chipewyan do not have myths and legends which emphasize starvation.” They did “not express severe anxiety about starvation or cannibalism in their historical legends or myths.” “Starvation and starvation cannibalism did occur among other subarctic peoples, many with greater diversity of resources (Savashinsky 1974: 61-7), yet not, apparently, among the Caribou Eaters. Survival, and even a state of primitive affluence, was made possible by an adaptive strategy that provided the Chipewyan an almost constant knowledge of herd movements, permitting them to anticipate or follow the herds.” Historical records from trading posts contain accounts of starvation deaths, but in the mythology, “people are usually saved from death at the last moment, unless they are receiving punishment for immoral activity.” Smith, “Economic Uncertainty in an ‘Original Affluent Society’: Caribou and Caribou Eater Chipewyan Adaptive Strategies,” *Arctic Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (1978): 68 and 82.

<sup>134</sup> Smith, “Notes on Witiko,” 31-34. The Dene, Smith acknowledged, were “relative newcomers” to the area.

‘psychosis,’ based on both the weakness of the evidentiary record and the interpretations of it.<sup>135</sup> In 1976, Robin Ridington published an article in which he questioned the labelling of the *wihtiko* as a psychosis. His argument was based on a cross-cultural comparison of the *wihtiko* with both the *wechuge* of Dene tradition and “categories of thought” in Western intellectual traditions.<sup>136</sup> The *wechuge* was a giant person-eating animal of mythic time that had once methodically hunted humans before being subdued and reduced in size by the Dene culture hero. *Wechuge* was feared like the *wihtiko*, not because it was psychotic, but because it was powerful and dangerous. Properly controlled, it was a source of supernatural power in the hunt; uncontrolled it was dangerous. To become a *wechuge* was to become – by one’s own or another’s violation of medicine taboos – the “particular Person-eating monster” that had been the very source of one’s supernatural power: one’s animal helper.<sup>137</sup> “Are Athapaskan [Dene] and Algonkian cultures so different,” asked Ridington, “that the *same cannibal monster belief* can have almost opposite meanings in the two different contexts?”<sup>138</sup>

The assumptions in Ridington’s question, however, are problematic: first, that they are the same cannibal monster belief, and second that they have almost opposite meanings. On the one hand, the idea of a common origin to *wechuge* and *wihtiko* remained merely a hypothesis. On the other hand, both beliefs conveyed similar meanings: human beings could learn or receive

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<sup>135</sup> “There have been several attempts to study phenomena such as wittiko ... thought of as the culturally defined content of a psychotic process in which the person believes himself to be a cannibalistic monster ... The evidence ... comes from early ethnographies. It has been difficult in the contemporary period to locate people who have these illnesses. ... If the availability of a content stereotype has the effect one would expect from labeling theory, the stereotype should have sustained the pattern, but in fact these content patterns seem to have disappeared.” Jane M. Murphy, “Psychiatric Labeling in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” *Science* 191, no. 4231 (March 12, 1976): 1021.

<sup>136</sup> Robin Ridington, “Wechuge and Windigo: a Comparison of Cannibal Belief Among Boreal Forest Athapaskans and Algonkians,” *Anthropologica* 18, no. 2 (1976): 107-129.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-115. “The person becoming Wechuge is not demented but simply a person compelled to act upon the logic of his experience in the world. Certainly, his behaviour is motivated by a need to validate a status claim that is being publicly challenged, but presumably for the person himself the mythically patterned experience of the vision quest is sufficiently authentic to validate his own belief in his medicine powers.” *Ibid.*, 122-123.

<sup>138</sup> Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 114-115, 108-109.

hunting competence from animals, but reducing one's competence to that of any predatorial animal had monstrous consequences.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, Riddington conjectured that historical developments, especially the Algonquians' earlier and greater exposure to "disruptive influence from contact with Europeans," may have transformed the *wihtiko* from something that once resembled the *wechuge* more closely, into something different, whether a psychosis or not.<sup>140</sup>

Regarding this latter question, however, Riddington echoed Hallowell and others: "windigo behaviour differs from most psychotic behaviour in our own culture in that it is believed to be genuine and real by the members of society as well as by the afflicted." Ultimately, the interpretation of *wihtiko* as psychosis was perhaps "more a function of our own categories of thought than that of the Indians themselves." Riddington was certainly onto something with this comparison, but his reduction of the *wihtiko* to a deformed *wechuge* belief, under European influence, was perhaps also more a "function of our own categories of thought than that of the Indians themselves."<sup>141</sup>

A year later, Turner argued that the *wihtiko* "syndrome" could be explained by looking beyond socio-biological and psychological paradigms to Cree social structures, and Cree explorations of them:

If ... 'cannibalism' is taken as a metaphor for incorporation into (becoming part of) a social grouping, the various acts and relations described in the story can be seen as attempts at mediating opposed tendencies toward autonomy at the domestic, brotherhood and band levels.

The key word here is 'if.' It may well be that this story served the purpose Turner outlines.

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<sup>139</sup> Preston later elaborated on this idea, arguing that the *wihtiko* reflected a loss of human competence in favour of purely animal competence. Preston, "Witiko" (1980), 129.

<sup>140</sup> There are, in fact, differences and similarities in both the beliefs and their meanings, but this will receive further attention in chapter 8. The *wechuge* represents a loss of control over one's supernatural helper: "another person sang his medicine song to overcome the emerging monster within the old man." "If the person is not cured and his power put back into the myth and the medicine bundle, he will begin to eat his own lips, which will turn to ice within him." Riddington, "Wechuge," 115-116, 122. The *wihtiko* is not merely psychosis or madness, but also manipulative control of others or evil abuse of power. *Wihtiko* can be as methodical as *wechuge*.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

Wihtiko stories, like other narratives, could have multiple purposes.<sup>142</sup> As Preston pointed out, however, Turner's hypothesis exemplified "our tendency to overpower a very poorly known Witiko phenomenon with our own intellectual creations" and so produce "intellectual monstrosities."<sup>143</sup>

### STRUGGLES FOR UNDERSTANDING & CONTROL OF THE WIHTIKO

If the Algonquian *wihtiko* was born out of phenomena that were difficult to explain, so too were Western interpretations of the *wihtiko*. As Hallowell and Preston point out, Western and Algonquian scholars and knowledge-keepers could be equally culture-bound in their pursuit of mental and moral competence. Nevertheless, the early twentieth-century evolution of *wihtiko* interpretations shows that intercultural conversations were ongoing, even if some failed to engage in them in their efforts to understand, or assert interpretive control over, the *wihtiko*. Although the failure to engage in conversation with Algonquian experts sometimes led to "intellectual monstrosities",<sup>144</sup> it would be too easy to dismiss these monstrosities as creatures of mental and moral incompetence, just as some did with the *wihtiko*.

By the mid-1970s, there were no longer concerns – expressed by Regina Flannery's Cree 'informants' in the 1930s – that sharing *wihtiko* stories might lead to another *wihtiko* trial in Canadian courts of law. Also largely diminished were concerns that sharing these stories might lead to another *wihtiko* 'trial' in Euroamerican 'courts' of public opinion or academia. One was more likely to find past participants of legal, scholarly or public trials and debates under scrutiny

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<sup>142</sup> David H. Turner, "Windigo Mythology and the Analysis of Cree Social Structure," *Anthropologica* 19, no. 1 (1977): 65.

<sup>143</sup> Preston, "Witiko" 1980, 120.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

for imperialism and ethnocentrism. There is sufficient evidence to show that such scrutiny was by no means unfounded, but if exaggeration, misrepresentation and bias were problems when the *wihtiko* appeared in modern scholarship, they were no less so amidst the changing power/knowledge matrix of post-colonial and late-modern scholarship.

Chapter six traces the appearance of the *wihtiko* in scholarship at a time when Western academia was being subjected to a late-modern and post-colonial critique. Writing three decades later, Smallman observed that scholars at this time were starting “to question what they viewed as an ahistorical and simplistic approach to studying the windigo, which they believed was used to exoticize Algonquians.”<sup>145</sup> If the *wihtiko* had sometimes appeared in debates about native mental, emotional or moral deficiencies, it was now far more likely to be used in debates about Western deficiencies. The *wihtiko*, and struggles for understanding and control of it, have always raised questions about mental and moral incompetence and the reduction of others and reality to objects of power. This is the very problem at the heart of the Algonquian conception and concept of the *wihtiko*. If this concept provides a powerful tool for critiquing this problem, it is because Algonquians faced it among and within themselves, independently of their encounter with Newcomers.

The story of Western culture-bound ignorance or ethnocentrism, however, has been retold and believed by many who wish to put a colonial history behind them and are keen to draw a line between themselves and many of their predecessors. Face-to-face encounters with the historical narrators and actors themselves, however, has often provoked an acknowledgement that neither Algonquian nor Algonquianist narratives can be reduced to culture-bound or ethnocentric obstinacy or ignorance, even if this was – and remains – part of the story. In this regard, late-modern *wihtiko* scholarship is not so different from modern *wihtiko* scholarship.

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<sup>145</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 574.

## CHAPTER 6

### *WIHTIKO* IN LATE-MODERN ACADEMIA

#### MANLIKE MONSTER OR ‘WHITEMAN,’ LIKE MONSTER, ON TRIAL?

The *wihtiko* originated as an attempt to understand and control rare but extreme forms of mental and moral failure. As a “manlike monster,” the *wihtiko* was repeatedly put on trial. Modern Western attempts to understand and control the *wihtiko* – from courts of law and public opinion to the academy – often emphasized a second level of questions about mental and moral incompetence. Consciously or not, the “Redman,” like the *wihtiko* monster, was put on trial. More recently, the *wihtiko*’s appearance in late-modern courts of academia has often emphasized a third level of questions about intellectual and moral incompetence. In short, Western attempts to understand and control Algonquian *wihtiko* behaviours, beliefs and practices have now put the “Whiteman,” like monster, on trial. This chapter shows that these “trials” are also marked by intellectual and moral failings that beg scrutiny but also contextualization. Yet it also shows that the best of late-modern scholarship acknowledges that the *wihtiko* – in representing the worst *any* person can do to self and other – can put the “Everyman” on trial.<sup>1</sup>

In his 1976 paper on the *wihtiko*, later revised for *Manlike Monsters on Trial*, Preston asked why there was so much “Whiteman Interest” in a phenomenon for which evidence was so slim. “Are we erecting a myth of inhuman savagery in order to rationalize colonial dominance

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<sup>1</sup> This is an allusion to an anonymous medieval morality play that recounts, in allegories, the moral life, condition and challenges of Everyman, who represents all human persons. Anonymous, *Everyman*, ed. A.C. Cawley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961; first published c. 1529).

over ‘our’ natives? ... Cannibals have been particularly apt subjects for this interpretation of natives.”<sup>2</sup> In 1979, Arens was more blunt:

Western culture has congratulated itself for putting a stop to ... [cannibalism] through colonial ‘pacification’ ... This conclusion is not meant to imply some peculiar feature of Western thought, since the accusation of cannibalism against others is pandemic. Yet ... [it] does point to an unsettling contradiction between avowals of scholarly objectivity and a prefigured outcome ...<sup>3</sup>

Yet the post-colonial world, observed Hulme more recently, has often reduced cannibalism to “a product of the European imagination” or “disturbed European psyche,” or “a calumny imposed by European colonisers to justify their outrages.”<sup>4</sup> According to Preston, the *wihtiko* is no exception in this regard: “this century ... we are more likely to find self-castigation for introducing savage conditions to the native populations, whereby the Wiitiko, for instance, would really be Our Fault.”<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, as Hulme elaborated, reactionary criticism of the post-colonial shift has often exaggerated its flaws, “while defending some version of the earlier story.”<sup>6</sup> This may be the case in larger debates about “cannibalism and the colonial world,” but criticism of post-colonial *wihtiko* scholarship has rarely been driven by *reactionary* appeals to an earlier narrative. On the contrary, *measured* criticism of some post-colonial counter-narratives has often been ignored, much like Preston’s warning. Regardless, the apparent lack of consensus in this scholarship begs explanation.

This chapter’s examination of the *wihtiko*’s appearance in late-modern academia shows that lack of consensus is less substantial than it appears and is grounded primarily in differences

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<sup>2</sup> Preston, “The Wiitiko: Algonkian Knowledge and Whiteman Interest” (1977), 101. As noted, this paper was first presented in 1976. Preston, “The Witiko: Algonquian Knowledge and Whiteman Knowledge,” in *Manlike Monsters on Trial* (1980).

<sup>3</sup> Arens, “Rethinking Anthropophagy,” 41. Arens also critiqued the problematic notion of “windigo psychosis,” in *The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 151-152. He rearticulated this argument in a chapter published in *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Hulme, “Introduction,” in Barker et al., *Cannibalism* 3.

<sup>5</sup> Preston, “Wiitiko” (1977), 101.

<sup>6</sup> Hulme, “Introduction,” in Barker et al., *Cannibalism*, 3.

and divisions that defy explanation by a Native-*versus*-Newcomer paradigm. First, *wihtiko* concepts and phenomena are ambivalent, elusive, complex and diverse objects of study – independently of historical changes. As Preston notes, full consensus is also lacking among Native experts, a point confirmed in Chapter Two. Second, *wihtiko* scholarship has engaged a wide array of disciplines and fields that are embedded in diverse conceptual languages, debates and larger literatures, making a full literature review difficult. Third, recent scholarship has shifted emphasis from understanding the *wihtiko* to the *wihtiko* as a means of understanding or critique. This second emphasis has sometimes obscured *wihtiko* phenomena and scholarship alike by reading them selectively. Fourth, as Preston remarks, both Algonquians and Algonquianists have tried to reduce the *wihtiko* to one particular explanation in order to assert interpretive control over it.

The apparent lack of scholarly consensus stems also from the very tendency exemplified at its worst by the *wihtiko*: the reduction of others and truth to objects of power. Arendt predicted in 1945 that the “problem of evil” would be “the fundamental problem of postwar intellectual life in Europe” – a problem from which Euroamerica could hardly remain immune.<sup>7</sup> “For a post-holocaust culture especially,” observes Kilgour more recently, “distinguish[ing] civilization from barbarism seems especially urgent, yet difficult. The ... cannibal dramatizes the danger of drawing boundaries too absolutely ... [or] not ... at all.”<sup>8</sup> Late-modern scholarship is keenly sensitive to this problem and, to a lesser extent, its own susceptibilities. There remains a need for ongoing post-colonial critique *and* critique of post-colonialism, especially where it has a dominant voice.

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 803.

<sup>8</sup> Maggie Kilgour, “Preface,” in *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity*, ed. Kristen Guest (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), viii.

If the Native-*versus*-Newcomer paradigm sheds light on differences and divisions in recent *wihtiko* scholarship it is primarily in the application of post-colonial analysis to the *wihtiko* and the use of the *wihtiko* as a tool of post-colonial critique. Imperialism was instrumental in the “rise of global *uniformities*” that, in Bayly’s words, led to a “heighten[ed] ... sense of *difference*.”<sup>9</sup> Tuhiwai Smith explains that the “reach of imperialism into ‘our heads’ challenges ... colonized communities ... to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity.” One strand of Native post-colonial critique “draws upon a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples.” The second strand focuses on “analysis of how we were colonized.”<sup>10</sup>

While Native scholars tend to focus on re-centring the Native self, Newcomer scholars tend to focus on de-centring the Newcomer self. As Morrison points out, his essays on the *wihtiko* and other aspects of Algonquian culture trace how he has “grappled with intellectual ethnocentrism ... a personal and professional struggle ... required of all interpretive scholarship.”<sup>11</sup> Although a critical spirit was present in earlier literature, in the late 1970s a debate began about the strengths and weaknesses of Western and Indigenous perspectives and cultures in developing a fuller understanding of the *wihtiko*. Preston sparked the debate; Flannery, Chambers and Jehle contributed to it; but Marano’s 1982 critique of “windigo psychosis” as an ethnocentric Western reading of the *wihtiko* set it ablaze. He prompted many replies, most importantly by Brown and, above all, Brightman in 1988. Brightman’s 1988 study, however, was largely ignored in favour of Marano’s, suggesting more was at play than quests for understanding of the *wihtiko*. Two decades passed without significant addition to the debate. In

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<sup>9</sup> Emphasis added. Bayly, *Birth of the Modern*, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, “Imperialism,” in Desai and Nair, *Postcolonialisms*, 97-98.

<sup>11</sup> Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 16.

contrast to Marano and those who echoed him, Carlson, a Native scholar, critiqued Western academia for dismissing the *wihtiko* as a construction of anthropology. His 2009 article aimed at “reviving” understanding of the *wihtiko* “from within Algonquian cosmologies.”<sup>12</sup>

Newcomer struggles against ethnocentrism and Native struggles for ethnic re-centring help explain the persistent emphasis on cultural difference in late-modern *wihtiko* literature. Although grounded primarily in quests for understanding, this emphasis sometimes appears to be also grounded in contests for control, which often have moralistic undertones. Nevertheless, by using the *wihtiko* to understand or critique scholars acknowledge its capacity to speak beyond Algonquian culture, even if it must first be understood within that context. Many scholars explicitly recognize the historical depths of such interculturality, or embody it themselves. To borrow (Hans) Carlson’s phrase, “something more sophisticated than an argument about cultural hegemony is required” to explain the nature, development and impact of this interculturality.<sup>13</sup>

#### UNDERSTANDING *WIHTIKO*: NATIVE & NEWCOMER CULTURAL PATHS?

In the last four decades, the academic literature on the *wihtiko* has grown amidst efforts to understand the *wihtiko* and apply it to other questions. Debates have focused on *wihtiko* stories and beliefs, probing their symbolic meaning or authenticity, as well as the nature and etiology of phenomena they describe. Scholars have disputed the existence of a *wihtiko* ‘psychosis’ or a ‘culture-bound syndrome.’<sup>14</sup> They have also examined the origin, distribution and evolution of the *wihtiko* phenomenon in Algonquian and intercultural contexts.

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<sup>12</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 355.

<sup>13</sup> Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 100.

<sup>14</sup> Mireille Thibault, “Le Wendigo: une croyance amérindienne” (Master’s thesis, Université Laval, 2011), 26-27. Thibault observed that most scholars who have studied the *wihtiko* have done so “dans le but de vérifier la

Algonquian knowledge-keepers have continued to share *wihtiko* narratives and interpretations. Many are contained in more general works,<sup>15</sup> but some collections or studies have focused specifically on the *wihtiko*. *The World of the Wetiko: Tales from the Woodland Cree* (1974) is a compilation of 15 stories told by Marie Merasty of Northern Saskatchewan.<sup>16</sup> Barnouw's 1977 study of *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths and Tales* includes a chapter on "Windigo Stories."<sup>17</sup> Clermont's 1978 article "Les kokotchés à Weymontachie" recounts and analyzes nine *kokotché* (synonymous with *wihtiko*) stories from northern Quebec.<sup>18</sup> Brightman's *Acadohkiwina and Acimowina: Traditional Narratives of the Rock Cree Indians* includes at least 15 *wihtiko* stories.<sup>19</sup> Flannery, Chambers and Jehle's 1981 article on "Witiko Accounts from the James Bay Cree" reproduces and analyzes almost 30 James Bay Cree accounts that Flannery and Cooper recorded in the 1930s.<sup>20</sup> Norman's 1982 *Where the Chill Came From: Cree Windigo Tales and*

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véracité des faits rapportés dans ces récits." Friedland pointed out that "Much of the academic debate over the wetiko has largely been about the existence or nonexistence of a disorder called 'windigo psychosis,' that included cannibalistic ideation and behaviour, and corresponding explanations of this 'culturally bound' phenomenon. Friedland, "Wetiko," 24-25.

<sup>15</sup> They are too numerous to list exhaustively here, but they include: Herbert T. Schwarz, *Windigo and Other Tales of the Ojibways* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969); George W. Bauer, *Cree Tales and Beliefs* (Orono, MN: Northeast Folklore Society, 1971); James R. Stevens, *Sacred Legends of the Sandy Lake Cree* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971); Madeleine Lefebvre, *Tshakapesh : récits montagnais-naskapi*. (Québec: Ministère des affaires culturelles, 1971); Ellis, *Atalohkana nesta Tipachimowina*, 78-89, 324-335. Vandersteene, "Some Woodland," 40-64.

<sup>16</sup> Merasty, *World of the Wetiko*.

<sup>17</sup> Victor Barnouw, *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths and Tales and their Relation to Chippewa Life* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 120-131. He noted that in the 1940s windigo stories were not considered to be true, though "they were probably believed in a few generations before." Barnouw made reference to the literature on the "so-called *windigo* or *wihtiko* psychosis," suggesting that there may be some grounds for Rohrl's argument about the importance of fat and Parker's argument about the "frustrated dependency needs in childhood." In this chapter and in a four-page review of the literature in a 1979 publication, he made no reference to any literature published since 1971. Victor Barnouw, *Culture and Personality*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1979; first published in 1963 & 1973): 340-343.

<sup>18</sup> Normand Clermont, "Les kokotchés à Weymontachie," *Recherches amérindiennes au Québec* 8, no. 2 (1978): 139-145. *Kokotche* was another term for *wihtiko*, though Clermont suggested that these terms and *atchen* (*atoosh*) may suggest original distinctions that have since been lost. He agreed with Cooper's assessment that the *wihtiko* may be explained by the tension between the severe prohibition against cannibalism and the privation that drove some people to or towards it.

<sup>19</sup> Robert A. Brightman, *Acadohkiwina and Acimowina: Traditional Narratives of the Rock Cree Indians* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2007; first published in 1989). His commentaries on these stories are quite brief.

<sup>20</sup> Flannery, et. al. *Witiko Accounts*.

*Journeys* gathers 31 stories from Northern Manitoba Swampy Cree.<sup>21</sup> Colombo's 1982 *Windigo: An Anthology of Fact and Fantastic Fiction* includes just over 40 windigo accounts and some academic explanations, from the 1630s to the 1970s, but few of them are Algonquian accounts unfiltered by Euroamerican perspectives.<sup>22</sup> Fiddler and Stevens' *Killing the Shamen* (1985) recounts a number of historical *wihtiko* stories in addition to the 1907 trial of the Fiddler brothers.<sup>23</sup>

More than mere contributions to Western scholarship, Algonquian *wihtiko* narratives are part of distinct intellectual traditions that are nonetheless engaged in intercultural dialogue with Western and other cultures. Likewise, Western academia is as much a contributor to Native scholarship, which extends well beyond the mere telling of stories. Bird and Johnston are obvious examples, but certainly not the only ones. Since 1965, Cree scholar and knowledge-keeper, Louis Bird, has collected numerous Omushkego Cree legends and histories from Hudson Bay. In the early 2000s, he began to digitize and publish these stories online and in books, in partnership with the Centre for Rupert's Land Studies. These publications, as well as a more recent radio documentary, provide many *wihtiko* narratives, as well as commentary from Bird.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Norman's *Where the Chill Came From: Cree Windigo Tales and Journeys* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982) collects 31 Swampy Cree dialect windigo tales, told between 1969 and 1980, originating primarily from Northern Manitoba. Norman interviewed 150 Cree elders. He lets the narrators speak for themselves, many of whom provide explanations themselves, but gives a brief (p. 3-5) account of the variations of Cree understandings, limiting his engagement with academic literature on the witiko to a reference to Preston's 1977 article on Whiteman interest, to support his own assessment of the witiko as a "complex, voracious spirit-being" (p. 3). Norman published one of these stories earlier, with Job Walks, "The Killing of the Moss Falls Windigo" *Alcheringa* 4, no. 1 (1978): 84-88.

<sup>22</sup> Colombo's *Windigo* includes 44 accounts but does not engage heavily in academic debates. His six-page introduction briefly outlines the extensive geo-cultural range and origins of the story-tellers and transcribers, as evidenced in part in North American toponymy; the plurality of terms and spellings; the range of literary styles and appearances in Euroamerican fiction, and variations of descriptions and explanations. He described the *wihtiko* as "a creature of the Algonkian imagination and experience" that could "assume the shape of a supernatural devil or demon of the woods," or "appear as a personality disorder or disturbance which finds expression in crazed actions and acts of cannibalism." It was both "a creature of legend and a living reality, whose doings are documented in fact and fantastic fiction," and a phenomena that had attracted the attention of anthropologists and psychiatrists and left its mark in Canadian toponymy and literature. *Ibid.*, 1-6.

<sup>23</sup> Fiddler and Stevens, *Killing the Shamen*. This is discussed in chapter 3

<sup>24</sup> Our Voices, accessed June 5, 2104, <http://www.ourvoices.ca>. CBC Radio "Ideas" dedicated a full hour-long program to an exploration of the *wihtiko* with Louis Bird. "Wihtigo" CBC Ideas, December 7, 2010 (radio

Although Bird does not reference the academic debates directly, his work engages with them and with Western ideas. His explanation of the *wihtiko* emphasizes *wihtiko* origins, variations, and attitudes, but above all its role in explaining evil, the loss of humanity, and madness.<sup>25</sup> Basil Johnston has played a similar role among the Anishinabe. In *The Manitous: The Spiritual World of the Ojibway* (1995), he draws on stories learned from elders, who also taught him “how to elicit meaning from the stories and from our native language.” His final chapter on the “Weendigo” recounts several stories and describes the physical and moral traits of the “evil ... giant manitou,” as well as the susceptibility of “ordinary human beings” to the *wihtiko* on account of their “tendency to indulge ... self-interests.” The final section of that chapter includes a critique of “Modern Weendigos.” Contrary to appearances, writes Johnston, “Weendigos did not die out or disappear; they have only been assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals.”<sup>26</sup> The influence of other Algonquian knowledge-keepers is often less obvious. This is why Preston made a point of highlighting the role Cree elder John Blackned played in his research. Far more than an informant he mentored Preston’s study of “Cree narrative” as “expressing the personal meaning of events.”<sup>27</sup>

Not surprisingly, Preston identified the Algonquian “ecology of mind” as key to understanding the *wihtiko*, echoing McGee’s suggestion that focus should be on the attitude and behaviour of “the mentally balanced Northern Algonkian ... with reference to the windigo myth.”<sup>28</sup> In Preston’s view, some scholars had ignored the “ecology of the mind” or never

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program). Bird’s first book made mention of the *wihtiko*, but the second book dedicated an entire chapter to the theme. Bird, *Telling Our Stories*, 21 and 25. Bird, *Spirit Lives in the Mind*, chapter 7, “Wihtigos and Cannibal Hearts.”

<sup>25</sup> Bird, *Spirit Lives*, 112-117.

<sup>26</sup> Johnston, *Manitous* (1995) xii, 221, 224 and 235. Johnston recounts a *wihtiko* story in *Ojibway Heritage* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 165-166.

<sup>27</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*. The first edition of this text was published as part of the National Museum of Man’s Mercury Series (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1975).

<sup>28</sup> McGee, “Windigo Psychosis,” 244-246.

transcended their own. Some were too quick to look for familiar knowledge in the new and exotic and thus projected the Western “Wildman” onto the *wihtiko*.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, some were too keen to formulate models that were unhelpful:

The Wiitiko problem remains a frustration; we think and read, and reflect, and yet cannot get ahold of it. Wiitiko remains just out of sight ... a failure of the intellectual enterprise. We are subjectively drawn to the problem, and then we back off into method and distance from the bush, the feelings, the culture, the phenomenal world of the Algonquians. What is back in the bush?<sup>30</sup>

Listening deeply to Algonquian elders and knowledge-keepers, argued Preston, would cultivate a more “critical, comprehensive, ethnographic grasp of the evidence to be interpreted.” Also required was self-awareness, so as “to differentiate our subtle expectations from our appropriate interpretations,” and, finally, “literate skills, and a poetic mind.”<sup>31</sup>

Preston cited a mid-twentieth century account given to Cree scholar, teacher and Christian missionary Edward Ahenakew by Weipust, a Cree elder whose words Ahenakew greatly valued. Although Weipust was a Christian like Ahenakew, he had only adopted Christianity as a middle-aged man, and was fully fluent in pre-Christian Cree culture. Weipust asserted that he had “no doubt that Wetikoos existed in the old days,” but only “very rarely.” In Weipust’s view, “the majority of the reports ... were untrue – many ... brought about by some mischievous minded Indian trying to frighten someone else.”<sup>32</sup> As Preston commented, Weipust was “more critical than suggestible, aware of wrongness and wrong-headedness on the part of Indians as well as white men, when they are wondering about such terror-inspiring topics.” *Wihtiko* narratives could serve many purposes, from keeping children close to camp to explaining the boundary between humanity and inhumanity. Even when it was a question of real

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<sup>29</sup> Preston, “The Wiitiko”, 1977, 101-105.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-105.

<sup>31</sup> Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 121-122.

<sup>32</sup> Weipust, cited in *Ibid.*, 122-123.

people, events or conditions, the *wihtiko* was, “for many Algonkian Indians ... very uncertain in both appearance and essence.” It was on occasion “not a transformed human, or not a cannibal, or not solitary, or not aggressive towards humans,” and could be interchanged with other creatures in many of the stories. In short, the meaning of the *wihtiko* was more flexible, open-ended and “a matter of attitudes” than acknowledged by “many Algonkians and Algonkianists [who] prefer to simplify this variance down to concrete kinds of person (monstrous, symbolic, or other) and condition. It is manifestly clear that in either culture the experts do not agree.”<sup>33</sup>

Preston acknowledged that madness and psychosis might well be aspects of what the *wihtiko* pointed to or explained, and that aspects of the *wihtiko* might be a component of psychological dysfunction in some individuals. Defining the *wihtiko* as a psychosis or condition characterized by cannibalistic desire, however, was a reductionist or literalist reading into which Algonquians and Algonquianists alike could fall.<sup>34</sup> Offering an alternative explanation, Preston suggested that the *wihtiko* pointed to a monstrous displacement of human competence by animal predator competence:

I suggest that Witiko madness may be imagined by some Algonkians as possible to resolve by transformation into the domain of what we call mythic persons. In this domain, Witiko is beyond madness and is better understood in terms of his transformed competencies. ... Witiko is a human transformed into a beast not only because he has dominated and eaten his family, but also because he lives on – with the kind of competencies that are characteristic of non-human carnivores.<sup>35</sup>

The *wihtiko* explained the loss of the mental and moral competence proper to human persons. In Preston’s view, this explained both the typical *wihtiko* cannibal narratives, as well as the more exceptional ones, including one “extreme case” that stood out in particular, referred to by Preston as “The child that was not born naturally.” Three decades later, Preston would publish a deeper

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-128.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-128.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 128-129.

analysis of this story in his reflection on “a life in translation” – of Cree culture.<sup>36</sup> In the intervening decades, others have also turned their attention to the meaning of the *wihtiko*.

Preston’s emphasis on the *wihtiko* as “more a matter of attitudes than ... a definable person,” resonates with Bird and Johnson’s more recent Algonquian explanations.<sup>37</sup> These explanations also support Flannery, Chambers and Jehle’s suggestion, in a 1981 article, that increasingly diffuse and symbolic *wihtiko* concepts reflected cultural change. The narratives Flannery and Cooper had collected three decades earlier, in the 1930s, revealed “a cohesive Witiko belief system” that distinguished between *Wihtiko*, “a folklore being,” and human *wihtikowak* “possessed by cannibalistic cravings.” It also differentiated both from “other fearsome beings.”<sup>38</sup>

Marano did not have the benefit of Flannery, Chambers and Jehle’s article when he completed his study of the *wihtiko* and published it as an article a year later. Writing in 1983, he commented that Flannery and her co-authors did not alter his analysis of the “windigo psychosis.” Their stories and analysis were revealing and insightful, but he did not agree that the “‘historical witiko incidents’ ... illuminate ‘aspects of the human witiko psychosis’”<sup>39</sup> However, Marano agreed with Preston that the *wihtiko* belief may have contributed to some cases of “psychological dysfunction,” but that “there probably never were any windigo psychotics in the sense that cannibalism or murder was committed to satisfy an obsessional craving for human flesh.” But, if “windigo psychosis” was “an artifact of research,” it was not primarily on account of a failure to consider the *wihtiko* from an Algonquian point of view. Instead, Marano

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<sup>36</sup> This recent analysis, of the story and the *wihtiko* concept itself, is discussed at the end of this chapter. In the interim, Preston also addressed the *wihtiko* briefly in other articles: “Interference and Its Consequences: An East Cree Variant of Deviance?” *Anthropologica*, 33, no. 1/2, *The Anthropology of Deviance* (1991): 69-80.

<sup>37</sup> Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 127.

<sup>38</sup> Flannery, et al., “Witiko Accounts,” 57-58.

<sup>39</sup> Marano, in Brightman et al., “On Windigo Psychosis,” 123-124.

continued, anthropologists had “systematically” conflated the “emics of our subject populations” (the *subjective* perspectives of Algonquians in this case) with their “etic/behavioral history” (the *objective* realities they subjectively experienced). Echoing Preston, Marano argued that anthropologists had then narrowly reinterpreted the Algonquian belief in their own terms: the “Northern Algonkian windigo ... [was] a much more inclusive folk taxon than the windigo of anthropology.” Whereas Teicher had argued that belief determined Algonquian behaviour, Marano argued that a narrow reading of Algonquian belief had determined anthropologists’ assessment of Algonquian behaviour. The “‘windigo psychosis’ had achieved such a reified status in anthropology that ... the inertia of [such] received wisdom” became something of a belief and a determinant of scholars’ research behaviour.<sup>40</sup> Although Preston had provided one of the strongest analyses, he had not explained “why the Algonkian ‘ecology of *mind*’ ... should have evolved the belief in a cannibal spirit-monster capable of taking possession of ordinary humans, thereby necessitating the execution of those so ‘possessed.’”<sup>41</sup>

Inspired by Harris’ analysis of the European witch craze, Marano proposed that the key question was not what caused cannibal mania, but what circumstances prompted accusations of cannibal mania. Just as Algonquian beliefs focused on alleged *wihtiko* individuals, so too had anthropologists focused on “individual psychodynamics.” Examined in light of “group sociodynamics,” the *wihtiko* was not a culture-bound psychosis involving cannibalistic obsession, but a “predictable – though culturally conditioned – variant of the triage homicide and witch hunting typical of societies under stress.” Marano argued that in this case, the stress was caused by the threat of privation and starvation exacerbated after the arrival of Europeans. Even

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<sup>40</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 385-386. Marano argued further that “those who have published on the subject since 1967 without reference to Honigmann’s ... [observation of the lack of evidence of obsession with cannibalism] must ultimately bear the responsibility for their omission.”

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 396.

if he was wrong on its post-contact tipping point, it was nonetheless “a situation in which cannibalism has proved to be a tempting recourse for persons of all cultures throughout history.” The *wihtiko* embodied the fear of cannibalism in oneself and others, and resulted from the “human tendency to condemn most vigorously in others that which is most feared in oneself and the propensity to project those fears onto vulnerable others.” Whether *conscious or unconscious*, such scapegoating also provided “a rationale for homicide with which everyone could identify.” Ultimately, then,

the *windigo* belief complex evolved among the Northern Algonkians as a way to help minimize the chances of getting caught in a famine with those who had already broken the taboo against cannibalism, to minimize the liabilities imposed by the incapacitated, and to focus group anxieties and aggressions upon individuals adjudged socially expendable.<sup>42</sup>

Marano grounded his argument in archival research, fieldwork among the Cree and Northern Ojibwa, and a detailed review of the existing literature. None of the alleged cases of “windigo psychosis,” he argued, gave firsthand accounts of cannibalism; many were so far removed from the alleged incidents that they were rumours at best. Only about ten percent of the cases could be “studied both emically and etically by reading court records, trial transcripts, and police investigation reports.” Among these cases, only the 1879 case of Swift-Runner involved cannibalism, and it was “murder-cannibalism under starvation conditions.” It was “hardly evidence of psychosis, nor ... [was] such behavior culture-specific.”<sup>43</sup> Other cases, such as the 1907 Fiddler case, involved executions of alleged *wihtikowak* that “appear to be thinly disguised rationalizations for triage homicide,” “scapegoating and witching hunting” and suicide.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-386, 388, 393-394. Marano cited adequate evidence for this as a plausible explanation of many *wihtiko* killings, though not all.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 385-386.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 386. In his own fieldwork, Marano had witnessed many instances of scapegoating and witchcraft accusations without encountering “one shred of evidence for cannibalistic yearnings.”

According to Marano, anthropologists' literalist and narrow reading of the Algonquian *wihtiko* had added a third non-Native category of *wihtiko* to the two that already existed:

[1] Windigo as superhuman monster(s), who may or may not have had human antecedents ... [2] human beings ... considered ... possessed by the spirit of the cannibal monster ... [3] a culture-specific syndrome the victims of which are obsessed by a compulsive desire to eat human flesh. The first two categories are Northern Algonkian; the third is a child of 20<sup>th</sup>-century anthropology. The main purpose of the present work is to review critically the evolution of this third category.<sup>45</sup>

Marano's article was published in *Current Anthropology* with comments from 19 other scholars and his own reply; the following year a further exchange with two others was published.<sup>46</sup> Some strongly criticized Marano's reading of the existing literature, especially their own work.<sup>47</sup> McGee agreed that much of the literature revealed more about "the investigators' cultures and personalities than about those ... under investigation," but added that Preston had said the same thing "earlier and better."<sup>48</sup> Preston himself found Marano's article "the most substantial piece of critical scholarship on this topic to date," even if it was not the final word. He conceded that "the actual behavioural and material circumstances," were no less important than "what people

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 386. Marano acknowledged many other varieties of windigo, and derivations.

<sup>46</sup> Respondents to the first article included: Charles A. Bishop, M. Jean Black (Mary Black-Rogers), William M. Bolman, Jennifer, S.H. Brown, Thomas H. Hay, Marshall G. Hurlich, Ruth Landes, Harold Franklin McGee Jr., H.B.M. Murphy, Anthony J. Paredes, Richard J. Preston, Robin Ridington, Vivian J. Rohrl, James G.E. Smith, R.J. Smith, Morton I. Teicher, David H. Turner, Leo G. Waisberg, Hazel H. Weidman. Robert A. Brightman and David Meyer provided additional responses the following year, published with a reply by Marano, "On Windigo Psychosis." Marano's article and a selection of these replies were republished as a chapter called "The Cannibal Compulsion Taxon," with an introduction by Ronald C. Simons and a commentary by Charles C. Hughes, in a book they edited entitled *The Culture-Bound Syndromes: Folk Illnesses of Psychiatric and Anthropological Interest* (Dordrecht, D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1985), 408-465.

<sup>47</sup> This was especially true of those who felt the brunt of Marano's criticism. Hay acknowledged that much of the evidence relating to *wihtiko* 'psychosis' was flawed, but stated: "If Marano's promised 'full analysis of the ethnohistoric and ethnographic data' is no more faithful to the sources than his critique of my article, it will be a major contribution to the misunderstanding of the windigo phenomenon." Rohrl also felt that Marano had misconstrued their work. Teicher wrote that Marano "has devoured those who have written about windigo psychosis." McGee gave more substantial reasons for most of his criticisms. Turner did not criticize Marano's article except on account of its assessment of Turner's own arguments. In Marano (and respondents), "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 400, 403-405.

<sup>48</sup> McGee, in *ibid.*, 401.

actually witnessed, what they told each other, and what they believed.”<sup>49</sup> The majority agreed that Marano had made a substantial contribution to the debate, even if it was neither conclusive nor flawless.<sup>50</sup>

Brown’s assessment was one of the most perceptive. Like others, she found Marano’s article “helpful and provocative” but inconclusive. Offering measured criticisms of its flaws, she agreed that the windigo psychosis concept had been “overused and under-analyzed,” but pointed out that Marano had failed to give an unbiased, nonadversarial and historically grounded account of how and why this had happened,<sup>51</sup> a finding echoed by others and by this present review of the literature. Brown affirmed Marano’s assessment of the diversity of the *wihtiko* phenomena and the deficiency of evidence of cannibalistic compulsion, but critiqued his “weighing of sources in terms of their congruence with his viewpoint.” She was more ready than Marano to accept that his “essential contributions do not stand or fall on whether all reported instances of windigo cannibalism or cannibalistic urges can be discredited.”<sup>52</sup> Although incidents of such cannibalism or urges “may be inadequately verified, ... 19th-century Northern Algonkians left

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<sup>49</sup> Preston, in *ibid.*, 403. On this point, Marano was in full agreement: “Nothing I have written should be construed as denigration of emic analysis, which I value. In the case of the windigo phenomenon, both emics and etics are necessary.” Marano, in Brightman et al., “On Windigo Psychosis,” 124.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Bishop, M. Jean Black (Mary Black-Rogers), William M. Bolman, Marshall G. Hurlich, Jennifer Brown, Anthony J. Paredes, Ruth Landes, H.B.M. Murphy, Richard Preston, Robin Ridington, James G.E. Smith (1982), and David Meyer (1983). For Ridington, Marano’s article confirmed his own argument that “uninformed ethnocentrism [had] dominated much of the debate about the causes of a ‘windigo psychosis’ that was believed to be a culture-bound syndrome peculiar to the Eastern Subarctic.” Ridington, “Knowledge, Power, and the Individual in Subarctic Hunting Societies,” *American Anthropologist* 90, no. 1 (March 1988): 98. James H. Shore and Spero J. Manson praised Marano’s article, noting that they had made similar findings in 1981 regarding the *ivacinko* among the Oglala Sioux. “American Indian Psychiatric and Social Problems,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 20 (1983): 165. “Marano’s ‘Windigo Psychosis: The Anatomy of an Emic-Etic Confusion,’ carefully documents how social science theory may become ethnocentric when it removes ethnographic information about subarctic people from the context in which it is known, learned, and communicated.”

<sup>51</sup> Brown, in Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 399-400. Black echoed this: “I would like to have seen some additional discussion of why this belief was so attractive to our ethnographic forefathers.” Black, in *ibid.*, 399.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, in *ibid.*, 399.

open the possibility that it could occur and may have wished they possessed Marano's confidence that it could not." Other respondents agreed.<sup>53</sup>

Marano clarified that he did not rule out the possibility entirely, but deemed it "extremely unlikely and ... that the burden of proof is on those who claim that it happened."<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, by sometimes overstating his case against *wihtiko* (non-starvation) cannibalism and – above all – in favour of scapegoating as a "likely uniformitarian solution to the windigo puzzle,"<sup>55</sup> Marano opened his arguments up to the most substantial and sustained criticisms it would receive. According to Weidman, Marano had replaced one type of etic projection with another, through "the transformation of 'self-defensive behaviour because of mental illness in another' into 'deliberate homicide based on economic need and matters of group survival.'"<sup>56</sup> Marano countered that "scientific observers" were "in no way absolve[d] ... from the responsibility of generating explanatory formulations which may differ from the understandings of the people they study," but that a "poorly operationalized term" like

"psychosis" ... should never ... be applied to a category of people – especially in a culture-bound context – without rigorous behavioral and empirical justification. Certainly we should *never* apply the label "psychotic" to a group of executed persons on the basis of information provided by their executioners.

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<sup>53</sup> Brown, in *ibid.*, 399. On these points, Brown's criticism was echoed by at least seven other scholars. Murphy, Bishop, R.J. Smith, Rohrl, McGee, Waisberg and Weidman, *ibid.*, 398-405. Bishop was critical of Marano for allegedly "rul[ing] out the possible cases of anthropophagy in which food stresses were absent" (Bishop in *ibid.*, 398).

<sup>54</sup> Marano, in *ibid.*, 406. As a result of Marano's assessment, observed Bishop in 1984, he "now refrain[ed] from using 'windigo psychosis,'" since there was no clear evidence that "individuals reported to be windigos were psychotic." On the other hand, he argued, "abnormal behaviour could come to be associated with the Windigo, and the collective witch-fear response could be grounded in violent reality." Charles Bishop, "The First Century: Adaptive Changes among the Western James Bay Cree," *The Subarctic Fur Trade: Native Social and Economic Adaptations*, ed. Shepart Krech III, 21-53 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 46.

<sup>55</sup> Marano, "Windigo Pyschosis" (1982), 397. McGee noted that "Marano, like those he criticizes, assumes that a single element in a people's belief system – such as the windigo phenomenon – must be explained by a single cause." This criticism was rejected by Marano, who pointed out that he did not see it as a singular phenomenon explicable by a singular explanation. McGee and Marano, in *ibid.*, 401 & 407.

<sup>56</sup> Weidman, in *ibid.*, 406.

If Marano exaggerated the extent to which other scholars had applied “psychosis” to a “category of people,” he did not acknowledge it in his reply. Nevertheless, he clarified and softened his own explanation of the *wihtiko* belief complex: “I engage in some etic analysis of both conscious and unconscious Northern Algonkian motivational dynamics ... [and only] reluctantly and minimally, because I have no other alternative.”<sup>57</sup>

Marano also qualified his original argument in response to McGee’s criticism that claiming the *wihtiko* belief was a means of scapegoating did not explain the phenomenon. “Why,” McGee asked, “does the scapegoating have to be expressed by reference to the windigo?”<sup>58</sup> Marano acknowledged that he had no answer to the latter question.<sup>59</sup> On the first aspect of McGee’s critique, however, Marano remained convinced that his argument accounted for the origins of the *wihtiko* belief, which, he had argued, arose not merely as a justification for scapegoating, but as a means of preventing repeated starvation cannibalism. The problems with Marano’s article were most obvious in this regard. His article suggested that breaking the cannibalism taboo “probably ... lowers the threshold for breaking it on subsequent occasions,” and this was why “the Indians doubtless tried to avoid getting themselves into a food crisis with those who had already broken it.” Yet Marano also asserted that “all executed windigo victims met death at the hands of their fellow Indians for reasons unrelated to the threat of their committing cannibalism.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 406, 408, 409.

<sup>58</sup> McGee, in *ibid.*, 401.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 409. “It may well be asked why the windigo rationalization for the elimination of the incapacitated came to be the accepted one, since Grant indicates that simple abandonment (or unadorned homicide?) was the accepted procedure among the sub-boreal Ojibwa in 1804. This is an issue I must leave for another occasion.”

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 356, 388. The first point was only stated on page 388. It was omitted from the introduction to his article and its conclusion, where instead, emphasis was placed on “scapegoating.”

The most substantial critique of Marano's interpretation came from Brightman, beginning in 1983.<sup>61</sup> He found Marano's arguments "unduly categorical," and his scapegoating explanation "hardly more flattering than the most colorful existing accounts of the psychosis."<sup>62</sup> According to Brightman, Marano had downplayed the real fear experienced by people and "underemphasized ... the 'emic' emphasis on *curing* rather than summarily executing" either famine or potential windigo cannibals, which seldom happened "without evidence that they posed a continuing threat." Instead, Marano had assumed that "the threats and attacks noted in so many accounts were *all* hallucinations or fabrications of the survivors."<sup>63</sup> In response to this brief critique, Marano acknowledged that summary execution was not always or immediately the fate of suspected *wihtikowak* or starvation cannibals, but rejected as a "serious misreading" of his position the allegation that he discounted the fears behind many *wihtiko* executions and assumed most of them to be *conscious* rationalizations.

This was, however, a much needed clarification of an "unduly categorical" or at least ambivalent articulation of his original argument. He had stated that "all" cases of *wihtiko* executions documented by Westerners (not including Swift Runner, who was executed by the Canadian state for starvation murder and cannibalism) "appear to be *thinly disguised rationalizations* for triage homicide," and that "the 10% sample these documented cases constitute is representative of the 'windigo' universe" – a finding "reinforced" by his own ethnographic observations of "frequent instances of scapegoating and ... countless witchcraft accusations."<sup>64</sup> In contrast, Marano now clarified that "[e]thnohistorical case materials suggest

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<sup>61</sup> Brightman, et al., "On Windigo Psychosis," 120-125.

<sup>62</sup> On this point Marano later countered that he "did not seek to 'flatter,' but to understand." Brightman, in Brightman et al., "On Windigo Psychosis, 123.

<sup>63</sup> Brightman, in *Ibid.*, 983, 120.

<sup>64</sup> Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 386.

wide variation, with two apparent patterns emerging from the data”: Algonquian executions prompted by “stark terror” and others where there was “no indication of fear of the ‘windigos’”<sup>65</sup>

Citing Kohl’s 1860 analysis of the *wihtiko* phenomenon, Marano retreated further from the scapegoating emphasis:

Kohl (p. 358) also believed that “this fear and the general opinion have so worked upon some minds, that they believe themselves to be really windigos, and must act in that way.” This last is a position I question with respect to cannibalistic behavior, but Kohl’s perspicacious observation that the windigo phenomenon is characterized by “a certain epidemic tendency, and a spontaneous self-production and propagation” puts him far ahead of his time.”<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, this was more or less the argument that Teicher and others had made, and that Brightman and others later took up, except that both Teicher and Brightman were less sceptical of the possibility that it had sometimes extended to cannibalistic behaviour.

Drawing from Preston, Marano shifted further away from his initial emphasis on scapegoating, and from “group psychodynamics” to “individual psychodynamics.” He argued that “in *all* the ways in which the term has been applied to humans,” *wihtiko* “involves the loss of competence ... the absence of mastery and control, passive victimhood, withdrawal/removal, abstraction/distraction, the abrogation of personal responsibility, and ultimately the forfeiture of self.” Finally, drawing from Tooker’s assessment of a linguistic relationship between the Powhatan word for “fool” (“wintuc, wintuccum”) and the Algonquian *wihtiko*, Marano suggested that fool was perhaps the original meaning of *wihtiko*, a term that only later – during a crisis period of a century and a half – acquired a cannibalistic connotation. He nevertheless

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<sup>65</sup> Marano, in Brightman et al., "On Windigo Psychosis", 122.

<sup>66</sup> Marano, in *Ibid.*, 123.

acknowledged that further research was needed.<sup>67</sup> Further research has been conducted, but it remains inconclusive on this particular point.<sup>68</sup>

Although Marano clarified his initial argument in response to criticism, he did not acknowledge any unfairness in his assessment of scholars before him, as was clear in his brief reiteration of his argument in 1985 in which he referred to “windigo psychosis” as a “discredited” artefact of anthropology, “a belief among academics that the Cree and Ojibwa are, for reasons peculiar to their culture, subject to a bizarre form of mental illness that compels them to eat human flesh.”<sup>69</sup>

Brightman provided a far more substantial response to Marano’s arguments in two 1988 publications. One of them, co-authored with Brown, was part of a commentary on George Nelson’s 1823 journal-letter, which they edited and published, along with appended commentaries by Native scholars Cuthand and LaRoque.<sup>70</sup> As noted, Nelson’s journal contains the earliest extensive non-Algonquian assessment of the *wihtiko*, including the human *wihtiko* condition, which Nelson had described as “a sort of mania, or fever, a distemper of the brain.”<sup>71</sup> As Brown and Brightman pointed out, this “anticipated anthropological discussion of ‘windigo

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<sup>67</sup> Marano, in *ibid.*, 124.

<sup>68</sup> Goddard had looked at this in several unpublished papers. John Hewson, “Owls and Windigos,” *International Journal of American Linguistics* 58, no. 2 (April 1992): 234-235. Amy Dahlstrom, “Owls and Cannibals Revisited: Traces of Windigo Features in Meskwaki Texts,” *Papers of the Thirty-Fourth Algonquian Conference*, edited by H.C. Wolfart (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2003): 81-114. Hewson attempted to provide an etymological explanation for the use of *wihtiko* as a term for the monster as well as an owl in some Algonquian languages. He proposed “that the etymology of this word for owl and scary figure is \*wi:nt-ekwe:w-a, an animate that is called or named by higher powers – in the case of the Windigo, driven by demonic powers. To call the owl by this name may relate to the legend, widespread on this continent, that persons about to die hear the owl call their name.” Hewson, “Owls and Windigos,” 235. Dahlstrom argued that in Meskwaki and other southern Algonquian languages, “the word for ‘windigo’ came to mean ‘owl’ and not vice versa. “Owls and Cannibals.”

<sup>69</sup> Marano, cited in Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 346.

<sup>70</sup> Brown and Brightman, “*Orders of the Dreamed*,” 159, 163. Although they only briefly referred directly to the debate on *wihtiko* psychosis, their findings, outlined in a 14-page section (158-171) of their commentary, contrasted with Marano’s. Cuthand and LaRoque’s commentaries on Nelson’s manuscript are discussed in Chapter Five. LaRoque’s commentary is very brief and does not engage in detail with Nelson’s text. Cuthand’s commentary engages more substantially with the manuscript, and offers additional ethnographic evidence on the *wihtiko*, some of which is cited in Chapters One and Two.

<sup>71</sup> George Nelson, in *ibid.*, 91.

psychosis' as a culturally specific mental disorder." They incorrectly attributed this position to Teicher, who, despite suggesting such a view in his introduction, had later clarified that the *wihtiko* was a culturally-specific belief or concept that conditioned and channelled a variety of more universal anxieties and mental illnesses.<sup>72</sup> In regard to this and the extreme infrequency of *wihtiko* disorders or murders and famine cannibalism, even in famine conditions, Brown and Brightman echoed Teicher's assessment. In some contrast to Marano and especially Teicher, however, they concluded that *wihtiko*-associated incidents "terminated far more typically in cure than in execution or in murder and cannibalism," a point conceded by Marano. While they, in turn, acknowledged triage homicide and scapegoating as one possible explanation for specific *wihtiko* cases, they did not give it the weight that Marano did. Nelson's testimony, moreover, challenged Marano's description of reports of non-starvation cannibalism or cannibal urges as hallucinations or fabrications of survivors or scapegoaters. On the other hand, Nelson and other sources also indicated that "the experience of famine cannibalism may have been a significant component in the development of windigo behavioral disorders," a point acknowledged by Marano, even if initially downplayed. Citing Nelson, they also noted the importance given to dreams and the belief in spirit possession as contributing factors in the *wihtiko* complex.<sup>73</sup> It was with emphasis on this point, in particular, that Brightman would formulate a more lengthy and focused critical response to Marano's arguments.

Brown and Brightman echoed Cooper's overall assessment that the *wihtiko* was explained by both ecological and cultural factors; otherwise, one could not explain why similar ecological factors had not produced similar responses. It was this very problem that Nelson had also formulated, like many afterwards, "in terms of the contrast between the universally human

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<sup>72</sup> See discussion of Teicher in Chapter Five.

<sup>73</sup> Brown and Brightman, "*Orders of the Dreamed*," 162-169, 171.

and the culturally specific.” According to Brown and Brightman, the “specificity of the windigo disorder led him [Nelson] ultimately to credit the explanations of his Algonquian informants.”<sup>74</sup> The statement they cite and italicize (as below) as evidence, however, can be interpreted (as underlined) quite differently:

There is such a singular, strange, incomprehensible contradictoriness in almost all these cases, and many I have heard, that I do most verily believe they are denunciations, witch or wizardisms: in any other manner they are not rationally to be accounted for, unless we suppose all those who feed upon human flesh to be thus possessed – then it is natural to man in those cases; but why then not the same with us as with these people?<sup>75</sup>

Brown and Brightman italicized the last phrase, but the underlined phrase suggests Nelson was inclined to consider *wihtiko* stories as denunciations, as there seemed to be no other reasonable explanation. Nelson left the question open, however. Had Marano done likewise, his interpretation might not have received the extended criticism Brightman applied to it in a separate article published in 1988.

Brightman critiqued Marano’s thesis on several points, above all for his dismissal of the *wihtiko* “psychosis” as “a figment of the Algonquian and Western ethnological imagination.” Brightman contended, in contrast, that a “psychiatric disorder entailing cannibalistic ideation and behavior ... [was] historically demonstrable.”<sup>76</sup> The European and Euroamerican historical accounts that he drew on were neither naïve nor unsympathetic. On the contrary, they tended to be sceptical and to depict cannibal incidents “not as exemplifications of savagery but as tragedies in which, as Isham ... phrased it [in the 1740s], ‘hunger will Enduce any man to do an unhuman action.’”<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, a comparison with Algonquian accounts showed a consistency in their depictions of the essential features of the *wihtiko* across geo-cultural space and time, from early

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>75</sup> Nelson, in *ibid.*, 171.

<sup>76</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 338, 337. Brightman argued that “the defining attribute of the windigo is its preference for human flesh when other food is available.” *Ibid.*, 351-352.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

contact into the mid-twentieth century.<sup>78</sup> These sources, as well as linguistic evidence, also strongly suggested that the *wihtiko* complex was of pre-contact origin, and sometimes involved “a disorder characterized by cannibalistic impulses and ideation.”<sup>79</sup>

Brightman also critiqued Marano for reducing “the complex of windigo beliefs ... to their purported functional effects.”<sup>80</sup> Although his “witch hunt hypothesis” clearly explained some cases,” it was “of dubious validity as concerns the majority of recorded windigo cases,” which more typically ended with cures than executions.<sup>81</sup> “Hypothetically,” Brightman pointed out, those who believed in the *wihtiko* “would be *less* likely” to resort to famine cannibalism precisely because it “carried ... the threat of subsequent degeneration into a nonhuman monster.” The functionalist argument assumed, in contrast, that life-threatening famine increased the occurrence or threat of cannibalism, as well as the use of the *wihtiko* to project fears of cannibalism onto those who increased the risks of starvation.<sup>82</sup> Such scapegoating required a pre-existing belief in, and fear of, cannibal *wihtiko* possession or transformation. Material explanations – functional or ecological – could not on their own explain the *wihtiko*’s “origin, persistence, characteristics and distribution.”<sup>83</sup> Other malevolent beings or explanations might have sufficed for the same functional purpose. Other societies, moreover, had faced equivalent levels of deprivation without giving rise to an equivalent belief.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 338, and 346, 351.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 338, 351.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 338. Ironically, Marano had criticized other anthropologists’ and other Western depictions of the “Algonquian windigo complex ... as an oversimplified and imbalanced distortion of a vastly more differentiated and recondite array of conceptions.” Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982),

<sup>81</sup> Brightman, “Windigo in the Material,” 357-358. Marano had already addressed some of these points in his reply to comments in 1982 – taking care of sick and elderly was one thing, taking care of demented or those who lacked self-control was another.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 337. The “correlation of environmental deterioration with early references to windigo ... does not hold for the interior Crees of Manitoba and Saskatchewan” (even if one accepts the now contested claims of Bishop). *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 354-357.

What, then, explained the origin of the *wihtiko*? “Without experiences of famine cannibalism the windigo complex could probably never have developed,” acknowledged Brightman, but “the belief that famine cannibals (among others) could become windigo monsters developed ... as a socially shared and symbolically constituted *interpretation* of famine cannibalism.”<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, if the belief or fear that “cannibal impulses would manifest themselves” in particular circumstances was “virtually dictated by cultural premises,” this did not explain the “psychodynamic process” by which individuals – albeit very rarely – might “transition from anxiety or anger or hunger to the impulses themselves.”<sup>86</sup>

In answer to this problem, Brightman argued that Algonquian notions about the “fragility of human identity, the significance of eating, and the prefiguring of events in dreams” could sometimes foster a ‘fatalist’ loss of hope in the face of external influences that were seen to impose themselves upon the individual.<sup>87</sup>

In short:

windigo ideology created cannibalism by convincing some individuals that they were predestined to it. Simultaneously such instances, together with windigo disorders resulting in cures and executions, re-created, validated, and modified the premises of windigo ideology and the structural categories that organized it.<sup>88</sup>

Marano had actually pointed to similar answers in his initial article and, above all, in his replies and clarifications. Nevertheless, his overstatement of his case gave the impression of deeper differences between himself, those he criticized and his own critics.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 368-369.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 337, 354, 363, 372. “Cases of windigo disorder need to be interpreted within the context of Algonquian doctrines of dreaming and predestination, a perspective never systematically explored despite the voluminous literature on the topic.” *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 374. “Since no individual windigo incident would, in its particulars, replicate any other or conform in all respects to cultural presuppositions, distorting relationships between structure, ideology, and practice were inevitable. The open-endedness, dynamic qualities, and regional variability of windigo that Preston (“The Witiko,”) and Marano (*Windigo Psychosis*) rightly emphasize are the necessary attributes of any cultural complex.” *Ibid.*, 363.

If tendencies towards reductionism and overstatement had already led to problems, it would not be the last time. Over the next two decades, the *wihtiko* appeared in academia primarily as a tool or means of understanding and critique. The final word on the *wihtiko* itself, deemed forthcoming by Burch in 1979, continued to be evasive.<sup>89</sup> Meanwhile, scholars looking to the *wihtiko* primarily as a *means* of understanding and critique tended to read existing literature selectively. Brightman's contributions were often ignored or misconstrued, as were many of Marano's clarifications, but there were other examples as well. The lack of scholarly consensus, noted Carlson in 2009, stemmed partly from incomplete literature reviews and poor interdisciplinary communication.<sup>90</sup>

In another publication that same year, Wonderley contended – quite tenuously by this time – that the scholarly literature (with few exceptions) had “all but ignored oral narrative about windigos.” He sought to remedy this with an analysis of 50 *wihtiko* narratives, which he divided into three categories: “those visualizing windigos as powerful supernaturals in a world lacking referents to familiar space and time,” “those emphasizing a human's personal power and the ability it confers to assume the form of a windigo” (usually in order to kill a windigo), and “those ascribing humanlike behavior to windigos operating in the familiar world.” He argued that “‘fact’ (in case studies and first-hand testimonies) and folklore may be more thoroughly intertwined in the windigo literature than has been recognized,” a point that others had made already. Also echoing others, he concluded that *wihtiko* tradition was “rich but ... also richly ambiguous ... stories are multivalent and may convey different messages to different people.”

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<sup>89</sup> In a 1979 review of recent research, Burch cited the “so-called Wittiko (Cree) or Windigo (Ojibwa) ‘psychosis’” as an “old subject in Northern Algonquian studies ... still being actively investigated,” having recently “received considerable attention” in multiple articles as well as shorter replies and criticisms. “However, ... we must look to the future for the final word on the subject.” Burch, “Ethnography,” 79.

<sup>90</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 371.

Wonderley did not offer any significant new arguments or nuances, or any new narratives: all of them had been previously published by others.<sup>91</sup>

In his 2009 article, in contrast, Carlson brought significant new arguments and evidence to the debate on *wihtiko* veracity and etiology. In order to “revive witiko (metaphorically) from the sceptical discourse of these scholarly circles,” he drew primarily on previously unpublished accounts of *wihtiko* cases from the Athabasca region of present-day northern Alberta between 1878 and 1910.<sup>92</sup> This evidence provided support for several explanations of *wihtiko*-associated phenomena and killings, including those highlighted by Marano. Other cases – based on Euroamerican and Algonquian testimonies – showed that “certain individuals self-identified as witikos, exhibited violent behavior, and declared cannibal impulses.” Only one case – insufficient to be conclusive – provided clear evidence of cannibalism outside the context of extreme necessity. Rather than showing evidence of *wihtiko* ‘psychosis,’ however, it showed a man who first resorted to starvation cannibalism and then engaged in non-starvation cannibalism after becoming fatalistic about *wihtiko* possession. This echoed Brightman’s analysis, but Carlson stopped short of agreeing that such behaviour constituted a “psychosis.” Carlson also pointed out that Brightman’s explanation left accounts of bodily swelling unaccounted for. Also unexplained were cases of two or more individuals in the same locale spontaneously exhibiting signs associated with *wihtiko* possession, and then being cured. It was not clear, in his view, how mental illness could explain these cases.

Carlson concluded that “a *witiko* ‘condition’ resembling the Algonquian reports” was “historically verifiable,” but concurred with Preston’s assessment that *wihtiko* ‘psychosis’ did not

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<sup>91</sup> Wonderley, *At the Font*, 71, 80, 97.

<sup>92</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 355-356. Carlson also examined one of these incidents, and its protagonists and narration, in greater detail in “Searching for Catherine Auger: The Forgotten Wife of the Wihtikôw (Windigo),” chapter 9 in *Recollecting: Lives of Aboriginal Women of the Canadian Northwest and Borderlands*, eds. Sarah Carter and Patricia A. McCormack (Edmonton, AB: AU Press, 2011), 225-244.

accurately portray it.<sup>93</sup> Carlson concluded that the *wihtiko* condition was grounded in “anxiety about turning into a cannibal” rather than a specific “psychosis causing one to have (and act on) cannibalistic impulses.” Although he avoided the term psychosis, his explanation of a “condition” grounded in “anxiety about turning into a cannibal” was not so different from Cooper’s 1933 explanation of a “psychosis” resulting from “the conflict between hunger and the rigid tribal taboo” against cannibalism, which provoked among the Algonquian a “profound aversion ... and ... horror.”<sup>94</sup>

For Carlson, *wihtiko* was “a social construction of the cultural world it was found within” – of a “coherent belief system within a uniquely Algonquian cosmology ... [that] generated and shaped certain behaviors and experiences.” When this system lost reinforcement in the twentieth century, cases ceased. Nevertheless, the “closest approximation ... to a proper understanding of the *witiko* phenomenon comes from the northern Algonquians themselves. Otherwise, *witiko* uncharitably remains a mystery.” In short, there was a gap separating attempts to understand the *wihtiko* “*from within* northern Algonquian cosmologies” and attempts to understand it from within “Western perspectives.” In his conclusion, however, Carlson also states that one does not necessarily have to espouse northern Algonquian beliefs, but at least give them more serious consideration than has been given heretofore.<sup>95</sup>

In contrast to Carlson, Thibault’s 2011 study sought to discern the *wihtiko*’s significance within a broader intercultural context.<sup>96</sup> Although she drew widely from evidence and

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<sup>93</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 371-380.

<sup>94</sup> Cooper, “Cree Witiko Psychosis,” *Primitive Man* 6, no. 1 (January 1933), 21-24.

<sup>95</sup> Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 381-382, 355.

<sup>96</sup> Thibault, “Wendigo,” 6-10, 27. This MA thesis was published the next year. Thibault, *La légende du Wendigo. Entre fiction et réalité* (Québec: Éditions Québec-Livres, 2012). To this end, she examined Native and Newcomer *wihtiko* legends and historical accounts, including two trials, 57 cases in total (almost all of them drawn from previously published sources). She also examined and compared cultural representations of fear; survival difficulties faced by migratory peoples; cannibalism of different types; legends about other monsters, such as the werewolf and the vampire; and various other ‘culture-bound syndromes.’

scholarship, Thibault offered no significant new analysis and her synthesis contradicted, ignored or misinterpreted some of the existing scholarship.<sup>97</sup> She cited exile and death as the consequences of *wihtiko* possession, but made no mention of cures.<sup>98</sup> She confused emic and etic explanations, arguing that because famine and hunger were seldom mentioned in *wihtiko* stories, they were not predominant factors compared to cannibalism and isolation. She also stated that fear of cannibalism was central to the *wihtiko* and invariably led to *wihtiko* possession, despite evidence indicating that cannibalism was less feared than the extreme loss of mental and moral competence it sometimes entailed, and that not all cannibalism led to *wihtiko* possession.<sup>99</sup>

#### **WIHTIKO: A PATH TO UNDERSTANDING NATIVES & NEWCOMERS?**

Thibault's study reflects a well-founded instinct to think broadly and comparatively as well as deeply. Yet it also illustrates the challenge entailed in such a project and the origin of much of the apparent discord in *wihtiko* scholarship: inadequate communication among scholars from diverse disciplines, some too quick to claim full understanding or interpretive control of a phenomena that has long been evasive, diverse, ambiguous, changing, and open to debate even among Algonquian experts. As noted earlier, this is compounded by the fact that the *wihtiko* has often appeared in academia, not primarily as an object of inquiry, but as a means of inquiring into Native and Newcomer cultures, differences and relations.

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<sup>97</sup> She ignored or misread Teicher and Brightman with regard to the role of belief; Flannery with regard to cannibalism that does not lead to *wihtiko* possession; Preston, with regard to the primary trait of the *wihtiko* as loss of human competence rather than cannibalism; Brightman, Nelson and Brown and Flannery with regard to the importance of treatment and cures; Marano with regard to a confusion of emic and etic explanations and famine as a factor.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 84, 109-112.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 23, 62, 82-84.

Far from being polarized, these emphases represented either end of a continuum along which both objectives resonated in varying degrees. Most scholars were interested in larger questions about Algonquian and intercultural contexts. If they, like Preston, delved deeply into the nature and meaning of the *wihtiko*, it was because they understood that the *wihtiko* could only shed light on Algonquian and intercultural contexts if it were properly understood within those contexts. For most scholars, this required consideration and critique of emic and etic (insider and outsider) perspectives alike. But no scholar who used the *wihtiko* as a tool or window of analysis could completely avoid the debate about the nature, origin and meaning of the *wihtiko* concept and its relation to associated phenomena and traits. Some acknowledged this debate without engaging in it, often because they addressed questions that did not necessarily require resolution of the debate.<sup>100</sup> Often, the *wihtiko* was too marginal or transitional to the central theme to elicit or necessitate more than a brief treatment, but these could sometimes hold great insights.<sup>101</sup> Others avoided the debate, even when it was relevant, by drawing selectively from the literature, overstating parts of it, or assuming it was resolved.

Until recently many scholars, citing Marano as the leading authority, neglected subsequent criticism and counter-arguments, especially by Brightman and Brown. Even reference to Marano was sometimes selective; emphasis was placed on aspects of his argument that put Algonquian culture in the best possible light or helped support a critique of problems – real and perceived – originating in Western culture. Despite Brightman’s subsequent critique, many echoed or overstated Marano’s suggestion that the *wihtiko* may have resulted from

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<sup>100</sup> Raymond H. Prince, citing Marano as a source, referred to a “psychiatric disorder called *windigo* by Algonkian peoples” in “Psychiatry Among the James Bay Cree: A Focus on Pathological Grief Reactions,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* 30 (January 1993): 38. He merely noted in a footnote that the “windigo concept and its relation to psychiatric disorder has received exhaustive discussion in the literature.” *Ibid.*, 46, footnote 13.

<sup>101</sup> See examples of Scott and Black-Rogers, who are cited in Chapter Two. Colin Scott, “Ideology of Reciprocity,” 85; Scott, “Knowledge Construction,” 197; Black-Rogers, “Ojibwa taxonomy,” 103; Black-Rogers, “Varieties of Starving,” 376, footnote 4.

Western colonialism,<sup>102</sup> and most emphasized his critique of “Windigo psychosis” as a culture-bound Western analysis. But few repeated or emphasized Marano’s explanation of the *wihtiko* as an Algonquian “scapegoating” mechanism. As Brightman had argued, such a reading of the *wihtiko* was “hardly more flattering [of Algonquians] than the most colorful existing accounts of the psychosis.”<sup>103</sup>

Like those they follow and sometimes examine, post-colonial and other late-modern inquiries range from blunt and weak to nuanced and penetrating. If reductionist or literalist readings of the *wihtiko*, as Preston stated in 1980, are “too easy to be real,”<sup>104</sup> so too are reductionist or literalist readings of *wihtiko* scholarship, modern and late-modern alike. If, as Preston remarked in 1976, post-colonial distortions of the *wihtiko* are now more common, it is primarily because post-colonial perspectives are now more dominant in the *study* of Native cultures and Native-Newcomer relations, regardless of their counter-cultural position in other contexts. If scrutiny of Western culture should be considered proportional to influence rather than propensity for error, this is no less true for scrutiny of post-colonial scholarship where it holds sway. Like that which preceded it, post-colonial scholarship cannot be divorced from its larger context. If some perpetuate binaries of cultural difference to invert judgments about mental and moral competence once associated with them, their goal is often to open dialogue. This seems ostensibly the case with Forbes and Cardinal’s critiques (cited in Chapters Two and Four). Yet, as Sheehan warns, they “might well lose everything.” Any study subordinated to the

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<sup>102</sup> Marano himself had noted that “Whether or not eating one another was a frequent necessity for the Cree before the fur-trade epoch is a matter for further research.” Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 388.

<sup>103</sup> Brightman, in Brightman et al., “On Windigo Psychosis,” 120. Marano responded: “My thesis is that the Northern Algonkian peoples are not culturally or psychologically aberrant, but respond to stress in much the same way as do ethnographically similar populations.” Marano, in Brightman et al., “On Windigo Psychosis,” 123.

<sup>104</sup> Preston, “Wiiitiko” (1980), 118.

goal of “convict[ing] civilization of its crimes against the aborigine”<sup>105</sup> may only provide an excuse for its own dismissal or a scapegoating alternative to reform.

In 1979, the same year that Forbes first published his critique of “Columbus and other Cannibals,” Morrison articulated a more nuanced and scholarly variation.<sup>106</sup> Similar to Forbes, he cited *wihtiko* (*kiwakwe* or *chenoo*) stories as evidence that “Algonkians recognized anti-social behavior as the antithesis of their moral order.” But he went further than Forbes in acknowledging the problem of evil, anti-social behaviour, or “alienation” as “an urgent problem” and concern for Algonquian and Euroamerican alike, and in recognizing differences between the challenges faced by “communal Algonkians” and those faced by “urbanized societies of the European colonies.”<sup>107</sup> However, Morrison’s argument was distorted by his binary assumption that “Algonkians oriented to reality in rigorously relational ways and ... Euroamericans did not.”<sup>108</sup> The common ground, therefore, was limited to a rather small minority of Europeans – Christians generally and Jesuit missionaries in particular. If many Algonquians “respected and identified with the Jesuits, they found that relationship on the whole atypical of their experience with Europeans,” most of whom “did not develop personal ties with the Algonkians as easily as the Jesuits and, in fact, ... were either a direct or indirect threat to the survival of their communities.” Citing a Mi’kmaq tale in which a Jesuit changed the heart of a *chenoo*, returning it to its original humanity, Morrison argued that the “inclusion of the Jesuit in the Mi’kmaq tale

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<sup>105</sup> Sheehan, “Indian-White Relations,” 267-268, 274. See discussion of Forbes in Chapter One.

<sup>106</sup> Morrison, “Towards a History,” 51-58. This was republished in 2002 as a chapter in Morrison’s *Solidarity of Kin*.

<sup>107</sup> Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 163, 61-62.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

represents the new possibilities of morally transforming the incorrigibly individualistic Europeans.”<sup>109</sup>

Morrison’s perception of such stories as a key to “Algonkian ethics ... [and to] reconstructing the peoples’ encounter with European newcomers” was well founded.<sup>110</sup> Yet his inference that the *chenoo*, as an outsider in this story, represented Europeans, was unsupported by the only source he cited.<sup>111</sup> More than anything, Morrison’s inference was grounded in his intuition that the Algonquians’ “solidarity of kin” ethic provided a powerful critique of Euroamerican anti-social individualism – a critique that was echoed elsewhere in his 2002 republication of this article.<sup>112</sup>

This critique was grounded in a contrast of Native ideals and Newcomer actions. On the one hand, Morrison argued that “Algonkian culture ... *successfully balance[d]* ... the dramatic tensions generated between individualistic impulse and the norm of community-oriented behavior.” On the other hand, “[a]s might be expected, ... Algonkians tested Europeans’ humanity ... and found many of them wanting.” If Europeans fell short of their predominantly Christian ideals, Algonquians’ “cardinal insight,” in contrast, “*propelled* them toward constructive alliance, a religious socialization of selfish, individualistic, and authoritarian (*and thus non-Indian*) others.” Finally, if Algonquians began to lose their successful ‘balance,’ it was

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 77 & 68-69. Morrison elaborated further: “the obviously transcultural aspect of the priest’s relationship with the cannibal giant ... suggests powerful sympathetic impulses ... subtle gives and takes of a mutual spiritual acculturation between the deeply religious Algonkians and French Jesuits.”

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>111</sup> He cited the same Mi’kmaq story quoted at the beginning of Chapter Two, told by Samuel Paul – deceased at age 80 in 1843 – to his grandson, Louis Brooks, transcribed by Silas Rand in 1859; and copied by Charles Leland in his 1884 collection of Algonquian legends. Leland, *Algonquin Legends*, 244 (Rand published his own book, *Legends of the Micmacs* in 1894). Leland thought the story to be of Inuit origin, but neither he nor any of the stories suggest the *Chenoo* came anywhere but from the north. It is only Rand, whom Morrison does not cite, who speculated – unaware of windigo stories told across the Canadian subarctic – that “the tradition of these remarkable beings” arose from the first visits of Europeans by ship: “it would be easy to magnify the men who could paddle such immense canoes into giants and wizards.” Rand *Legends*, 308 and 239-240.

<sup>112</sup> Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*. No substantial changes were made to Morrison’s republication of this particular essay in 2002 collection of his essays.

primarily because “European contact intensified the ancient struggle against alienation and discord with the introduction of new and, at times, contradictory European social views.” Citing Bishop, he also suggested that *wihtiko* cannibalism resulted from Euroamerican pressures.<sup>113</sup>

Although Morrison briefly acknowledged that different contexts generated different challenges to the ideals of reciprocity and solidarity, he did not elaborate on the extent to which, in many European contexts, reciprocity outside of one’s immediate kinship network was far less likely to be a virtue encouraged by necessity. Among small, mobile, subarctic Indigenous populations, in contrast, the very capacity for hoarding was severely limited, and reciprocity was frequently practiced out of necessity, even when not out of virtue.<sup>114</sup> Outside such contexts, however, there is no indication that the practice of reciprocity beyond kinship networks was any less tenuous among Indigenous North Americans than it was among Europeans or Euroamericans.<sup>115</sup> Finally, if cross-cultural encounters “intensified the ancient struggle against alienation and discord” for Algonquians, it did no less for Europeans and Euroamericans.<sup>116</sup> Notwithstanding these issues, Morrison’s essays, like Forbes’, were nonetheless replete with insights. The same can be said of much of the literature that appears to have ignored Brown and Brightman’s contributions to the debate about the nature of the *wihtiko*.

In a 1988 article, Ridington asserted that “uninformed ethnocentrism [had] dominated much of the debate about the causes of a ‘windigo psychosis.’” He based this on Marano’s “careful” study, despite Brown’s suggestion that Marano’s analysis had not necessarily been so

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<sup>113</sup> Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 61-62, 69 (footnote 47) and 71, 79 & 163.

<sup>114</sup> See Lips, “Naskapi Law,” 1947.

<sup>115</sup> See discussion of this in chapter four.

<sup>116</sup> Morrison, *Solidarity of Kin*, 163. See Annabel S. Brett, *Change of State: Nature and the Limits of the City in Early Modern Natural Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), chapter 1, “Travelling the borderline,” which examines debates about natural law, rights and mendicancy in Europe alongside debates about the “right of inter-communication” with regard to the Americas.

“careful” or fair in its critique. He did not likely have the benefit, however, of Brown and Brightman’s more recent and substantial contributions to the debate that year.<sup>117</sup>

Goldman’s 1996 “A Taste of the Wild” critiqued Samuel Hearne and Henry Thompson’s exploration narratives, which “seem to have ... [been] ‘enhanced’ ... with unsubstantiated accounts of cannibalism guaranteed to titillate European audiences.” As a result, “they mistranslate and ... distort the notion of the ‘windigo.’”<sup>118</sup> Although Goldman references Brightman’s analysis of similar Euroamerican accounts, she gives no indication that his findings contrast with her own conclusion “that explorers, even when accurately reporting references to the windigo, lacked a context in which to interpret the highly figurative term.”<sup>119</sup> She also makes no mention of Brightman’s criticism of her arguments, drawn from Bishop, Ridington and Marano, in favour of a post-contact origin of the human *wihtiko*. Hearne and Thompson, as agents of fur-trade companies, “were indirectly responsible for creating starvation conditions that gave rise to the cannibal monsters they regarded with such horror.” These explorers, Goldman continues, were “documenting, not an entrenched practice among the Cree and Ojibwa, but an evolving response to the Europeans’ disruptive presence.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ridington, “Knowledge, Power,” 98.

<sup>118</sup> Marlene Goldman, “A Taste of the Wild: A Critique of Representations of Natives as Cannibals in Late-Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Canadian Explorer Literature,” 43-66 in *Multiculturalism and Representation: Selected Essays*, ed. by John Rieder and Larry E. Smith (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1996), 46. It was also a critique of their inclusion as “the only samples of exploration literature currently featured in the first volume of the popular Anthology of Canadian Literature in English, a standard text used by Canadian university students edited by Brown and Bennett ... worse ... these brief selections from the explorers’ narratives actually magnify Hearne’s and Thompson’s focus on accounts of supposed acts of cannibalism among the Natives.” *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. She writes: “Robert Brightman (“Windigo” 347-351) also analyzes accounts of cannibalism reported by early explorers, traders, and missionaries.” *Ibid.*, 59, endnote 4. Goldman agreed that George Nelson was an exception, but Brightman had cited more examples than Nelson.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 46. Goldman does not consider the fact that when the fur trade reached its peak the sources were more complete because the fur traders had the best knowledge of what was going on and had penetrated the ‘hinterlands’ much further. Increased information does not equal increased incidence.

Goldman's analysis of Hearne and Thompson's narratives shows that their published versions were indeed embellished, a finding that echoes Brightman's,<sup>121</sup> but her article is put in doubt by her citation but non-engagement of Brightman's work where it challenges her own findings and those she drew from Marano's "invaluable essay."<sup>122</sup> Ironically, Goldman and Marano draw quite different conclusions from the same excerpt from Hearne: she as an example of distortion, he, as primary affirmative evidence for his main thesis. The relevant excerpt from Hearne reads as follows:

It is the general opinion of the Southern [i.e. Cree] Indians, that when any of their tribe have been driven to the necessity of eating human flesh, they become so fond of it, that no person is safe in their company. And though it is well known they are never guilty of making this horrid repast but when driven to it by necessity, yet those who have made it are not only shunned, but so universally detested by all who know them, that no Indians will tent with them and they are frequently murdered silyly [sic]. I have seen several of those poor wretches ... the eye most expressively spoke the dictates of the heart, and seemed to say, "Why do you despise me for my misfortunes? The period is probably not far distant, when you may be driven to the like necessity!"<sup>123</sup>

Although Goldman argues that Hearne, like Thompson, viewed the *wihtiko* with repugnance, this passage – juxtaposed with evidence cited by Brightman and others – suggests that tales of cannibalism might be embellished, for different reasons, or met with repugnance and sympathy, by Native and Newcomer alike.<sup>124</sup> But this, in fact, is one of Goldman's points; with regard to Wapoo, a suspected *wihtiko*, she writes that "both Hearne and the Crees ... display the same tendency to label the outsider as other, and there is no better marker of otherness than the label

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<sup>121</sup> Brightman, "Windigo in the Material," 357-358.

<sup>122</sup> Goldman, "A Taste of the Wild," 46.

<sup>123</sup> Hearne, cited in Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 388. The same text is cited by Goldman, "Taste of the Wild," 47-48. This is the most important part of the text cited affirmatively by Marano in support of his contention that *wihtiko* was a scapegoating mechanism, "an example of a human tendency to condemn most vigorously in others that which is most feared in oneself and the propensity to project those fears onto vulnerable others." Marano, "Windigo Psychosis" (1982), 388.

<sup>124</sup> "Euro-Canadian observers," writes Brightman, "represented them not as exemplifications of savagery but as tragedies in which, as Isham (1949 [1743-49]: 100) phrased it, 'hunger will Enduce any man to do an unhuman action.'" Brightman, "Windigo in the Material," 365.

‘cannibal.’”<sup>125</sup> Goldman’s concluding line articulates a more cautious position: “this study demonstrates [that these] ... explorers and fur-traders ... were partly responsible for the “birth” of (or, at ... least, the intensification of) the monster ... they viewed with such fascination and repugnance.”<sup>126</sup>

A year later, in 1997, Angell used the *wihtiko* concept and *wihtiko* narratives to explore the importance of narrative in social therapy. In his critique of the current social science literature, he overlooked the work of Brown and Brightman but included Marano in his criticism of social scientists for approaching “the *windigo* in a reductionist fashion seeking to categorize facts to the exclusion of themes and plots” and “fail[ing] to realize the importance of *windigo* from the constantly changing perspective of native people.” Like Marano, however, he offered a new insight onto the *wihtiko* complex, arguing that “the *windigo* effectively separates the person from the problem” and “serves to explain, predict, and deter the impact of certain events on human behaviors.” This too turned an important insight into a reductionist view by excluding the alternative Algonquian use of the *wihtiko* to explain malice or evil within people – resulting in a self-induced *wihtiko* transformation or possession.<sup>127</sup>

Goldman and Angell were not the last to cite Marano and ignore or downplay Brown and Brightman. Publications by Tseng, in 2001 and 2006, and Ferrara, Lanoue and Waldram, in 2004, did the same. In 2001, Tseng drew on Marano, but omitted Brightman, in a brief assessment of the development of the *wihtiko* into a “diagnosis and classification [as psychosis] ... with no observation of an actual case.” It was an argument he reiterated and expanded slightly

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<sup>125</sup> Goldman, “A Taste of the Wild,” 49.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>127</sup> Angell, “Madness,” 179-196, citations from 188, 179 and 186.

for a 2006 article.<sup>128</sup> Meanwhile, in their 2004 article on “The Self in Northern Canadian Hunting Societies: ‘Cannibals’ and Other ‘Monsters’ as Agents of Healing,” Ferrara and Lanoue also ignored or omitted the work of Brown and Brightman. They used the *wihtiko* to explore the construction and healing of the “Native Self,” which they argued, is “best ... described by the word ‘composite,’” requiring harmony between three elements: the ego-self, the social-self (relationship with other human beings) and the transcendental self (relationship with other-than-human beings). Rather than a culture-bound psychosis, *wihtiko*, they argued, “is more of an attempt to describe the dangers of disequilibrium and the steps that help heal the fragmented and disassociated composite Self.” It was, in their view, a “powerful sign ... still relevant today as people try to balance the components of the Self that are brought into disequilibrium by Euro-Canadian political agendas.”<sup>129</sup>

In another 2004 publication, also on Indigenous health, Waldram also cited Marano while ignoring Brightman and Brown. Waldram, in fact, overstated Marano’s argument. *Wihtiko* ‘psychosis’ originated, he wrote, “in the imaginations of scholars rather than the cultures of the original inhabitants of North America.”<sup>130</sup> Marano, in contrast, had argued that an uncritical reading of Algonquian imaginations was at the root of the problem, as much as scholars’ application of their own.<sup>131</sup> The main target of Waldram’s critique was the larger problem of cultural essentialism, with its untested assumptions of cultural difference, especially between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The construction of the Aboriginal, in this regard, was not

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<sup>128</sup> Wen-Shing Tseng, *Handbook of Cultural Psychiatry* (London: Academic Press, 2001), 256. He reiterated the argument in 2006: Tseng, “From Peculiar Psychiatric.”

<sup>129</sup> Nadia Ferrara and Guy Lanoue, “The Self in Northern Canadian Hunting Societies: ‘Cannibals’ and Other ‘Monsters’ as Agents of Healing” *Anthropologica* 46, no. 1 (2004): 69 and 76. This understanding of the self is found in non-Indigenous society as well.

<sup>130</sup> Waldram, *Revenge of the Windigo*, 194, 191. His very brief four-page treatment of the literature on the *wihtiko*, however, relied heavily on a 1985 article by Lou Marano, but did not address any of the criticism Marano had drawn in the interim by Brightman or others. Waldram, *Ibid.*, 192-195. Waldram dedicated much more space to the broader social science and medical literature relating to constructions of the Aboriginal.

<sup>131</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis,” 1982, 385.

without its equally constructed, essentialized and frequently ill-regarded “foil: the ... ‘white man’ ... [a] ubiquitous bogeyman, the real-life colonizing windigo who is characteristically located in contradistinction to the Aboriginal.”<sup>132</sup> Waldram was equally critical of Aboriginal scholars trained in the Western tradition for their own construction of the Aboriginal.<sup>133</sup> In the end, he was not aiming to invert an “Indian-White” binary, but rather, to critique ill-founded claims to scientific objectivity, where hasty quests for understanding could become obstacles to understanding, and harmful stereotypes would wreak havoc:

Having given life to the psychotic cannibal, inadvertently unleashing its primal forces into our ethnographies, our psychiatric textbooks, our clinics, and even our popular culture, we must now find a way to finally terminate it. Otherwise, the windigo will continue to return, perhaps in the guise of an Ojibwa patient in a Toronto mental health clinic. Hungry.<sup>134</sup>

Waldram lamented that *wihtiko* psychosis was still being discussed despite having been disproven,<sup>135</sup> but Carlson soon argued the opposite: “in spite of evidence demonstrating the historicity of the witiko condition, a number of scholars and commentators *still maintain that witiko is regarded as a disproven artifact of cultural anthropology.*”<sup>136</sup> Further examples supported Carlson’s point. In a 2005 MA thesis, MacNeil drew from Marano to argue that the *wihtiko* was a creation of colonialism. Yet she also asserted: “the published literature on windigo comes to an abrupt halt in 1984.”<sup>137</sup> Intentionally or not, this selective reading of the *wihtiko* and *wihtiko* literature was, in its turn, a creation of post-colonialism.

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<sup>132</sup> Waldram, *Revenge of the Windigo*, 315 & 256-258. “Cross-cultural research is based on an assumption of a priori cultural difference, that, for instance, a registered or self-declared Indian *is* culturally different in meaningful ways from a non-Aboriginal person ... Researchers have rarely explored this as an empirical question.” *Ibid.*, 312.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 316.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 320.

<sup>135</sup> Reference needed for this.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 355-356.

<sup>137</sup> Genevieve E. MacNeil, “Avenging the Windigo: A Critical Ethnohistory of the Algonkian Condition” (MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 2005), 2, 86.

Selective readings of the literature are often unavoidable, especially in short encyclopedia articles, such as Dillon's 2013 article on the "Windigo," published in the *Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*.<sup>138</sup> She shows that the characterization of the *wihtiko* as a creation of colonialism – the post-colonial tendency that Preston critiqued in 1976 – is prevalent in the literary and cinematic context, but her brief article also suggests a scholarly consensus for this interpretation. Omitting Brightman, despite listing him in the bibliography, she argues that Ethnohistorians "emphatically" make the case that "starvation spawned the Windigo, and colonization caused starvation; therefore, colonization brought the Windigo into being." Citing only Carlson, she argues that Native scholars believe that Western perspectives cannot grasp the *wihtiko*. Instead, "hegemonic Western discourse" dismisses the *wihtiko* as "a form of insanity" and *wihtiko* stories to "myth or legends born of the harsh winters ... where food became scarce, and people sometimes resorted to cannibalism to stay alive." The last word is given to Waldram's overstatement of Marano's critique of *wihtiko* psychosis as a scholarly construction of a Native mental disorder. If as Dillon asserts, the "reality of the Windigo for Indigenous peoples is much more complex," so too is the reality of the *wihtiko* for Western scholars,<sup>139</sup> and for those who do not fit easily into either category: Western or Indigenous.

As previous chapters have shown, the history of the *wihtiko* is strongly intercultural. In this regard, Fogelson and Sandy follow Ridington's example in comparing the *wihtiko* to similar cannibal figures in other Indigenous cultures.<sup>140</sup> The nature and degree of Native-Newcomer

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<sup>138</sup> As Dillon notes, in much contemporary popular literature and film, "Windigo has become synonymous with Western capitalistic expansion and cultural appropriation." Dillon, "Windigo," 3.

<sup>139</sup> Dillon, "Windigo," 6-7, 17-18. Dillon's reading of the *wihtiko*, however, is undoubtedly more complex than an encyclopedia article can indicate.

<sup>140</sup> In a 1982 publication, Fogelson appealed to *wihtiko* to frame a study of Cherokee stone-clad giants. There were two possible interpretations in his view: "that the Stoneclad represent the existence of evil in nature and define by negation evil in man; and that the Stoneclad embody specifically the forces of winter and their severe impact upon a primitive society." Raymond D. Fogelson, "Windigo Goes South: Stoneclad among the Cherokees," in Halpin and Ames, *Manlike Monsters on Trial*, 132. Peggy Reeves Sandy compared *wihtiko* with other cannibal

interculturality, however, has been subject to far more attention and debate. This is clear in scholarship, examined in previous chapters, on the *wihtiko* in religious-cultural, socio-economic, and legal-political relations. It is also reflected in other scholarship examined in greater detail here, including literary analyses of Newcomer exploration literature, fiction and popular culture.

Goldman suggested, in 1996, “that explorers, even when accurately reporting references to the windigo, lacked a context in which to interpret the highly figurative term.”<sup>141</sup> This contrasts with author Margaret Atwood’s argument, the year before, that the “Wendigo ... illustrat[es] the extent to which Native motifs have infiltrated non-Native literature and thought.”<sup>142</sup> As she elaborates:

White people and Native people have been interacting in the North, and cross-pollinating one another’s inner landscapes, for hundreds of years now, and the concepts of getting ‘bushed’ [going crazy in the bush] and ‘going Wendigo’ can overlap in interesting ways.<sup>143</sup>

More recently, in a 2001 article, Goldman uses the *wihtiko* to analyze Atwood’s literary prose. *Wihtiko* stories, Goldman argues, should not be seen as “exotic artifacts of a primitive culture,” but “as disaster narratives that register the impact of imperialism and colonization.”<sup>144</sup> This is echoed by Bibeau’s 2007 study of *wihtiko* in the novels by Atwood and other Anglo-Canadian

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figures in *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), especially chapter 3: “Cannibal Monsters and Animal Friends.” In this chapter she compared the *wihtiko* primarily with the Chipewyan Wechuge and the Kwakiutl Man-Eater. The “fear of the cannibal monster ... dressed in various cultural clothes, is probably a cultural universal, appearing in all societies in response to concerns about the antisocial power of hunger.” *Ibid.*, 102. She relied heavily on the information and interpretations of Teicher, Hallowell, Fogelson and Hay, and did not site any more recent literature.

<sup>141</sup> Goldman, “A Taste of the Wild,” 46.

<sup>142</sup> Margaret Atwood, *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), chapter 3 “Eyes of Blood, Heart of Ice: The Windigo,” 62-86, citation at 62. Referring to one American poet who rhymed about the *wihtiko*, Atwood wrote that he “lived far enough away from the North so that he could reduce the Wendigo to an amusing poem; but for those who believe in it, the Wendigo is far from being a laughing matter.” *Ibid.*, 66. “Since the arrival of paper in North America, this creature has made frequent appearances on the page, beginning with notations in explorers’ journals. ... But when the Wendigo gets into this kind of written material – especially when the material is produced by non-Natives – what is it that the Wendigo is understood to be doing there?” *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>144</sup> Goldman, “Margaret Atwood’s *Wilderness Tips*: Apocalyptic Cannibal Fiction,” in Guest, *Eating Their Words*, 167. She uses the *wihtiko* as an interpretive key to Margaret Atwood’s short-story collection *Wilderness Tips*. Atwood, according to Goldman, invites her readers to “look in the mirror, reflect on our own greedy behavior – the legacy of imperialism ... and acknowledge the face of the white cannibal.” *Ibid.*, 181.

novelists, where it appears as a symbol for pondering the question of Canadian identity. According to Bibeau, the windigo prowls around white invaders squatted on Indigenous lands, taking revenge in defence of ‘Turtle Island.’<sup>145</sup>

This emphasis on the *wihtiko* as site or tool for a critique of Western culture is evident in most post-colonial studies of *wihtiko* narratives – contemporary and traditional alike. Sacuta’s literary MA thesis (1987) aims to “show how competitive individualism in White society is just as likely to incite Windigo-like behavior.”<sup>146</sup> Hearne’s 1999 study critiques the cultural appropriation of *wihtiko* stories for children’s literature.<sup>147</sup> Tharp argues, in a 2003 article, that Louise Erdrich’s “The Antelope Wife,”

invites a more conscious approach to cultural adaptations that will resist the devouring presence of mainstream excess and help people not only to refrain from devouring one another, but to learn to nurture one another as well. While the danger to Native cultures is clear, Erdrich’s criticisms *apply just as readily to those who loosed the windigo in the first place*.<sup>148</sup>

This is echoed by Sugars’ 2004 article, which explores how Eden Robinson’s short story “Dogs in Winter,” “the abject Native confronts the culture that gave it being, offering a reminder of white society’s historical complicity in the abjecting of the Native.”<sup>149</sup>

Zimmerman’s 2007 “novella-length creative thesis,” entitled “Red Tag Windigo,” is a blend of fiction and non-fiction that explores the “interpretation and appropriation” of *wihtiko*

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<sup>145</sup> Gilles Bibeau, “Étrange familiarité du Windigo,” *Santé mentale au Québec*, 32, no. 2 (2007): 239-249. Turtle Island is an Iroquoian symbol of the earth and, later, more specifically North America.

<sup>146</sup> Norman Sacuta, “Windigo and Other Disorders” (MA thesis, Department of English, University of Edmonton, 1987), 4. “Algonkian-speaking Natives suffered Windigo Psychosis because of cultural traits remarkably similar to European (White) society. This collection of poems [his thesis] attempts to emphasize this point, that modern Canadian society has produced behavior similar to the murder/cannibalism associated with Windigo, through the narrative of a single person as he becomes possessed by Windigo.” *Ibid.*, v, 1-4.

<sup>147</sup> She briefly examined the incorporation of the windigo in non-Indigenous children’s literature in “Swapping Tales and Stealing Stories: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Folklore in Children’s Literature,” *Library Trends* (winter 1999): 509-528, especially 511-512.

<sup>148</sup> Emphasis added. Julie Tharp, “Windigo ways: eating and excess in Louise Erdrich’s *The Antelope Wife*,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 27, no. 4 (2003):129.

<sup>149</sup> Cynthia Sugars, “Strategic Abjection: Windigo Psychosis and the ‘Postindian’ Subject in Eden Robinson’s ‘Dogs in Winter,’” *Canadian Literature* 181 (2004): 88.

narratives by mainstream Western culture, as well as “the wetiko attitudes they represent.” As he elaborates, such appropriation:

does not simply steal an idea, but steals the signifier of an idea and discards the idea itself; the majority of pop-windigo literatures take the word “windigo” and the simplistic signs that indicate windigo, cannibalism and exoticism, but discard the history and cultural significance of windigo.<sup>150</sup>

Zimmerman goes further, arguing that the “Evidence shows that shortly after first contact with Europeans, First Nations peoples associated them with windigo.” In contrast to Morrison’s earlier claim in this regard, Zimmerman has at least one example to draw on, but it does not support the sweeping and assertive nature of his claim.<sup>151</sup>

Cherubini’s 2008 study does not focus on the *wihtiko* but cites it as an example of a gap between Native and Newcomer cultures: “To be conceptually receptive to the stories of the elders,” he argues – not without good reason – “entails the simultaneously relinquishing of both the perspective from western empirical research and the genuine engagement in Aboriginal peoples’ perspectives.”<sup>152</sup> The same thing can be said, and has been said, about reductionist tendencies in empirical epistemologies more generally, whether in relation to other aspects of Western culture or non-Western cultures.<sup>153</sup> Visvis’ 2010 article analyzes the *wihtiko* as a tool of decolonization, and conceptualization of trauma, in Joseph Boyden’s novel *Three Day Road*, but also draws on the broader academic literature on trauma and the windigo for this purpose.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Zimmerman, “Red Tag Windigo” (MA thesis, Department of English, University of Calgary, 2007), iii, 1, 8.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4. Zimmerman cites a story recounted by Bruce Morrison and Roderick Wilson in *Native Peoples and the Canadian Experience*, of “a rabbit who predicts that the East Wind will ‘introduce many foreign wares from abroad to support life: food, tools, and raiment ... [but] will also introduce the Weendigo who will cross the Atlantic and consume human flesh’ (Morrison 225).” Zimmerman adds that “It is understandable that Europeans, based on their hunger for furs and other resources, would be associated with the windigo.” *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>152</sup> Cherubini, “Metamorphosis,” 308.

<sup>153</sup> Hallowell, “Psychic Stresses,” 1295.

<sup>154</sup> Vikki Visvis, “Culturally Conceptualizing,” 242. “In *Three Day Road*, the Windigo reconceptualizes dimensions of trauma in two distinct ways. By formulating trauma in culturally specific terms as a Windigo, the novel complicates Eurocentric psychoanalytic paradigms of trauma and allows for productive alternative configurations that are ultimately culturally illuminating. And by inverting the discourse of savagery that is inherent

Although critical of Western culture, much of this literature is aimed at opening up dialogue. This was the goal of Rasevych's 2001 study of contemporary *wihtiko* narratives: "a dialogue with Aboriginal people can be set up, where all voices are heard," but only if readers of Native literature are "willing to take this perspective seriously."<sup>155</sup> Podruchny's 2004 article shows that many Newcomers or Euroamericans have often been willing to take Native perspectives seriously. Echoing Noll's comparison of the *wihtiko* phenomenon with lycanthropy,<sup>156</sup> Podruchny's study of French-Canadian oral traditions and belief in werewolves reveals a "fascination with the supernatural, blurred boundaries between animals and humans, dreaming, and the process of metamorphosis." These cultural traits gave voyageurs a framework for understanding and incorporating Algonquian *wihtiko* stories; so did "the widespread privation in voyageurs' jobs, the fear of starvation and starvation cannibalism, the occurrence of mental illness." These "points of cultural conjunction became a form of *métissage* outside of the practice of marriage and the birth of métis generations." If "Cree and Ojibwe thought influenced voyageurs," it was because "cannibalism and monsters were abiding discourses in most Aboriginal and European cultures."<sup>157</sup> Podruchny's argument is supported by other historical studies of Native-Newcomer encounters with the *wihtiko* and each other in the fur-trade context.

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in Western constructions of the Windigo, Boyden's work encourages a reassessment of the stereotypes that allowed for the more insidious trauma of Western cultural dominance and assimilation, particularly during the First World War."

<sup>155</sup> Peter Rasevych, "Reading Native Literature from a Traditional Indigenous Perspective: Contemporary Novels in a Windigo Society" (MA thesis, Department of English, Lakehead University, 2001), 1. He explores the meaning of *wihtiko*, above all in three contemporary Indigenous novels: *Silent Words*, by Ruby Slipperjack, *Ravensong*, by Lee Maracle, and *Slash*, by Jeannette Armstrong.

<sup>156</sup> Richard Noll cited the *wihtiko* as a point of comparison in a study of lycanthropy. "Lycanthropy is the delusion in which an individual believes he has been transformed into an animal, traditionally a wolf. ... Whitigo psychosis among the native Indians of North America is a related syndrome. In this condition, the patient believes he has become a Whitigo, a legendary giant cannibalistic figure, and may progress to homicide and cannibalism." Richard Noll, *Vampires, Werewolves, and Demons: Twentieth Century Reports in the Psychiatric Literature* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1992), 119-120.

<sup>157</sup> Carolyn Podruchny, "Werewolves and Windigos," 680 & 678, 693. A similar view is expressed by Stymeist in "Myth and the Monster Cinema," *Anthropologica* 51, no. 2 (2009): 403. (cited earlier)

Although Carlson does not explore the question to the same length in his 2009 study of the James Bay Cree, he cites the *wihtiko* and several incidents associated with it as illustrating both the Cree worldview within which they acted, and how “in their interactions with Europeans, [they] made some of it a part of the outsiders’ worldview when they came to live on Cree land.”

His brief treatment of the *wihtiko* and the *wihtiko* literature is nuanced and incisive:

The Cree did not express anxiety about hunger, but they did express anxiety about cannibalism and its connection with both insanity and a loss of humanity and hope. ... There was certainly a cultural interpretation involving insanity and cannibalism for the Cree, but attempting to fit it into a clinical, psychological framework is no more satisfying than is speaking of structural anxieties. For the Cree, the concept of the windigo was closely tied to aspects of the cultural environment related to the loss of self-control, but its meaning within Cree culture remains unclear. ... Windigo was, thus, a semiotic and narrative category connected to the larger subject of hope, and cannibalism might be explained more as an ontological crisis than as a psychological one. ... people gave in to the irrationality of pessimism – the ontology of fear.<sup>158</sup>

Brown and Brightman’s studies, cited earlier, of fur-trade encounters with the *wihtiko* also echo Podruchny’s conclusions.<sup>159</sup> Other historians of Native-Newcomer relations have also recorded *wihtiko* encounters, but without entering into the larger debates.<sup>160</sup>

Smallman, whose study of HBC fur traders’ encounters with the *wihtiko* is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, is more doubtful about the extent to which fur traders adopted Cree understandings.<sup>161</sup> Compared with French Canadian voyageurs, and their oral traditions, however, the HBC fur traders and clerks who kept the official records reviewed by Smallman, were literate and often relatively new arrivals from Europe. In his conclusion, Smallman briefly pointed to non-Algonquian efforts, in courts of law, mental hospitals and academia, to

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<sup>158</sup> Carlson, *Home is the Hunter*, 56-61.

<sup>159</sup> Brown and Brightman, *The Orders of the Dreamed*; Brightman, “Windigo in the Material”; Brown, “Wasitay Religion.”

<sup>160</sup> Lytwyn, *Muskegowuck*, 170. He cites two 18<sup>th</sup> century fur traders accounts of the *wihtiko* from the Cree of western Hudson and James Bay. Morantz, *White Man’s*, 52. She briefly discusses the *wihtiko*, but also cites three alleged incidents of *wihtiko* fears or killings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century among the Cree of James Bay.

<sup>161</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings.”

understand and control the *wihtiko*. “In all these efforts,” he wrote, “we can see the need of colonial powers to assert their authority by defining narratives around the windigo.”<sup>162</sup>

As Chapter Four has shown, there is a fairly extensive post-colonial literature that examines the appearance of the *wihtiko*, as an expression and application of Algonquian law and medicine, in Canadian courts of law at the end of the long nineteenth century. Although the emphasis in the literature discussed in Chapter Four tends to be on the suppression of Algonquian law and medicine by the Canadian state, much of it also explores the principles of Indigenous law and medicine.<sup>163</sup> These two emphases are echoed in other scholarship on contemporary issues.

Some, for example, use the *wihtiko* as a metaphor or tool of critique of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Boyce Richardson’s *Strangers Devour the Land* (1975) is an early example.<sup>164</sup> More recently, John Long’s 2010 study of Treaty 9 in Northern Ontario uses *wihtiko* to describe the two governments involved in this treaty as well as other colonial and outside threats.<sup>165</sup> Damien Lee’s 2011 article uses the *wihtiko* to critique non-governmental environmental organizations complicity in neo-colonial agendas.<sup>166</sup> Westman’s 2013 article uses the *wihtiko* to critique “(petro)-capitalism.”<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 590.

<sup>163</sup> See chapter four for a fuller discussion of this literature.

<sup>164</sup> Boyce Richardson, *Strangers Devour the Land: A Chronicle of the Assault upon the Last Coherent Hunting Culture in North America, the Cree Indians of northern Quebec, and their Vast Primeval Homelands* (New York: Knopf, 1975).

<sup>165</sup> Long, *Treaty No. 9*, 370, 373. “The *wihtikow* or windigo has many names, and I am grateful to the person who told me, in Winnipeg in 1987, “The government is our *wihtikow*.” *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>166</sup> “Like windigo spirits in the Anishinabe worldview,” writes Lee, “colonialism seeks to cannibalize the spirit of Indigenous nations’ self-determination in Canada’s ‘nation-building.’” Damien Lee, “Windigo Faces: Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations Serving Canadian Colonialism,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 31, no. 2 (2011): 135-136.

<sup>167</sup> He suggests “that (petro)-capitalism can be compared to the monstrous Windigo (not a trickster) with respect to its uncontrolled appetites and growth, and also that various proposed technical remediations resemble the vain adventures of the hubristic, foolish, and acquisitive Amerindian Trickster.” Clinton N Westman, “Cautionary Tales: Making and Breaking Community in the Oil Sands Region,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology/Cahiers canadiens de sociologie* 38, no. 2 (2013): 211.

One of the most incisive uses of the *wihtiko* in this regard is found in a 2004 article by Feit, in which he uses the *atuush* (the more common Eastern James Bay Cree term for *wihtiko*) to critique the legal and other arguments used by the governments of Quebec and Canada against the James Bay Cree since the 1970s. “Atuush,” Feit asserted, “is about asocial self-interest, irresponsibility, and exploitation, i.e. about what all people can become.” Citing Berkhofer, Feit showed how the image of the Indian as (anti-, pre- or a-modern) *other* – positive or negative – leaves “no space for hybrids – no place for true Indians who are modern, nor for traditional Indians who change without becoming modern.” Applying this to the Cree, he argued that their claims were once denied because “they lacked civilized essentials, now [because] they are the same as other citizens.”<sup>168</sup>

if *Atuush* highlights the dangers of not attending to relationships, and the risks of knowledge that envisages itself as being removed from the moral universe of responsible action, it also highlights the dangers of ignoring the hybridity of the “other,” which cannot be encompassed by differentiating identity processes.<sup>169</sup>

Others scholars echo the work of Angell, Ferrara and Lanoue, discussed above, in their reading of *wihtiko* concepts and narratives for principles that can be helpful in addressing contemporary questions including the ongoing impacts of colonialism.<sup>170</sup> Not surprisingly, there is an overlap with literary criticism, since these principals are drawn from *wihtiko* literature – traditional and contemporary.

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<sup>168</sup> Feit, “Contested Identities,” 123, 113.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 123. “For the older Cree hunters, Whitemen are not coincident with *Atuush*, but Whitemen like Cree are capable of being or becoming *Atuush*. In certain contexts, *Atuush* seem to be used as metaphors of the commodification of human relations in industrial market societies. ... Fur traders brought goods that increased security in the bush and lightened Cree workloads, and some built enduring social relations with Cree. But ... as recently as the 1930s several Cree families starved in the bush when denied credit and food by traders during a period of game shortages. ... Some Waswanipi Cree hunters say that *Atuush* are not common in the Cree world anymore, that they were more common at the beginning of the 20th century -- at a time in which there was greater conflict within Cree society, and when people sometimes starved in the bush. ... But some note that *Atuush* have been returning in the contemporary world, with the growing conflicts over development projects with Euro-Canadians.” *Ibid.*, 119-120.

<sup>170</sup> Angell, “Madness in the Family”; Ferrara and Lanoue, “Self in Northern Canadian.”

McKinley's 2012 thesis, for example, examines the evolution and continuity between traditional and contemporary *wihtiko* narratives, with a focus on the latter, showing how the "recontextualization by Indigenous authors and storytellers differs from the recontextualization arising from non-Indigenous social scientists."<sup>171</sup> The *wihtiko*, in these modern recontextualizations, "represents an Indigenous way of understanding ... [the] serious social problem," of Indigenous youth suicide:

With the increased influence of colonization the Windigo has adopted the destructive power of state discourse and policy as a means of isolating and hunting his prey ... [Its] hunting ground has changed. Traditionally, windigo uses starvation and isolation as a hunting tool. The Modern Windigo uses self-loathing, despair, and isolation as his hunting tools.<sup>172</sup>

McKinley's ultimate goal is to bring this understanding of the *wihtiko* into conversation with medical understandings of the same problem so as to better address it: "bringing together of works from cross-discursive boundaries will ultimately aid in the crosscultural understanding of the long-term effects of colonization."<sup>173</sup>

McKinley's use of the *wihtiko* resembles that of Friedland, whose 2010 study "uses the *wetiko* as a metaphor to capture the current predicaments of child victimization within Indigenous communities" – where victim and perpetrator alike are loved ones – and to address this problem by means of the *wihtiko*, which "is best understood as a complex legal concept, or categorization." *Wihtiko* stories, she points out are no different from case law, and can be analyzed for legal principles.<sup>174</sup> She was guided by her thesis director, Borrows, who has

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<sup>171</sup> Gerald Patrick McKinley, "Narrative Tactics: Windigo Stories and Indigenous Youth Suicide" (PhD thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2012), 6, 24. He only briefly addresses *wihtiko* literature by non-Indigenous social scientists, and his review of traditional windigo narratives is also brief, sufficient only to show a continuum between traditional and contemporary Indigenous *wihtiko* literature. His comparisons focus, above all, on contemporary *wihtiko* literature and non-Indigenous mental health research literature.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

<sup>174</sup> Friedland, "The Wetiko (Windigo)," v-vi, 120. Although Friedland briefly and incisively summarizes the debates about the veracity of the *wihtiko* belief and its associated phenomena, she does not engage in them further.

examined *wihtiko* and other narratives as a source of Indigenous law.<sup>175</sup> From various *wihtiko* narratives, Freidland draws out legal principles relating to process,<sup>176</sup> response,<sup>177</sup> and obligation: “including a responsibility to help and protect, a responsibility to warn, a responsibility to seek help, and a responsibility to support.” She outlines procedural and substantive rights: “the right to be heard and the right to decide ... [as well as] the right to life and safety, the right to be helped and the right to ongoing support.” She also identifies underlying general principles: “the principle of reciprocity: helping the helpers, and the principle of efficacy: being aware and open to all effective tools and allies.” Freidland argues: “these principles give us a clearer picture of the law that was always there in the *wetiko* stories. This is law. Distinctly and unmistakably law.” Her study is no mere research project, but an expression of hope:

I hope it shows that we can analyze oral and written stories and accounts of collective problem-solving processes within Indigenous societies, and start to speak to each other about the law we recognize in them. I hope seeing the law in these stories will encourage people to reject outdated stereotypes and resist accepting lies about themselves and their ancestors. I hope both Indigenous people and white people can look at *wetiko* stories and see the enduring strength and resourcefulness in Indigenous legal traditions.<sup>178</sup>

Freidland’s 2010 reading of *wihtiko* narratives for legal principles resonates with Preston’s reading of *wihtiko* narratives for ethical principles in an article published that same year.<sup>179</sup> As

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<sup>175</sup> John Borrows, *Drawing Out Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2010): 216-227. *Canada’s Indigenous Constitution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010): 81-84

<sup>176</sup> These include the following: that “legitimate decisions are collective and open, that authoritative decision makers are leaders, medicine people and close family members, and that legitimate responses require three procedural steps: recognizing warning signs, observation, questioning and evidence gathering to determine whether someone fits in the *wetiko* category, and determining the response.” Freidland, “*Wetiko*,” 120-121.

<sup>177</sup> Legal responses, she argues, “usually go from least intrusive to most intrusive, as needed, and available resources and larger political realities affect decisions. The overall principle is ensuring group safety and protection of the vulnerable. There are four response principles that are blended and balanced depending on the facts in a particular case. These are healing, supervision, separation, and incapacitation. To a lesser extent, retribution may also be considered.” *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>179</sup> Preston, “James Bay Cree Respect Relations.” He only mentions the *wihtiko* briefly in this article. “Killing humans would have been technically relatively easy, but the close dependency of humans on their food-animals included a clear and strong line between what is food for their families, and what simply cannot – must not – be food. In other words, there was a fundamental line between food-persons and human persons. This line was a virtual precipice, for the idea of eating a human was a sign of extreme desperation tantamount to madness, and to give in to this urge meant transformation from a human into a *Wiiitiko* (cannibal) monster.” *Ibid.*, 272-273.

Freidland has since pointed out, it also resonates in many ways, with an interpretation I first put forward in a 2010 publication and have expanded on in Chapter Two. This interpretation is indebted to Preston's work on Cree narrative and culture.<sup>180</sup>

It is appropriate to finish this chapter by examining Preston's most recent inquiry into the *atoosh* (a *wihtiko* equivalent) as part of a 2011 reflection on "a life in translation" of Cree culture. For Preston, the *wihtiko* is of interest because it opens a window onto a broader appreciation of Cree culture and its insights into the meaning of being human in a contingent world – insights justifying "a life in translation."<sup>181</sup> Like other "mythic traditions, such as the 'Abrahamic' traditions," Cree narratives "have inspired centuries of painstaking hermeneutical study by a great many scholars, to try to discern the meanings of the 'texts,'" which hold a "depth of cultural understanding" and "a forest of symbols" that reach "far beyond the normative particularities of language structure."<sup>182</sup> By scholars, Preston refers to Cree elders such as Blackned, his own mentor.

In this chapter, Preston examines an *atalohkan* or sacred myth narrative that depicts a younger brother's monstrous transformation, precipitated by the attack of an *atoosh*. Before leaving on a hunt, the father warns his "lazy" wife, pregnant with child, that an *atoosh* may attack the camp (perhaps because it is not well kept). While the father is absent, an *atoosh* does indeed attack, kill and eat the mother, but not before tossing aside her uterus. Freed from the

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<sup>180</sup> Cecil Chabot, "Witiko Possession & Starvation Cannibalism Among the Cree of James Bay: Monstrosity or Madness?" in Nelson et al., *Creating Humanity*, 3-16.

<sup>181</sup> Preston writes about the "epiphany" he had in the third summer of his fieldwork among the James Bay Cree: "my understanding 'broke through' when I had learned – actually become immersed in – enough narratives from them to, in some sense, substantially cross-reference their meanings and implications of meaning within my mind. I had a moment of epiphany that I still regard as a spiritual experience, when my normal, more-or-less intellectual recognition of the coherence of a story gave way to a welling up into consciousness that silently but clearly said the words 'Yes, that makes sense ... and it really does.' The next forty-two years brought some additional depth of insight, several fruitful surprises, even some small epiphanies, but no great revelations." Preston, "A Life in Translation," 420.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

uterus and nurtured by mice, the younger brother is later reunited with his family, first with his older brother, who survived the *atoosh*'s attack, and later with the father as well. Attempts to reintegrate him into human society, however, are unsuccessful, in part because the father, by this time, has secretly married a lynx and had another family at a separate camp. The sons inadvertently kill their father's lynx-wife on a hunt, their half-siblings when the latter seek revenge, and finally their father, fearing he is about to do the same. The older brother marries a human woman, but the younger brother follows his father's example and tries to form relationships with various animal spouses – a rather comical part of the story – before settling down with a beaver-girl. To make the marriage work he transforms himself into a beaver. Before this transformation is permanent, however, his older brother breaks into the beaver lodge, kills the beaver-wife and again attempts to reintegrate his younger brother into human society, eventually tricking him into eating his dead beaver-wife. At this point, the younger brother leaves and transforms permanently into a beaver – a monstrous beaver. Having devoured his beaver-wife, he has become an *atoosh* and a cannibal.<sup>183</sup>

As Preston explains, this story tells of the dangers of not living well in a mysterious world defined by contingent relationship, not only with other human persons, but also with animal-persons and other non-human beings. Relationship with, and respect for, others; mental competence; and self-control are all crucial to live well in this contingent world. One must distinguish between the reciprocity appropriate with animal-persons, for example, and that which is appropriate with human-persons. “Respect for prey” is crucial, “but a food-person is not permissible as a mate. And humans are emphatically unthinkable food for other humans.” To

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<sup>183</sup> Preston, “Life in Translation,” 428-438. See also: Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 124; Bell, History of the Che-che-puy-ew-tis.”

never learn, or to lose sight of, the boundaries of authentic humanity and morality is to open the door “to transformation into an atoosh.”<sup>184</sup> As Preston himself summarizes it:

humans’ individuated personal and spiritual autonomy combines practical action, [‘characterized by fortitude and hope,’] traditional knowledge, and mystical experience. Although it varies with each individual, it is not set in isolation from the rest of the world, but is embedded in experience and knowledge of the great community of persons ... intuitively known and repeatedly tested against experience ... and ... [which] requires open receptivity to new knowledge ... [because] at a fundamental level, we have an ultimately mysterious, contingent world that all persons must try to live, and live well, within. Different perspectives were expected and accepted; at least up to a point. But each person was responsible for the consequences of his or her actions.<sup>185</sup>

*Wihtiko* and other Cree narratives depict “the consequences that follow when the point of acceptability is crossed.”<sup>186</sup> This happens when people lose the emotional, mental and moral competence required to discern what is or should be, and to act accordingly, and instead, reduce others to objects of power and truth to an exercise of power.

### STRUGGLES FOR UNDERSTANDING & CONTROL OF THE WIHTIKO

Preston’s reflections and insights – richer than what can be summarized here – have a timeless quality, much like the narratives on which they are based. These stories “have inspired centuries of painstaking hermeneutical study by a great many scholars.”<sup>187</sup> The foregoing chapters have shown that such stories are not always easy to translate, but also that Natives and Newcomers alike have found meaning in them. This evokes, once again, the literal translation of *ehbebukdaet*, an East Cree word translated as “hope”: “untying something, like a knot – plus the quality of a revealing insight or perception, expressing some new knowledge.”<sup>188</sup> After “a life in

<sup>184</sup> Preston, “Life in Translation,” 443-444.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 443-444.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>188</sup> Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 208.

translation,” Preston has discerned the timeless principles bound up in stories that might sometimes appear to show only “situated response[s] to particular political and epistemic configuration[s]”<sup>189</sup> based on “standards of normality [that] are relevant only within a given cultural system.”<sup>190</sup>

In 1982, Marano argued that scholars had consistently conflated subjective Algonquian perspectives with the objective realities they experienced (emics versus etics), and then narrowly re-conceptualized the *wihtiko* in their own terms, reducing it to an object of interpretive control. “Windigo psychosis” soon gained such “reified status” and “inertia” that it determined subsequent scholars’ research behaviour. Critics of Marano observed that a similar thing had happened. Marano had simply replaced one type of etic projection with another, in Weidman’s words, through “the transformation of ‘self-defensive behaviour because of mental illness in another’ into ‘deliberate homicide based on economic need and matters of group survival.’”<sup>191</sup> Nelson and Kohl had proposed scapegoating or witch-hunting more than a century earlier as one *possible* factor, and others had repeated it, at the height of the long nineteenth century, as justification for the prosecution of *wihtiko* executioners. Marano asserted it as a “likely uniformitarian solution to the windigo puzzle,”<sup>192</sup> in an attempt to reduce the *wihtiko* to an object of interpretive control. Although he backtracked in subsequent exchanges, Marano never openly acknowledged the reductionist and – in Brightman’s words – “unduly categorical”<sup>193</sup> nature of his initial argument. This made it easier for others like Waldram and MacNeil to draw selectively from his writing in order to re-conceptualize the *wihtiko* as a construct of Western scholarship or

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<sup>189</sup> Rouse, explaining Foucault, and Foucault, cited in Rouse, “Power/Knowledge,” in Gutting, *Cambridge Companion*, 112.

<sup>190</sup> Green, “Culture,” 225-226.

<sup>191</sup> Weidman, in *Ibid.*, 406.

<sup>192</sup> Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 397.

<sup>193</sup> Brightman, in Brightman et al., “On Windigo Psychosis,” 123.

colonialism.<sup>194</sup> This view gained such reified status and inertia, in what Coates calls a “culture of criticism,”<sup>195</sup> that Carlson would write in 2009: “in spite of evidence demonstrating the historicity of the witiko condition, a number of scholars and commentators *still maintain that witiko is regarded as a disproven artifact of cultural anthropology.*”<sup>196</sup> In short, Brightman’s extended response to Marano had been largely ignored, or referenced without engagement by those set on critiquing “hegemonic Western discourse.”<sup>197</sup>

Such a summary of the last four decades of *wihtiko* scholarship, however, would be no less subject to Brown’s criticism of Marano for reading the evidence selectively in his own favour.<sup>198</sup> As noted already, there are many other factors at play: an elusive, complex, ambivalent, diverse and changing object of study; an extensive interpretive scholarship that draws from multiple disciplines but is insufficiently interdisciplinary; and a tendency, for Native and Newcomer alike, to try to assert interpretive control over the *wihtiko* and the questions it evokes. Despite differences and divisions, the appearance of the *wihtiko* in late-modern academia reveals a persistent intercultural conviction that reducing others or truth to objects of power is a sign of intellectual and moral incompetence. Despite some simplistic post-colonial inversions of judgments once attached to Indian-White binaries, most recognize this as a universal human problem. If, as Ahenakew observes, many younger Algonquians have only “a very hazy idea” of the *wihtiko*,<sup>199</sup> it is not merely due to a loss of culture, but an absence of the circumstances that originally gave rise the *wihtiko*. On the other hand, as this chapter shows, younger Algonquians

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<sup>194</sup> Waldram, *Revenge of the Windigo*, 194, 191. MacNeil, “Avenging the Windigo,” 2, 86.

<sup>195</sup> Coates, “Writing First Nations,” 112-113. As noted earlier, Coates points out that “coercive consensus ... is ... far too strong to describe the current state of affairs, but the absence of healthy and rigorous debate about the major historiographical issues is a cause for concern.” *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 355-356.

<sup>197</sup> Dillon, “Windigo,” 6-7, 17-18. Dillon’s reading of the *wihtiko*, however, is likely more complex than an encyclopedia article can indicate.

<sup>198</sup> Brown, in Marano, “Windigo Psychosis” (1982), 399-400. Black echoed this: “I would like to have seen some additional discussion of why this belief was so attractive to our ethnographic forefathers.” Black, in *ibid.*, 399.

<sup>199</sup> Cited in Preston, “Witiko” (1980), 122.

are also “reviving” the *wihtiko* and bringing it into conversation with Western scholarly disciplines – medicine, law, psychology, sociology, among others – in order to help understand and respond to fundamental questions.

This creative interculturality echoes Raphael Wabano’s recommendation that such dialogue could help his community.<sup>200</sup> It is a dialogue that only makes sense if the relationship between cultures “is not one of absolute foreignness.” It “assumes the potential universality of any culture,” even if it requires a life in translation.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Cited in James Bay Cree Society, “Wetamakwin,” 18-19.

<sup>201</sup> Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 59. In this particular discussion he uses the term “inculturation,” but goes on to say that this is a flawed term, and we should use the term “interculturality.” *Ibid.*, 64.

## CONCLUSION

In many of its appearances in Western academia, the *wihtiko* appears to exemplify Native-Newcomer cultural difference and division. For Schoolcraft (1839), *wihtiko* narratives are evidence of “blind adherence to ... idolatrous customs and superstitions.”<sup>1</sup> For Parkman (1851), tales of “*weendigoes*” told to the “credulous circle around an Ojibwa lodge-fire” are “faithful reflections of the form and coloring of the national mind.”<sup>2</sup> For Gillin, drawing on existing academic literature in 1939, the “witigo or windigow psychosis *seems* to be confined to the Algonkians of the northeast.”<sup>3</sup> For Yap, writing a dozen years later, the “‘Wihtigo Psychosis’ ... *is* ... confined to the Cree, Ojibway and Salteaux Indians of N[orth] America.”<sup>4</sup>

Critiquing earlier *wihtiko* scholarship in 1977, Preston contrasts “Algonquian knowledge and Whiteman interest.”<sup>5</sup> In a more extensive critique of the same literature five years later, Marano argues that Western attempts to understand the *wihtiko* concept only led to the development of their own *wihtiko* concept.<sup>6</sup> More recently (2003), Haring observes that few Native traditional practices were “more inherently at odds” with Newcomer law than *wihtiko* executions, the religious basis of which “defied the moral sense” of Canadians.<sup>7</sup> In Cherubini’s view (2008), the “medium and the message” of *wihtiko* narratives, “distinguish between Aboriginal and mainstream worldviews,” and are “quite possibly intentionally exclusionary for those who are not familiar with Aboriginal worldviews.”<sup>8</sup> There “is little sign in many of the HBC records,” writes Smallman (2009) about the *wihtiko*, “that the HBC men came to share the

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<sup>1</sup> Schoolcraft, *Algic Researches*, 105-118.

<sup>2</sup> Parkman, *Conspiracy of Pontiac*, cited in Colombo, *Windigo*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Emphasis added. Gillin, “Personality,” 690.

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis added. Yap, “Mental Diseases,” 320.

<sup>5</sup> Preston, “Wiiitiko” (1977).

<sup>6</sup> Marano, “Windigo Pyschosis” (1982), 386.

<sup>7</sup> Haring, “Wendigo Killings,” 96.

<sup>8</sup> Cherubini, “Metamorphosis,” 307.

beliefs of their Cree allies.”<sup>9</sup> According to Carlson (2009), the *wihtiko* can only be “adequately accounted for” if “analyzed *from within* northern Algonquian cosmologies rather than Western perspectives.” The *wihtiko* disappeared, he elaborates, because of the Canadian legal system and industrial economy, as well as “*conformity* to Christian values and cosmology.”<sup>10</sup> Laflèche argues (2010) that the 1907 prosecution of the Fiddlers for killing a *wihtiko* not only constituted a “clash with Euro-Canadian law and values,” but also exemplified “the *inability* of the broader Canadian public to sympathise with an aboriginal health paradigm (and more generally with aboriginal cultures).”<sup>11</sup> “Indigenous scholars,” comments Dillon more recently (2013), “emphasize that Western perspectives are incapable of accounting for the Windigo phenomenon.”<sup>12</sup>

Much historical evidence supports these emphases on cultural difference and division. Many Newcomers were indeed puzzled or disturbed by *wihtiko* killings. Responding in 1818 to Stacimau’s killing of an alleged *wihtiko* who was the wife of an HBC fur trader, Alexander Christie stated: “for this barbarous act the Indian deserves to be severely punished.”<sup>13</sup> In 1832, relatives of Mrs. Swanson, the alleged *wihtiko*, found an opportunity to retaliate for her killing after Stacimau and his family attacked an HBC post at Hannah Bay. Surviving relatives of this same Cree hunter sought to secure their own revenge in 1845. Finally, in 1889-90, another younger relative of Stacimau allegedly turned *wihtiko*, and although HBC trader William Corston intervened to prevent his execution, he labelled them “all a bad lot” on account of their

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<sup>9</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 581.

<sup>10</sup> Emphasis added. Carlson, “Reviving Wetiko,” 355 & 381. As noted “conformity” implies, like the term “conformist,” a change that is at the level of form rather than substance – it is superficial or prompted or motivated by something other than a compelling reasoning.

<sup>11</sup> Laflèche, “Windigo” (summary on DVD); Laflèche, “Anishinaabe Medicine,” 30.

<sup>12</sup> Dillon, “Windigo,” 6.

<sup>13</sup> Christie to Beioley, April 1, 1818, HBCA, B.135/b/137: 43.

earlier transgressions.<sup>14</sup> This label was echoed widely by many interpretations of the 1832 Hannah Bay ‘massacre.’ In 1907, after sentencing Anishinabe shaman Joseph Fiddler for a *wihtiko*-killing, RNWMP Commissioner Perry stated that it was “in the interests of humanity” to abolish such practices, a view echoed by the *London Times* and most other newspapers that covered the high-profile trial.<sup>15</sup> Some, like the *Montreal Gazette*, went as far as depicting *wihtiko* killings as “Dread Rites of Devil Worship among the Fiddler Indians in Keewatin,” part of a “horrible cult of fratricide” aimed at appeasing a demonic spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Notwithstanding their veracity, these examples are skewed in one direction and often taken out of context in ways that overemphasize difference and division across time and space. Cannadine and Gregory have recently contended that history is distorted by such overemphasis. This problem has been particularly acute in Native North American and European Newcomer relations, where binary paradigms of difference and division were frequently used to justify imperialism. A brief survey of the last half-century of relevant historiography suggests that many major contributions have been significant precisely because they have challenged perceptions of Native-Newcomer difference and division in economic, social and political spheres. Yet this historiography still reveals a persistent emphasis on *cultural* difference, despite acknowledgement and even celebration of the development of intercultural common ground *between* these original differences. Binary paradigms of Native-Newcomer difference and division still seem to linger and the emphasis on cultural difference is especially prevalent when scholars shift from discerning cultural differences to using them as a tool of post-colonial critique.

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<sup>14</sup> Gordon, “Peetawabino,” 236.

<sup>15</sup> RNWMP *Annual Report* for 1907, in *Sessional Papers*, vol. XLII, no. 14, cited in Schuh, “Justice,” 77.

<sup>16</sup> “Dread Rites,” *Montreal Gazette*, October 8, 1907.

To investigate the problem, this study examined the Algonquian *wihtiko*, an apparent exemplar of Native-Newcomer difference and division. It first probed the *wihtiko* phenomenon's historical origin, evolution and meaning in subarctic Algonquian cultures. This study then examined post-1635 European Newcomer encounters with this phenomenon: from the bush to European and Euroamerican newspapers and juridical decisions, especially between 1815 and 1914, a period where greater evidence of such encounters is available, and in post-1820 academia. Diverse archival documents, ethnographic records, newspapers, oral traditions, and academic texts were consulted. The academic literature on the *wihtiko* was both a primary source and a secondary source.

To give a precise focal point that represents other Algonquian cultural contexts, my examination of the *wihtiko* focuses on examples from the James Bay Cree context. This context was selected for several reasons: the James Bay Cree occupy a central position among subarctic Algonquians; they have had a long and relatively balanced relationship with European Newcomers who have documented Cree history and oral tradition fairly well without overwhelming it. However, as Chapter One shows, limited evidence is available for the pre-contact and early contact period, making it difficult to determine the evolution of Algonquian culture before the eighteenth century. As a result, it is also difficult to distinguish pre-contact cultural similarities and differences from those generated by contact, or to give an accurate picture of the context in which the *wihtiko* originated and evolved. This is especially true in relation to Christian culture, which greatly influenced Cree culture in ways that remain contested and elusive to enquiry.

Nevertheless, a brief history of James Bay Cree culture, outlined in Chapter One, shows that it is possible to discern some changes and continuities in Cree experiences, perceptions of

their place in a contingent world, and their ideals about how to relate to that world. This brief history suggests that Cree conversations with Christian culture resulted in a general adoption of Christian theism, but slower shifts of emphasis and meaning in their non-theistic cosmology. More importantly, it suggests that Christianity did not radically alter their core ideals. For the Cree, emotional, mental and moral competence within a contingent world continued to depend on discerning one's place within a larger network of interdependent relationships and cultivating self-control, hope and reciprocity. Understanding these ideals is important because the *wihtiko* embodies their antithesis. Conversely, by negating these ideals, the *wihtiko* helps shed light on the evolving cultural context in which it must be understood.

The last section of Chapter One presents a working model for understanding the mental and moral dimensions of inter- and intra- cultural change, difference and division. Understanding, experience and action are the constitutive elements of culture, and the person-in-relation (neither isolated individual nor merely group member) is the bearer of culture. All human understandings, experiences and actions are contingent and limited by their immersion in a reality that surpasses them. But these constitutive elements of culture require unity or at least a constant quest for unity by the bearer of culture. To maintain the unity of a culture's constitutive elements, engagement with new experiences, actions and understandings frequently requires change. Such change can be an evolution of meaning that affects only the periphery of a culture's centre-of-gravity, or it can be a revolution of meaning that impacts a culture's centre-of-gravity. External impositions of change or continuity can be very disruptive for cultural persons-in-relation. Regardless, cultural persons-in-relation suffer when cultural unity is superficial or lacking: when gaps between their understanding and experience of reality grow too

large, when they are unable or unwilling to act according to their understanding, or when they ignore or do not experience the consequences of, or the consequences intended by, their actions.

This model of culture helps navigate the larger questions of this thesis, but in Chapter Two, it is also used to explain the most fundamental traits that define the *wihtiko*. These three traits are not related to physical appearance, or even to cannibalism, but to internal qualities or attitudes: severe loss or abandonment of self-control, or the manipulative control of others; disconnect with or manipulation of reality; and abandonment, rejection or manipulation of relationship.

The less negative manifestations of these traits are associated with people who have been possessed or transformed by the *wihtiko*, largely against their will. They *lose* the capacity to control themselves, discern reality and relate to others primarily because these capacities have been *taken away* from them. The more negative manifestations of these traits belong to the *wihtiko* itself. The *wihtiko* reduces truth, reality and others to objects of self-serving power. The *wihtiko* is the epitome of cultural disunity or artificial unity. The *wihtiko*, in effect, was used by Algonquians to explain mental illness, or physical illness that affected the mind, as well as evil. It could be used to affirm people's humanity, *despite* their behaviour and attitude, or to condemn people's inhumanity, *because* of their behaviour and attitude.

If the *wihtiko* was used to explain both madness and wickedness, it was because the Algonquians attributed mental and other illnesses to a malevolent intention *somewhere* on the part of *someone*. This was especially evident in the case of the *wihtiko* sickness, for it led to monstrous behaviour even by people who were known to have been very good. For many, it was unclear whether the original *Wihtiko* was human, but it was clear that it had ceased to be human.

Algonquians blamed this original superhuman or supernatural *Wihtiko* for much of the evil in their world and believed it originated, or first manifested itself, in acts of violent cannibalism.

The evidence examined in Chapters One and Two, supplemented in later Chapters, suggests the *wihtiko* originated within an Algonquian cosmology permeated by *Manitu* or mystery, and by persons, powers and intentions that were seen, unseen and sometimes other than what they seemed. In this cosmology, metamorphosis was possible, and dreams were powerful channels of communication among human, animal and other-than-human persons. The *wihtiko* came into being because Algonquian understandings, experiences and actions were forged in a subarctic environment where they frequently experienced hardship and the threat of starvation. It developed as an explanation of extreme failures of emotional, mental and moral competence that sometimes accompanied or followed starvation-induced cannibalism, especially violent cannibalism. It was also a way of coping with the drastic actions people were sometimes forced to take to protect themselves and others. Writing about the Algonquian in 1823, Nelson asserted “there is perhaps not a people in this world who take [starvation and deprivation] ... so patiently as these people do ... it is very rare they will kill a *fellow* to live upon him.”<sup>17</sup> Scholars concur on the rarity of violent cannibalism, and *wihtiko* incidents more generally, but such incidents were frequent enough to develop sustained efforts to both understand and control the *wihtiko*.

The *wihtiko* belief also came to explain cases of similarly extreme emotional, mental and moral failures that could occur outside famine contexts. But because the *wihtiko* originated as a response to famine cannibalism, belief in its cannibalistic nature also coloured manifestations and interpretations of these other generic failures. When people showed *wihtiko*-associated symptoms in the absence of famine, the explanatory appeal of other catalysts such as shamanic malevolence were reinforced.

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<sup>17</sup> Nelson, cited in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 3.

The *wihtiko* beliefs and fears were strong enough that they profoundly shaped the interpretations and behaviours of those who believed themselves threatened by *wihtiko* possession or transformation, especially if obsessive fear and fatalism about going *wihtiko* led them to act out what they most feared becoming. For some, this fatalism might be a loss of hope or an attempt to end the anxiety generated by the uncertain outcome of an ongoing struggle against the *wihtiko*. For others it might be an attempt to lessen or overcome the guilt of a deviant action – like violent famine cannibalism – that could now be blamed on a monster that had possessed them. For others, it might be a desperate attempt to control a situation that seemed to be rapidly slipping from their control; acting out the *wihtiko* would bring treatment or a merciful killing. As the *wihtiko* threat ceased to be limited to famine contexts, so too were fatalistic responses to it.

Understandings of the *wihtiko* were confirmed but also challenged by subsequent actions and experiences. The *wihtiko* phenomenon, therefore, remained ambiguous, but this ambiguity allowed people to understand and control various threats of extreme emotional, mental or moral incompetence, especially when they appeared in the intimacy of their families, as they most often did. With no mental asylums or hospitals, it was extremely difficult to cope with the threat posed by relatives or friends who lost their emotional, mental or moral competence. They could not be left at home with weaker family members while the strongest left camp to hunt and procure sustenance. If necessity forced their hand, it was easier to kill a *wihtiko* than a loved one and, afterwards, it was easier to read their experience of such traumatic events in ways that affirmed the difficult measures they sometimes felt forced to take. But people were usually reluctant to resort to execution without first attempting treatment or containment. Degrees of prudence varied

from one individual and circumstance to the next and depended on the intentions and objectives of those involved.

Algonquians struggled to understand and control the threats that were associated with the *wihtiko*, but the *wihtiko* could also be used – even if only unconsciously – to control or manipulate others, often for malevolent purposes. It could be used to slander, ostracize, murder, euthanize, or scapegoat. Awareness of such manipulation generated scepticism only about particular *wihtiko* interpretations not their general possibility. If some Algonquians were searching above all for understanding and self-control, others were searching above all for control of others or reality, even at the expense of understanding and self-control. In the latter case, their attitude was not unlike the *wihtiko*. European responses to the *wihtiko* reveal great similarities in this regard, even if these similarities manifested themselves differently.

The *wihtiko* attained mythic proportions in various Algonquian traditions, conveying an implicitly symbolic understanding of a very real threat. Additionally, Algonquian *wihtiko* myths pointed beyond the particular experiences that continued to shape and reshape them. They constituted an Algonquian response to questions about free will, moral responsibility, madness, and evil with which humanity continues to struggle. The multi-layered threat of the *wihtiko* did not allow easy closure of the gaps in understanding, experience and action. Algonquians varied in their *ehbebukdaet* (hope)<sup>18</sup> – the mental and moral strength with which they probed these questions or what Einstein calls “the grandeur of reason incarnate in existence, which, in its depths, is inaccessible to man.”<sup>19</sup> Faced with such depths, some tried to reduce them to that which could be understood, or to rule out questions that could not be answered with certainty. Others reduced metaphors and ‘implicit symbols’ to their literalist reading. Important ways of

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<sup>18</sup> As noted, this is an East Cree concept akin to “hope” that means “untying something, like a knot – plus the quality of a revealing insight or perception, expressing some new knowledge.” Preston, *Cree Narrative*, 208.

<sup>19</sup> Einstein, “Personal God Concept,” 182.

knowing were thus weakened by overstating or understating their explanatory capacity. Either way, reductionist and literalist interpretations were, in Preston's words, "too easy to be real."<sup>20</sup>

For Algonquians, the *wihtiko* threat was lethal and multi-layered. It posed a threat to individuals who were, or feared they were, susceptible to *wihtiko* possession or transformation. It threatened those who responded either too cautiously or too hastily to it. Finally, it also threatened those who were vulnerable to unconscious use or conscious abuse of the *wihtiko* as a means of manipulation, scapegoating, murder or euthanasia.

Newcomers threatened by moral and mental failures attributed to the *wihtiko* responded in very similar ways, and often took Algonquian beliefs and practices seriously, even espousing them, as Francis Beaton did in the case of Napanin. At the very least, they responded in very similar ways, working with Algonquians to eliminate or punish the *wihtiko*, as with the Hannah Bay murders and Nanusk, or taking over the role of *wihtiko* executioner, as with Swift Runner.

Some of these *wihtiko* threats, however, could only be deemed real from within an Algonquian cosmology. Cultural differences were real and they mattered. For Newcomers who had little knowledge or many prejudices, Algonquian beliefs, behaviours and responses raised another layer of questions about Algonquians' emotional, mental or even moral state. Matters were confused by the fact that the *wihtiko* did shape Algonquian manifestations and interpretations of generic mental and moral failures, and that it was sometimes used to manipulate, scapegoat or kill.

Even a very sympathetic and thoughtful listener like Nelson, who acknowledged in 1823 that "devoutly believed" *wihtiko* stories provoked "the greatest dread and horror[,] and certainly not without the very great cause," was left with serious questions about the relationship between

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<sup>20</sup> Preston, "Witiko" (1980), 118. He was speaking of Algonquianist attempts to understand the *wihtiko* but made the same point about Algonquian attempts to understand the *wihtiko*.

the concept and its associated phenomena. On the one hand, *wihtiko* was “a kind of disease (or distemper rather, and of the *mind* I am fully persuaded) peculiar to the Crees and Sauteux’s.” But his experience and the stories he had heard left Nelson weighing other possibilities:

There is such a singular, strange, incomprehensible contradictoriness in almost all these cases, and many I have heard, that I do most verily believe they are denunciations, witch or wizardisms: in any other manner they are not rationally to be accounted for, unless we suppose all those who feed on human flesh to be thus possest – then it is natural to man in those cases; but why then not the same with us as with these people?<sup>21</sup>

This difficulty has proved persistent for many other Newcomers, from the bush to the academy. According to Carlson, the end result is that “the closest approximation we have to a proper understanding of the *witiko* phenomenon [still] comes from the northern Algonquians themselves. Otherwise, *witiko* uncharitably remains a mystery.” Ultimately, in this view, there remains a gap between attempts to understand the *wihtiko* “from within northern Algonquian cosmologies” and from within “Western perspectives.”<sup>22</sup>

Yet, two centuries of amateur and professional ethnographic study have produced reiterations of three primary explanations: *wihtiko* as disease of the mind, a madness or acute anxiety that is channelled by cultural belief; *wihtiko* as scapegoating or witch accusation; and *wihtiko* as antithesis of humanity, expressing the worst human beings can do to others and themselves. The three fundamental *wihtiko* traits, found in ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ *wihtiko* narratives are relevant to all three of these explanations. This relative consistency in *wihtiko* scholarship, moreover, suggests a similar degree of consistency across time and space in the sources it relies on: Algonquian and non-Algonquian *wihtiko* narratives and interpretations.

On the other hand, *wihtiko* scholarship is also marked by significant differences and even contradictions. Yet, as Preston, points out, this is common to Algonquians and Algonquianists

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<sup>21</sup> Nelson, in Brown and Brightman, *Orders of the Dreamed*, 85, 88-90.

<sup>22</sup> Carlson, “Reviving Witiko,” 381-382, 355.

alike: “It is manifestly clear that in either culture the experts do not agree.”<sup>23</sup> Contradictions in *wihtiko* scholarship point to gaps in Native and Newcomer cultures alike, between their constitutive elements – experience, understanding and action – and the fullness of reality that forms, informs and surpasses these elements despite their full immersion in it. The apparent lack of scholarly consensus stems largely from attempts to assert interpretative control of a phenomenon that was difficult enough for Algonquians to understand, let alone those who came afterwards. There are recurrent themes in *wihtiko* scholarship that keep coming back, and most of the debates are in reaction to one attempt or another to reduce the *wihtiko* to a single interpretation or cause.

The *wihtiko* is less a sign of *inter*-cultural gaps than a sign of *intra*-cultural gaps that are universal to every bearer of culture. Natives and Newcomers *both* had difficulty understanding this phenomenon and were often left with lingering questions. More importantly, the *wihtiko* illustrates gaps that can result in any culture because of extreme mental and moral incompetence. When examined in this light, the more superficial cultural differences signalled by the *wihtiko* begin to fade in importance. Instead, the *wihtiko* comes into focus as a profound Algonquian understanding of the mental and moral failure that results from reducing others and reality to objects of power. Never merely abstract, this understanding guided practical and *necessary* attempts to *control* this very problem. From the very start, Algonquian struggles to understand the *wihtiko* were entwined in struggles to control it.

Newcomers who encountered the *wihtiko* were also drawn into struggles for understanding and control. These were not primarily struggles *against* Native people, but *alongside* them. The story of Nanusk Stone shows this well. Even the Hannah Bay retaliation, examined in detail in Chapter Three, brought Crees and traders together on opposite sides of a

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-128.

debate about clemency and cure versus retaliation. If fur traders sometimes led or helped in the hunt for a suspected *wihtiko*, it was not merely because it was allowed or demanded by Cree law, or because survival, commercial success or a contest for power were at stake. It was also because mental and moral competence was at stake. If some fur traders tolerated, acquiesced to, or adopted the exercise of Cree law – which others sometimes disparaged as ‘superstition’ and ‘cowardice’ – it was not merely because of a “cultural distancing” in which they “perceived themselves more as observers than participants,” or because they lacked power to ensure an alternative or impose a punishment.<sup>24</sup> It was because they recognized that Cree *wihtiko* beliefs and killings – even when it involved the killing of their own servants at Big Lake – were grounded in basic human struggles for survival as well as mental and moral competence. Similarly, when fur traders and missionaries empathized with alleged *wihtikowak* and challenged Cree law, medicine and religion, they were also seeking to exercise mental and moral competence. Similar motives were at play when, after 1870 in Rupert’s Land, Canadian government officials began to intervene as well. Many alleged *wihtikowak* were sent (or brought) to hospitals where they received treatment, some returning home, others not. If Canadian courts prosecuted *wihtiko*-executioners, like the Fiddler brothers, it was to stop the most extreme remedy applied to such diagnoses – execution. In other cases, such as Swift Runner’s, Canadian courts largely confirmed Algonquian *wihtiko* interpretations.

Some Algonquians supported and even requested Newcomers’ interventions. Initially, it was only because they questioned particular diagnoses or welcomed alternative treatments. Alternatively, Algonquians were happy to have Newcomers – like the captives at Frog Lake in 1885, or later the RCMP – deal with *wihtiko* threats. When Canadian officials misconstrued the nature of Algonquian beliefs or intentions in order to accelerate change, most Canadians *who*

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<sup>24</sup> Smallman, “Spirit Beings,” 582.

*were better informed* protested alongside Algonquians. Yet few of them protested by asserting the validity of the original *wihtiko* diagnoses or executions. Rather, they asserted the *wihtiko* executioners' integrity of understanding and action. This was certainly the case with those Algonquians and Canadians who protested on behalf of the Fiddler brothers.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Algonquians were already beginning to modify their general understanding of the *wihtiko*. The London *Times* likely overstated the degree to which such change had occurred by 1907, but by the end of the twentieth century, the *wihtiko* had long ceased to be perceived as the threat it once was. This was not only because starvation was no longer a concern, but also because the *wihtiko* was no longer used to explain most cases of physical or mental illness, except criminal insanity. More importantly, this cultural change was not primarily the result of external imposition. Rather, it resulted from a deeper continuity of Algonquian quests for cultural unity: their desire to understand what they experienced, to experience the consequences of their actions and to act in ways consistent with their understanding. Any quest for such unity could lead to a strengthening and distilling of "perceptions and values" or "a profound reshaping of ... [a] culture's previous form." As twentieth century evolutions or distillations of the *wihtiko* concept show, such cultural change "does not necessarily involve any kind of violation or alienation."<sup>25</sup> In contrast, if Algonquians had clung to certain *wihtiko* beliefs or practices that they no longer saw as valid, it would have been a profound violation of their deepest cultural ideals. To insist, in particular, that delirium was caused by the *wihtiko*, despite growing certainty that it was caused by other factors, would not constitute cultural continuity. When a quest for integrity leads to an *internal* demand to change one's understanding, the refusal to change weakens a culture, just as *external* pressure for

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<sup>25</sup> Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance*, 63.

change can do the same. Both may lead to suffering for the bearer of culture. The Fiddler case resonates powerfully in this regard.

Despite changes in Algonquian culture, the *wihtiko* is still relevant to questions of mental and social illness, above all where moral factors are at play. Most importantly, the *wihtiko* has retained its capacity to explain mental and moral failures that stem from the reduction of others and reality to objects of power. As noted, the *wihtiko* concept has long helped Algonquians explain the problem of manipulative power, but it has also proven susceptible to abusive manipulation. This did not change when Newcomers responded to the *wihtiko*, struggling to understand and control it.

As Chapters Three and Four show, Newcomers sometimes discounted, misconstrued, or asserted control over Algonquian *wihtiko* beliefs and practices. This happened in spheres of law, governance and public opinion, but also academia, where some sought interpretive control over the *wihtiko*. For some post-colonial critics, these Newcomer responses to the *wihtiko* raised a third layer of questions about mental and moral incompetence, this time on the part of their Newcomer predecessors. Yet some of these critics have also misconstrued earlier Newcomer attempts to understand and control the *wihtiko*. They do this most often when they shift from studying the *wihtiko* to using it as a site or tool of critique. In this respect, late-modern scholarship is no different from some earlier scholarship, which sometimes saw the *wihtiko* as confirmation of prejudices about Algonquian mental and moral incompetence.

This study of the *wihtiko* reveals deep commonalities and continuities. They are obscured by real changes and differences in the evolution of Natives' and Newcomers' struggles to understand and control the *wihtiko*. Yet these very struggles and the *wihtiko* itself reveal a persistent shared conviction that reducing others and reality to objects of power signals mental

and moral failure. The *wihtiko* reveals cultural differences, changes and divisions, but exemplifies more fundamental human commonalities and continuities.

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