Dene Women in the Traditional and Modern Northern Economy in Denendeh Northwest Territories, Canada.

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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July 1992

The Dene are a subarctic people indigenous to northern Canada. The indirect and direct contact the Dene had with the European traders and Christian missionaries who came to their land around the turn of the 20th century triggered profound changes in their society and economy. This study focuses on some of these changes and particularly, on how they have affected the lives of Dene women who inhabit the small community of Fort Liard, which is located in the southwest corner of the Northwest Territories'"

Using as context the formal and informal economy and the concept of the mode of production the author proposes two main ideas first "Nurturing" or “Social Reproduction" and "providing" or "production" are vital and integral to the Dene's subsistence economy and concept of work; second, it is through the custom of “seclusion" or female puberty rites that the teaching and learning of the these responsibilities occurred Dene women played a pivotal role in this process. The impositions of external government, Christianity, capitalism, and free market economics have altered Dene women's concept of work.

The Dene women of Fort Liard are presently working to regain the social and economic status they once had. However, reclaiming their status in current times involves recognizing conflicting and contradictory ideologies in the workplace. The goal of these Dene women is, ultimately, to overcome economic and ideological obstacles, to reinforce common cultural values, and to reaffirm the primacy of their own conception of family and community. The goal of this study is to identify and examine the broad spectrum of factors and conditions that play a role in their struggles.

Dedications

To my grandmother, Dora Nahanni,

my parents the late Celine and Alfred Nahanni,

the women of Ft Liard.

Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I must say, ‘mahsi cho' or thank you. First among them is the McGill Geography Department for accepting my application as a Qualifying Student, then as a Graduate Student. Several of my field trips would not have been possible without the grants I received from the Northern Scientific Training Grant (NSTG) of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs. My tuition and living allowance were provided by the Dept of Education, Government of the N.W.T.

My supervisor, Dr Ludger Muller-Wille has helped me in several ways. To him I extend my sincere thanks" for his unfaltering patience with me while l faltered in the writing of this thesis his confidence in me will always be a source of inspiration.

The Fort Liard Dene Band Council made it possible for me to carry out my field research. To this Council I say "mahsi cho". It would not have been possible to continue without the encouragement of friends and relatives: Elsie and Jonas Marcellais, Harry Fantasque and his daughter's Judy, Noreen and Bernice, Martina Kochea, Genevieve Bethale and late son William Bethale, Pauline Sassie, Annette Mattou and all the women who participated in the Questionnaire. My cousin Cathy Nahanni was always there to talk with me and provide me with transportation over the long gravel highways.

‘’Mahsi cho" also to the numerous women and friends in Denendeh and Montreal, with whom I have enjoyed many hours of debate and conversations, especially Marie-Helena, Kiatch, and Debbie. I am especially thankful for the encouragement and support I received from Souie Gorup, Heidi Nast, Mary Williams and Richard Bachand.

Finally, my sincere thanks to my family and extended family for their financial and moral support.

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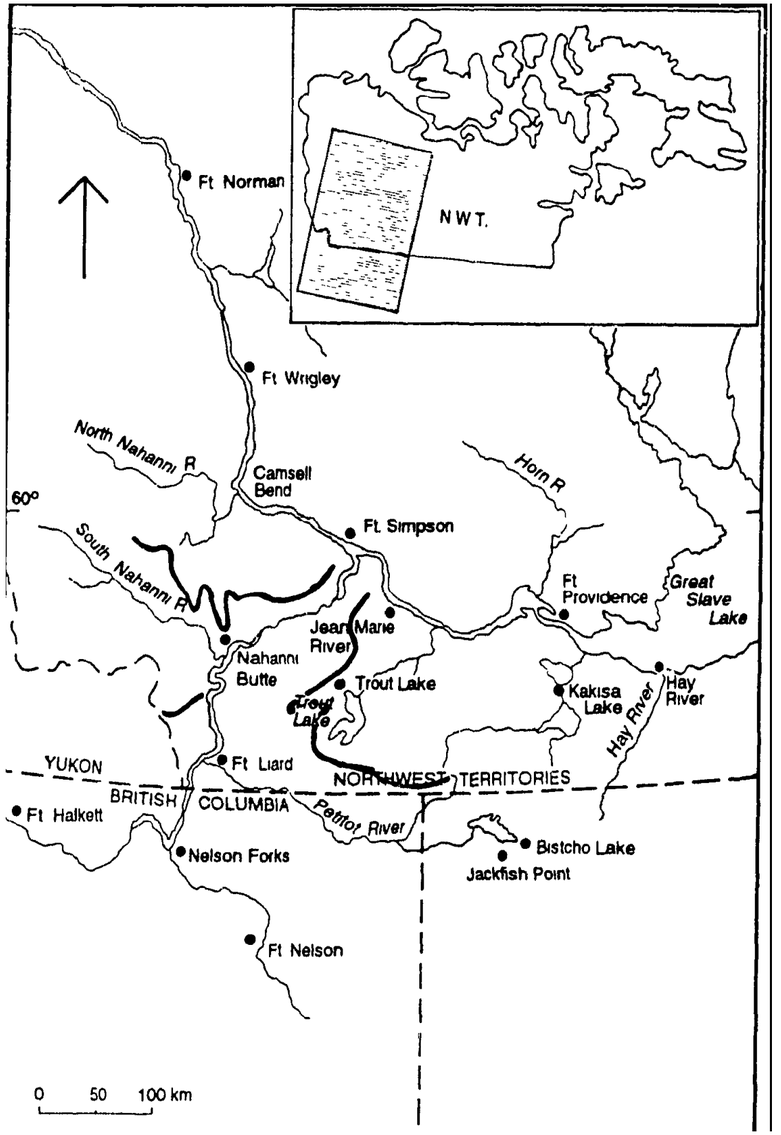
0. **INTRODUCTION**

The indigenous people who belong to the Athapaskan language family and who inhabit the Cordillera and the Boreal forest areas in the Northwestern Subarctic region of North America are descendants of a hunting and fishing people who 1nhabited the region since at least 1700 B.C. (Helm 1981:116). This study focuses on the Slavey-Speaking Dene in the Lower Liard region of the Mackenzie Basin in the Northwest Territories (Fig. 1)

More specifically my thesis is an examination of the role of the Dene women who live in this region, and on the effects that the changes in their indigenous economy that have occurred since the turn of the century, have had on their social and economic status.

"**indigenous**" economy is the term I use to describe the Dene hunting, fishing and gathering way of life that existed prior to the contact with European traders, During the first decade of this century, the Dene began to depend more and more on Western trade goods (Asch 1976).

Trapping for trade altered this economy into what is herein called the "**traditional**" economy. In general, processes discussed here may also apply to Dene women of other Dene populations in the Mackenzie Valley of the Northwest Territories.



0.1. Dene Women and Their Changing Economic Context

The available literature on indigenous societies does not adequately recognize the positive role of Dene women. The work of Dene women within the home or within the extended family is not recognized as an important contribution to the continuity of there culture. Consequently the extent of their participation in, and the depth of their contribution to, the family-based subsistence economy in the bush, and the household economy in the community are relatively unknown.

The thesis concentrates on two fundamental responsibilities Dene women have in caring for children and family "nurturing" and "providing". In the Slavey-Athapaskan language these responsibilities are expressed separately: ts' neh zheh, ('to nurture or 'tending to growth of), and k'ets'endi ('to provide' or 'caring' to needs of).

When these terms are used in close association, they refer to Dene Women's responsibilities towards children and family, both immediate and extended.

The conceptual meanings of the Slavey terms 'nurture' and 'provide' are depicted in the context of indigenous Dene society's social relations, and in the context that contacts the Dene have with certain externally imposed institutions, namely, the schools (mission and government), the law (in the form of the R.C.M.P.), state government (federal and territorial), and the formal economy (large corporations and small businesses) (fig.2).

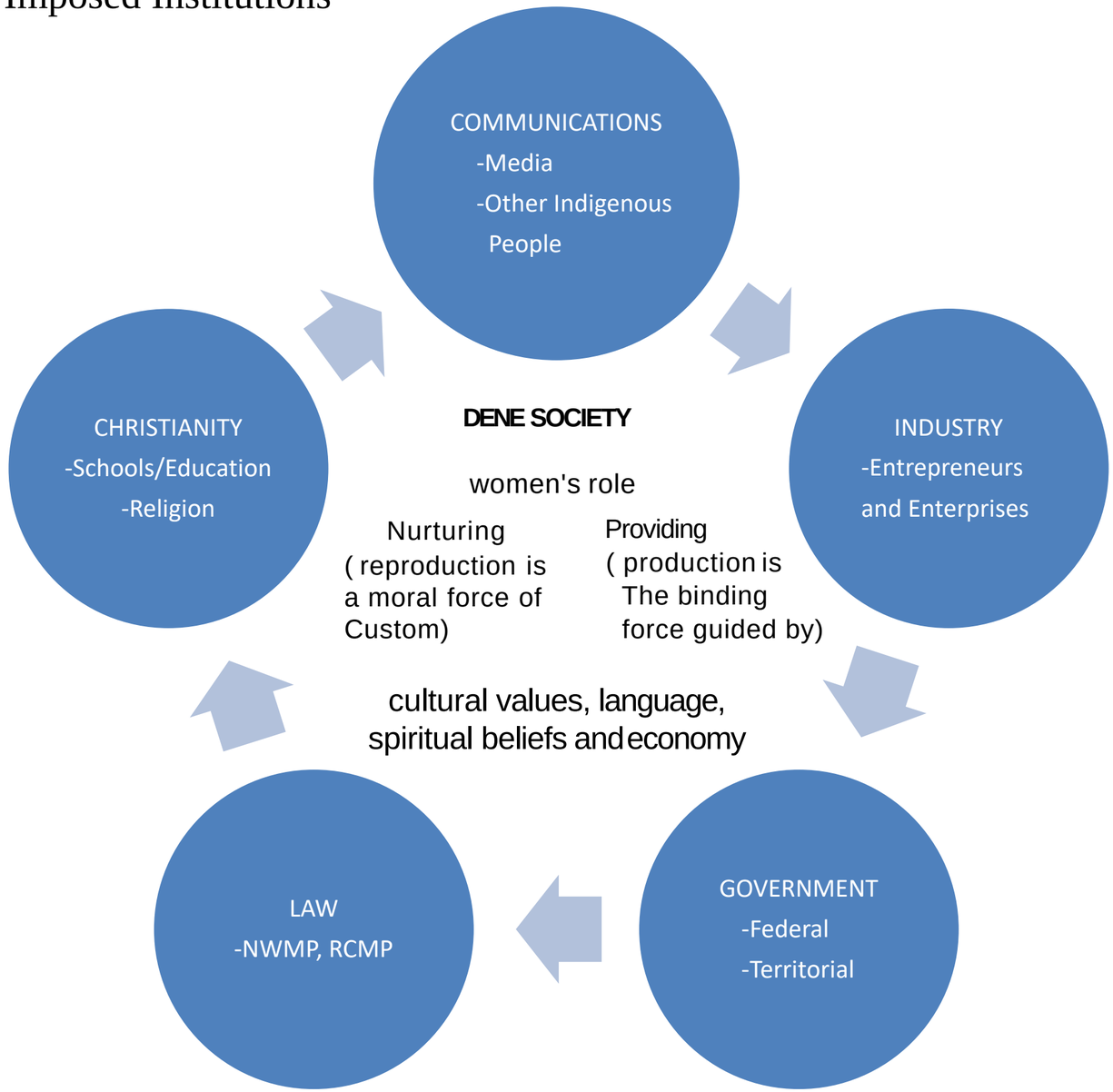
These Slavey concepts comprise the essence of the thesis and will be discussed throughout.

It will be also be demonstrated: (1) how these responsibilities are understood within the context of Dene social relations as conceptually inseparable and where they become separate concepts; (2) that the skills needed to 'nurture' and ‘provide’ are congruent with the activities of the subsistence economy; and (3) how through time and interaction with exogenous forces these responsibilities separate and diffuse.

Prior to the examination of these assertions I draw attention to my preference for the term 'nurture' rather than ‘reproduction' (of 'social relations)') because the former conveys a moral force. Similarly, 1 prefer the term 'providing’ over ‘production, because its use in conjunction with 'nurture' converges on the essence of a ‘binding force' in the subsistence economy.
Through an elaboration of these concepts, an attempt will be made to compare them to Western feminist and feminist geography analyses of 'social reproduction' and 'production’. A brief discussion of this appears in chapter 1.

Any inquiry into indigenous Athapaskan people and culture must include the examination of the levels of participation of women in socioeconomic processes. In this research, 1 wish to substantiate the importance of such examination by looking at the nurturing and providing roles of women in the socioeconomy of one Athapaskan community.

figure 2. The Dene and Externally Imposed Institutions
Source: Author.



By qualitatively examining their social and familial responsibilities, I wish to contribute to knowledge about Dene women in two areas.

In the area of education: I would like to contribute the following. It will be established that, from the Dene perspective, 'nurturing' and 'providing' are customarily attached to Dene women's approaches to 'learning' and 'teaching' methods. These methods are applied from birth. Interviews with older Dene women from Fort Liard corroborates this. These women maintain that 'nurturing' and 'providing' are a major part of their 'eghalaeda' or 'work'. When young women have their first menses, or 'ala sagh Ii,' the Dene concept 'work' is actualized through a custom of puberty rite also referred to as, seclusion among Athapaskans.

Older Dene women learned skill of 'work' from their mothers and female relatives. Most of this transfer of skills took place formally, during seclusion. In August 1991, interviews were conducted with twelve Dene women between the ages of 20 and 45 They were asked specific questions about Dene women's 'work' and about seclusion (appendix l). A few had knowledge of seclusion or the female puberty rituals of the Dene, but most did not know that it was the Dene way of initiating into the responsibilities of adulthood and family membership. This reflects one of many changing circumstances for women in the Dene society and traditional economy. (For a further discussion on this see chapter 4.)

In the area of social development: I have the following comments to make. Dene women have as other contemporary aboriginal women, not only their position in their society to comprehend and maintain but also the expectations that are thrust upon them from external sources. Participation, passive or active, in a variety of processc'i such as community organizations; political organizations that employ liberal democratic procedures; the classroom, where formal styles of education prevai1; and in the wage and free-market economy, as well, challenges the Dene women.

These external forces have tended to generally deviate from their traditional society. I will identify some of the choices available to the Dene women in the modern context and discuss how these women are compelled to recognize that in making and mixing those choices, their concept of 'work' will be transformed. There is the temptation to presume that they frequently ask themselves, "Am I prepared to make these choices and sustain my traditional beliefs?"

0.2. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into five parts. The first outlines the theoretical framework I have chosen to use and begins with a discussion of the traditional economy and its place in the North that employs the concepts of the 'Formal and Informal Economies' and the 'Mode of Production'. Included in this chapter is an examination of the ways Dene women are presented in the existing literature.

The Dene concepts of 'nurturing', 'providing' and 'learning processes are discussed in relation to these analyses of the 'mode of production'. In addition, I engage in a broad discussion of Western feminism, feminist perspectives in Geography and Aboriginal Feminism.'

The second chapter contains an overview of Dene history, of the Dene people's movements and contacts. The third chapter consists of a description of the Slave Territory, and of the Lower Liard people and their land use, their traditional economy, and their cultural knowledge.

This chapter is a summary of the available literature about the Dene, supplemented by my own cultural background, experiences, notes, and field stays in the region. The fourth chapter includes an analysis of the contemporary role of Dene women within the context of informal and formal economies. This theoretical construct provides a base for some understanding of the current situation of these women. It also provides a way of viewing adjustment problems experienced by Dene women. Finally, in the fifth chapter, 1 present my conclusions and discuss some future considerations.

0.3. Methods and Methodology

An interest in the study area was first established in 1975 when I collected land use data from a 30% sample of Dene hunters and trappers (Nahanni in Watkins 1977:27, Dene Mapping Project 1981). At that time, there did not exist extensive research material on indigenous history or first-hand accounts of Dene land-based travel .

In addition, literature on their traditional knowledge and economy had not yet been published. Thesis research was conducted in Fort Liard located in the Lower Liard region of the Northwest Territories. The majority (92.4%) of Fort Liard's population of 460 (as of 1986) is Dene. Most continue to hunt, trap, fish, and gather, either full time or part time on a seasonal basis. They balance the time they spend in the wage economy with that which they spend in the traditional economy.

The method of participant observation, interviews, and distributing a one-page questionnaire were employed to facilitate the qualitative analysis of the traditional economy and the role that women have within it. I have attempted here to look at the microcosm of social relations, describe how they function, identify where women fit in and explain some of the related processes and their complex underlying factors.

Completed were three short period of field work in 1986 and 1987. Eight weeks were spent in Fort Liard, Nahanni Butte, and two bush camps - one that was visited in the summer (Swan Point) and the other in the winter (Harry F's camp) (see fig. 3). Five of the eight weeks were spent in Fort Lia rd. I briefly describe both experience, the first in the Bush Camps the second in the community of Fort Liard.

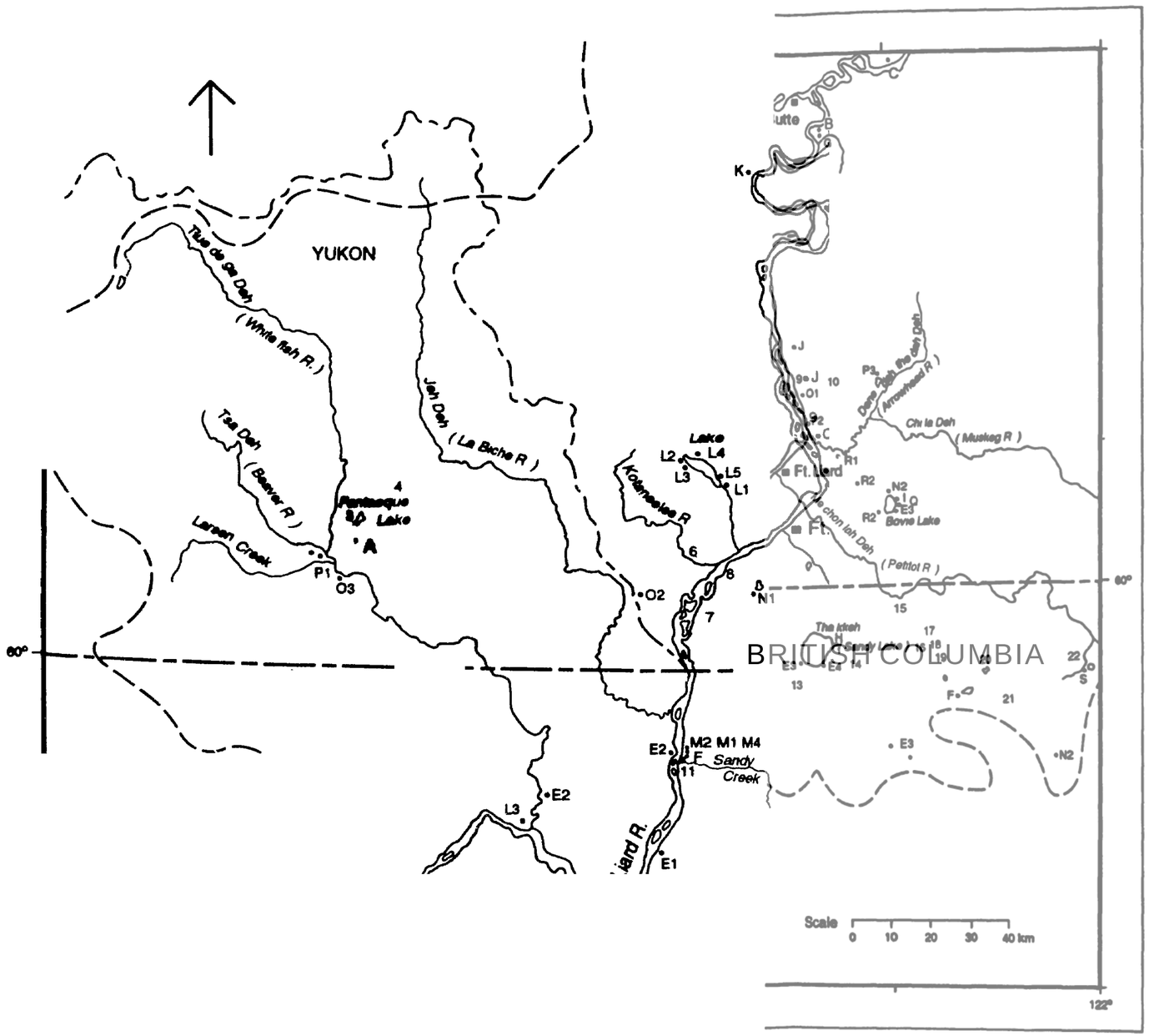


Figure 3 The Study Area. Source: Author.

■ Settlement

● camp

A	Harry Fantasque	L4	Klondike, Johnny
B	Netla	L5	, Julien
C	Swan Point	M1	Kotchea, Fred
D	Berreault, Fred	M2	, Gordon
E1	Bertrand, Armand	M3	, John
E2	, Francis	M4	, Raymond
E3	, Joe	N1	Lomen, Daniel
E4	, Philip	N2	, Frank
F	Bethale, William Sr	O1	Mouyé, Edward
G	Betsaka, Francis	O2	, Wind
H	Deneron, George	O3	, St. Pierre
I	Diamond - C, Edward	P1	Nande, Francis
J	Edda, Alfred	P2	, Lucy
K	Ekotla, Isidore	Q	Sasse, John
L1	Klondike, George	R1	Thomas, Alfred
L2	, James	R2	, Stanley
L3	, John Jr	S	Timbre, Gordon

Dene Place Names

1.	sąmba deh	12.	di daa the
2.	' eh daawa léh	13	tai deh
3.	mia go cho	14	ga la deha
4.	mia go dąmbe	15.	shida lah
5.	tlue too	16	medzih mia
6.	gohtta ni lį	17	matoo mia
7.	nu cho déna	18.	ama tsa too
8.	d'é tse ah deetenı	19	go la chi deh
9.	gah cho deh	20.	mia go cho
10.	gah cho mia	21	tsu da deh o
11.	tli go ché	22	tsa th 'e deh

Fantasque camp in registered Trapline

Provincial Boundaries

Full extent of Lower Liard Dene Land Use

In August 1986, I went to visit a bush camp called Swan Point situated on the Liard River. It belonged to a Nahanni Butte family. During the five days of my stay I was witness to events in the daily life of a healthy Dene v.omen, who was well accustomed to her role in the community household and bush workplaces. The other bush camp I visited, in December 1986, belonged to a family from Fort Liard who had a registered trapline around Fantasque Lake in the Liard Plateau, Yukon Territory.

This family consisted of a father (Harry F.), his two daughters, and the preschool children of one of the daughters. At this winter camp, I saw the two daughters perform many tasks such as cutting and hauling wood, packing snow and ice for cooking, and ice fishing, while the father concentrated on hunting and visiting the traplines. In the summer of 1987, I lived in the Fort Liard community for five weeks. I visited people in their homes and explained in English and Slavey that I wanted to talk to them about the traditional economy. Some conversations were short, while others stretched out over days and contained abundant information.

Generally, the interviews began with some discussion of the hunting and trapping trails and the place names known to the people of Fort Liard. The place names were recorded on audio tapes and designated on maps at 1:250,000. (See fig. 3 The place names provided me with a general picture only and cannot be considered complete). I requested the help of people to whom I spoke in interpreting the trails that they used. It was not always necessary to ask structured questions, because the hunters talked spontaneously about their hunts and traplines. I sought to confirm that people still depend a great deal on the traditional economy and found confirmation in the interviews that I conducted in the community and in the observations that I recorded there. I observed the Dene preparing and departing, on foot, by canoe or motorboats, for expeditions along the river or in the bush and the preparations of moose hide by the Dene Woman.

I also visited the local office of the N.W.T. Department of Renewable Resource's to obtain some animal species information, some harvest-kill information, and some information about general locations.

In the summer of 1987. I made three other short land trips adding to my overall appreciation of the summer conditions in the area. The three locations were Virginia Falls in the South Nahanni River area; a fire tower situated on Mount Coty, fourteen miles west of Fort Liard; and a small lake called Dendale Lake, situated in the far northern area of the Liard Plateau near the N.W.T.-Y.T. border a place where some hunters went for caribou, moose and sheep.

A final field trip to Fort Liard was taken in August 1991 to accomplish two things. First, I met with the Liard Dene Band Council to discuss the substance of my research and to share information with them. Second, I interviewed four women (50 years and over) and conducted a survey using a one-page questionnaire directed at young women between the ages of 20 and 45 to find out how much they could tell me about the Dene puberty ritual (a topic to be introduced in chapter 4) and Dene women's work (see appendix I).

Secondary sources that dealt with historical information were conducted at the Prince of Wales Museum in Yellowknife, N.W.T., and libraries at McGill University and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs (DIANO) in Ottawa. Some primary sources were used at the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario.

1 The Theoretical Framework

l.l The Socioeconomic-economic Context

This chapter is directed towards a theoretical understanding of the focus of the thesis I will consider current and existing information and analyses of the traditional economy (to some extent this includes traditional knowledge) and the role of Dene women in the traditional economy. For the latter, I will direct my attention to the nurturing and providing roles. Lastly, some views are proposed here of how Dene women's role could be understood in relation to and within the Western feminist perspective in Canada. Considered also are some discussions of feminist perspectives in geography.

1.1.1. Traditional Economy and Modern Northern Economy

The milieu of the Dene, the traditional economy, is one that is commonly misunderstood. One view that was prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s had the traditional economy to be fading with the introduction of industrialization. Ross & Usher (1986) suggest a theoretical framework for an understanding of traditional economy as persisting in the modern context or contemporary northern economy.

They suggest that in North America, economic activities fall under two general economic categories - formal and informal. The formal economy in northern Canada today is the economy that was introduced by commerce, government and industry. The process began incrementally from the beginning of the fur trade and with much more force during the last 20 years. In the domain of the formal economy, progress is easily measured. Every year the Government of the N.W.T. table's its budget, estimates and public accounts.

The progress of the northern economy is thus assessed in dollar value. In contrast to the formal economy the informal economy is not easily measured. lt is based in hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering, a way of life in northern communities. These activities are land and community based and still dominate Dene settlements in northwestern Canada.

These communities are characterized by small populations, the great distances between them, and by the presence of government and industry even while most of the inhabitants are engaged in hunting, fishing and trapping. (Ross and Usher 1986:141)

Since the 1970's N.W.T. Government researchers and academics have attempted to quantify the value of hunting, fishing, gathering and trapping, which they refer to as renewable resources utilization. So far, two types of assessment have been developed.

One type has been built into the government system of calculating fur value with each trapper's fur return. For example, the Fur Management Division of the Renewable Resources Department of the Government of the N.W.T. recorded the total fur value returns for Fort Liard in 1989-90 to be $116,990.18 and in 1990-91 down to

$97, 131.08. (personal communication with Wildlife Officer, Renewable Resource on 1 on 1 1a1d 111 1992).

The second type of assessment is done occasionally. Calculation of the value of country food are measured in 'replacement' dollar based on value of store- bought meat for an equal weight of harvest-kill country food.

This type of assessment was done for the community of Fort Liard by Michael Asch and presented before the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry in 1976. (In presenting this evidence, M. Ashe added that the people in the North face several economic, social, and political problems which would not be solved by the introduction of a pipeline development)

What is difficult to calculate is the distribution value of the country f ood in the community (or how many people benefit from the harvest of one moose for example), the value of finished products for domestic use, such as leather and fur goods, use of bones for tools and carvings, and so on. Furthermore, it is difficult to quantify the time spent in travel, the expertise and knowledge in the assessment of conditions of the environment, the preparation of the workplace, and means of production. In all of these, the activities of women are prominent.

The continued failure to recognize what cannot be quantified is a predicament for the Dene and the future of their traditional economy. The tendency is for the general western public to view hunting, fishing, and gathering as an "evolutionarily superseded activity" (Asch in Whittington 1985:3). Asch (ibid) suggests that this will remain so until drastic changes are made, and the traditional economy is accorded recognition in its value to industrial economy much, like agriculture is currently of value to the industry in the south.

1.1.2. Mode of Production

All economies are comprised of processes known as material production and reproduction. These processes are generally defined within the concept or the Mode of Production. The 1nformative choice for the application or this concept, (even while it was not fully developed by Marx) to pre-capitalist societies is Godelier (I 977:18).

The interpretation of this concept by Asch (1979) is one that provides a framework for the analysis of economic activities within Dene societies. It also puts their 'informal' economy into simultaneous perspective with the 'formal' economy; sometimes linked to and sometime' s separate from the latter (sec chapter 4). The mode of production concept is based on two assumptions about human beings.

First, humans can think rationally (Asch 1979: 88) Second, humans require each other to fulfill their material needs and they do this through social relationships (Ibid: 88). Humans as rational beings creates technological and institutional structures through social relations that will enable them to produce and reproduce their material needs. The structures are technical in nature and are called forces of production. Since the structures are created by humans, The stability of these structures depends on their usefulness to those who use them and the products they produce. The structures require the assurances of the social relations of production.

Usher defines the concept of the mode of production as follow: A mode of production encompasses not only the resources and technology by which a people make their living, but also the social organization and ideological system which combine the factors of production (land, labour, resources, technology and capital) in a functioning productive system. (Usher 1982: 418)

To explain the unique economy of the Canadian North he proposes two modes or production - **domestic** and **capitalist** (Ibid). Usher proposed that in the Canadian North the prominent domestic mode of production is the **native economy** (Ibid 420) or the **village economy** (Ross & Usher 1986: 141, I call this the **traditional economy**, see chapter 3, subsection 3.2). The prominent capitalist mode of production is the **industrial economy** (Usher 1982: 419).

Usher considers the former a type of informal economy, prominent in the North, and the latter a formal economy in modern Canada. Each identify products, sectors and producers that characterize them as such. The traditional economy is linked into the northern economy through commodity exchange, that is raw fur for credit or cash and more recently, the sale of country food in retail stores. The irreconcilable difference is that the time spent in the wage economy undermines the time that could be used in the traditional economy (lbid:419).

Ross and Usher (1986) and Whittington (1985) identify a third economic sector - the welfare economy. They also appear to agree that the welfare system is just another source of income to be tapped in time of need, or off-season when people are unable to hunt, fish and trap. People use welfare as a buttress between, the formal and informal economy to secure cash flow. While the term 'welfare' may have negative connotations, it is important to note that there are other perspectives on welfare issue.

In the case of northern hunter-gatherers, this 1s the amount received and how the spending of it are utilized. For example, Scott observed among the Cree of Quebec in the mid-I 970s,.. when subsistence production is taken into account at its replacement value, the contribution of wages and welfare income to Wemindji use-value in 1975 was still only about half of the total, as was the case for most Cree groups (Scott 1984: 75).

Furthermore, Scott proposes that the Cree, through their land claims negotiations are managing to balance the 'original affluence' of a hunting society with the 'consumer affluence' they enjoy under the terms of the Income Security Program they negotiated through the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement. Integrated in the Income Security Program are the Cree concept of wildlife conservation and management (Feit 1985). The positive effects of this Agreement on the continuity of James Bay Cree hunting demonstrate the ability to balance economic spheres, including transfer payments.

1.2. View of Dene Women: Literature Review

Two major criticisms ate levelled at non-aboriginal researchers of Athapaskans.

First, that research on indigenous societies has generally been kept within the confines of academic understanding and is not usually readable by the average aboriginal person, and have been kept out of indigenous education until recently (Weaver 1981:15).

Secondly, there is the obvious omission of the female perspective in the literature. Prior to the I960s most of the analyses of Subarctic Athapaskans were on culture change. A few researchers acknowledged their inability to interview aboriginal women (Vanstone 1961, 1963, 1974). In subsequent years, non-aboriginal academics turned their attention to explaining Athapaskan ecological adaptations including stress (e.g.Savishinsky 1973, Vanstone 1974). then to Subarctic Athapaskans as adapting to socioeconomic changes (Helm 1961) and analyst's of social organization (Asch 1980). The term 'acculturation' was generally used to describe indigenous people who adopted western and modern clothes and mannerism such that fitted in neither society.

“Modernization”, “westernization", 'development and under-development' and 'industrialization constituted different ideas that scholars used to describe what was implied by Government objectives in policies towards aboriginal people (Mayes 1982:36-47).

In current times, these analyses have evoked mixed responses from Aboriginal people and researchers. Some aboriginal people like the Dene compare their experiences with the dominant society as like those experienced by colonized people in Third World countries (Erasmus in Watkins 1977:177-181}. To them, the term colonization have real meaning because they are experiencmg elements of this process. Their political struggle is to work to undo their 'colonized state' through 'de-colonization'. Part of there response is due to the realization that they no longer want to be the objects of study by outsiders, solely. Instead, further studies about them must involve them.

Recognizing the need for aboriginal perspectives on their own society, some academics have turned to the syntax of Aboriginal languages to convey the 'internal’ or 'emic' perspective that would for example, describe the environmental conditions that are taken into consideration when preparing to go on a hunt or while on a hunt (Basso 1972, Brody 1987, Rushforth 1986).

Others have examined the legends and oral traditions including life histories and culture (Cruikshank 1979, 1981; Bataille and Sands 1984) and the meaning of inner world technology as compared to material technology (Ridington 1987). Consequently, there appears to be a recognition that research with and about the Dene can also improve research techniques and quality. Yet, information that exist about Dene women is not substantial nor critically examined. Dene women continue to remain in the background.

Since the mid-1970s researchers have observed that the historical and contemporary roles of aboriginal women in their economics have been seriously neglected in the literature (Fiske 1987: 186, Littlefield 1987: 173, Van Kirk 1989). .

Furthermore reconstructing pre-contact societies and the traditional role of Women is virtually impossible for two reasons:

(I) aboriginal societies and cultures experienced rapid disruption by the fur trade and

(II) early recorders portrayed ethnocentric and patriarchal biases (Brodribb 1984: 86, Leacock 198l). The colonizers and missionaries displaced women by supplanting male-oriented views on aboriginal societies, (Leacock 1981: 43- 62). In the last three decades women have attempted to understand the authentic role of aboriginal women through life stories (Cruikshank 1990; Bataille and Sands 1984).

Through critical analyses and cautious interpretations of recorded history, researchers revealed evidence of the pivotal roles of aboriginal women in their societies as well as in the fur trade, (Brodribb 1984, Brown 1975, Cruikshank 1969, Etienne 1980, Leacock 1981, Littlefield 1983, Vander Flier 1974, Van Kirk 1989). This has encouraged several aboriginal women to offer additional perspectives which have appeared in anthologies (Gunn Allen 1989, Crynkovich 1990, Perreault and Vance I 990).

There are indications that historical information on Dene women was slow to accumulate. How useful is this information in the development of theory is still uncertain. The bibliography of **North American Native Women** (Green 1983) contains two references on Dene women (Cruikshank 1975, 1979) which are used in this paper. Some information on Chipewyan Dene women before 1900 is found in a recent publication entitled **"Many Tender Ties"** by Sylvia Van Kirk (1989). The book provides an insight into the movement of Indian women in the fur trade in North America from journals kept by members of the HBC, other fur trading companies and explorers during the years 1670- 1870.

One notable Dene woman was Thanadelthur, a Chipewyan who, "acted as guide", interpreter and peace negotiator for Governor (James) Knight's expedition of 1715-16" (Van Kil)., 1989: 66). She took on the major task of establishing peace between the Cree and Chipewyan so that the English could trade with both groups, Chipewyan women were also prominent in Hearne's third expedition to the Arctic (1771-72).

In his journal Samuel Hearne recorded that his Chipewyan Indian guide, Mctonabbee, insisted that Hearne's first two failures were due to the lack of women's help and that he will not join Hearne's third attempt without women. Mctonabbee argued, ...when all the men are heavy laden, they can neither hunt nor travel to any considerable distance; and in case they meet with success in hunting, who is to carry the produce of their labour? Women ... they also pitch our tents, make and mend our clothing, keep us warm at night; and, in fact, there is no such thing as travelling any considerable distance, or for any length of time, in this country, without their assistance..(Van K ir I...1989: 63).

Hearne's other notable encounter was on his return from the third expedition (1772). Iii\ expedition found a young Dogrib women who had been enslaved, escaped, got lost and had lived alone for the previous seven months, Snared small game kept her in good supply. She had a fishnet of willow bark she had a knife fashioned from an old hoop; she had turned an arrowhead into an awl, she made fire by knocking two sulphurous stones against each other; she was in fact a very resourceful girl, a most desirable package! (Speck 1963: 236)

Hearne and Hardisty as quoted in Perry (1979: 363) also recorded the low status and miserable life of subarctic women, who practised female infanticide to spare their daughters a miserable life. However, Perry also argues that negative portrayal of women and behavior of men towards them are directly related to involvement with European trading (Ibid).

Female infanticide among the Subarctic Athapaskan appeared in historical records from the early 1800s (Helm 1980:260). Helm attempts to provide the extent of this practice through her analyses of the census in the year 1829, 1858, 1891 and 1924. Her estimates are based on the proposal that the average number of males, for every 100 females is around 99 to 104. Excess of this average indicates, fewer females, than males and consequently can infer female infanticide.

The figures she provides in these year!, indicate skewed sex ratios among the Mackenzie Dene in the years 1829 and 1858 with some decline in 1891. Between the years 1820 and I 840 historical evidence of high rate of disease and starvation occurred (Yerbury I 986:158).

The imbalance between native populations and food resources suggests that infanticide continued to occur throughout the nineteenth century (Ibid). Evidence from one Mountian Dene women (1872-1971) indicates her knowledge of female infanticide from her mother, "it was hard then ... if it is a big family" (Helm 1980:259).

While some comments were made by Honigmann (1946) and Jenness (1972) about the Slave women, insufficient information is offered to develop a portrait of them. The most that was stated was that the women did not have the prestige associated with hunting; that they were treated with kindness; that they did the hardest work, but the men packed the heavier loads.

On the other hand, useful and positive insights have been provided in several publications by Julie Cruikshank (1975, 1979,1981,1984, 1991) on Athapaskan women in the Yukon which indicate a role very similar to that among Dene women. Others before her have also noted a practice which appeared to be a common custom among Athapaskans, the female puberty rites or seclusion (Osgood 1936, Honigmann 1946).

Cruikshank's research into this custom among Yukon women concludes that the most important time in the life of a woman is during her first menses. This is the time when tlw woman experiences seclusion. The rites she experiences are the door and path to maturity. The valuable contribution that Dene women make to their society are signalled by their entry into adulthood through this rite. Puberty rites have ceased to be practiced since the 1950s. Why'? Cruikshank (1975) discovered that it was related to the conversion of the Athapaskan to Christianity. The following statement made by an older Yukon women contains the concerns many older Dene women have and will be discussed in part in chapter 4.

Many older women offer descriptions of puberty seclusion as an important example of the 'old ways' which have changed so greatly in this Century. It was a custom specifically tied to women's roles and its passing is a change they have experienced in their lifetime. (Cruikshank 1975:4)

White (1987: 76) alleges that stereotypical views of aboriginal people evolved since the 18th and 19th century colonial experiences and that these views in turn influenced the policies and legislation of the Department of Indian Affairs. The department changed the role of Indian women in Indian culture by the formal education of Indian children (lbid:100). Their policy was to civilize, protect and assimilate all Indian people defined by the Indian Act. Through the women, social change would occur. They characterized "Indian women as downtrodden and oppressed by a brutish and savage culture" (lbrd: 116).

White's thesis concludes among her several important salient points, that the, Canadian state with the help of the church set about to transform the degraded squaw into a helpful, industrious and health conscious rural housewife. Thus the restructuring of the domestic economy was a key ingredient to the assimilation of the Indian women into the larger Euro-Canadian society...(lbid:264).

In the Canadian north, this policy was implemented after the Second World War, by forcibly removing children from their parents and sending them to residential school for several years, then reducing it to ten months of each year but with some children starting school as young as three years of age.

In these institutiom they were supervised and taught by either Protestant or Roman Catholic missionaries. Sentiments, like those of the State towards Indian people were also recorded in the historical sketch of the Slave area that included Fort Simpson, Jean Marie River, Fort Providence, Nahann1 Butte, and Fort Liard between the years 1858-1958 by the Sacred Heart R.C.Mission (Lesage 1958). The Dene with whom the above accounts were discussed and who also knew the priest, displayed expressions of disbelief and disappointment.

Dene Concepts of "Nurturing" and "Providing"

It was stated earlier that when the Dene terms 'nurturing' and 'providing' are used in close association, they refer to the responsibilities of women towards their children and family, immediate and extended. For the purposes of analyses, these responsibilities will be separated, fint in the *context* of the indigenous Dene society, without using European historical period , followed by the context of the changes to this society.

In association with the act of physical caring, 'nurturing' is largely the transmittal and reception of information, They occur within two broad areas: language acquisition, comprehension and use; and apprenticeship. Language acquisition and cognition is obtained from infancy. It begins with the parents, grandparents and siblings mimicking with the baby, so they acquire what their parents and elders iterate.

The first three years of the child is spent primarily with the mother who carries the child on her back while she performs all her duties. Movement with the mother provided reference for language acquisition, particularly the sounds and articulations. Christian and Gardner (I 977) documented extensively the context of language acquisition among the Fort Liard Dene in their field study in 1974 and 1975. Language transfers information on kinship, customs, beliefs, and socially accepted behavior towards others and the environment. It also includes concepts on the seasonal and cyclical nature of the environment.

For example, months are named by the cyclical nature of the moon and the movement of animals. The first menses of the women is translated as 'first moon flow' thereafter **it** is referred to as regular 'moon flow'. Storytelling to the children, usually in the evening time, when both parents and grandparents are settling down for the night, is the time when what was observed and experienced during the day is related in legends.

Apprenticeship is the method of learning. It is the "internal organization of the learning" (Lave 1982: 183) by listening, observing and doing.

Christian aptly describes 'listening' processes in three different ways: listening, not listening and noisy (1975· 118) Observation enables the apprentice to find a 'way-in'. Way-in is a nickname for whatever it takes to get from the state of high ignorance about how to do something to a state in which one can make a first approximation to it. (Lave 1982: 184).

Through a succession of doing, undoing, redoing, replicating the craft is perfected. For Dene women, apprenticeship in preparing a hide, fish processing, setting snares, etc. begins at the early age of six or seven. The young apprentice usually receives encouragement when successful. Observation of the learning process indicated that parents emphasized to their, children the importance of acquiring knowledge through performing task repeatedly and independently while also transferring language acquisition.

The act of 'providing' or 'production' in the indigenous Dene society usually are a collective activity. From the home base, whether it is a bush camp or a community setting, women teach their children to 'provide' by first having them assist at home and their surrounding environment an act of 'gathering'. They teach them how to identify the material, how to select them and why, and how much to harvest at one time.

Children learn about their resources of the environment near home, through the act of fetching and gathering necessities including water, firewood, food such as berries, roots, sap, herbs, and building material such as spruce boughs, young spruce for snowshoes, bows, and for whittling.

Fishing, enables the children to become familiar with the Dene technique, in getting food in open water and through ice. They also become familiar with specie, and preparation of fish for storage, drying, and eating. In addition, they become aware of the location of fish runs. They grow up becoming familiar with and cautious of environmental conditions for their safety.

Air temperature, snow conditions, and thickness of ice, for example, become important factors for decision. Learning how to provide necessities require participation in small game hunting and snaring. Usually participation begins when the child learns to control bodily functions properly This is the start of the child's first personal experience with the environment far from 'home'. Season, climate, vegetation, and animal habitat is explained on these excursions. Power of animals is also explained. A successful hunt is followed by encouragement and techniques for preparation and sharing with others. Also, children are encouraged to relate their experiences about outings and hunting excursions.

Women (mothers and grandmothers) encourage their sons and grand-sons to go on big game hunting with their families. Through observation and sometimes participation, women are familiar with the techniques of big game hunts, but generally do not engage in this activity. Children observe this and know from language acquisition the cultural belief that women possess powers that can counter or complement those of men when they are on a hunt. Young girl!. during their first menses are instructed on this among other cultural beliefs, and the purpose of their responsibilities.

All clothing and some tools were made by women prior to contact with European traders. Clothing was made from hide and fur which had to be acquired through hunting and snaring. By learning to dress themselves up, children learned to see how their clothing were made. A young girl particularly, had to follow her mother so that she could know how to prepare and tan hides, as well as sew moccasins and other articles of clothing. In this way she learned some short cuts and in making quality clothing. In addition she learned to skin animal fur, prepare whatever is edible and dispose of the viscera in a respectable way according to custom.

Working with material on hand was not only for clothing, it also included making and building homes.

Mobility of Dene hunter-gatherers required that the Dene know what materials they needed to build temporary homes. Often, it was the women who prepared the hides for the tents they lived in or the Mooseskin boats, especially in the pre-contact years. Women often helped their husbands gather material such as moss and spruce bark for temporary camp dwellings and spruce bark and gum for bark canoe's.

1.4. **Dene Society: Changes and Continuities**

Exogenous forces, identified above, have exerted considerable influence in altering the indigenous Dene society concepts of 'nurturing' or 'social reproduction' and 'providing' or 'production.' I recognize the complexity of events around the culture-change process and have chosen to identify a few of those features in this process that would explain my thesis on nurturing and providing.

Beginning in the 1930s, children, primarily orphans, were sent to mission-run residential schools for at least ten months of the year. There, learning was done through books, the printed word and lecturing rather than sharing. Love for "God" was emphasized. After the Second World War, the federal government took over the education of the Dene contracting the mission schools to continue educating them, The additional feature in this change of authority in education was the compulsory attendance for all children at specified ages. This meant that many children even those who had living parents, were sent to residential schools for most of the year.

Compulsory attendance and education meant that the responsibility of teaching by mothers and elders were taken away from them. By imposing new language, English, upon Dene children, a non-Dene world-view both physical and spiritual were also imposed. Most of the Dene children were brought to residential school from distant communities. These schools were fenced in, physically cutting off any association with the surrounding land and bush environment.

By cutting off association with family and environment, Dene children were vulnerable to whatever physical or spiritual information transmitted to them. The situation they found themselves in was entirely new: they and their parents had never experienced such situations before. They could assimilate and forget their heritage, or they could be stubborn and refuse to learn what was taught. Those who insisted on the latter choice were punished severely.

The type of 'nurturing' Dene children received were based on different expectations in morals and behavior. Individual attention was not given except for competitive success or examples to ridicule. Sisters and brothers were separated and not allowed to talk with one another nor were they encouraged to show emotional attachments.

Underlying this government and missionary teaching method was the assumption that the Dene children did not know anything. They were inferior and ridiculed for this. The mission schools were determined to teach the abstract fundamentals of reading, writing, arithmetic and religion. Competition - spelling matches, sports - for rewards were one of several ways to motivate children. Religion was to be the source of consolation in time of need or despair. It also provided the moral guidelines on interpersonal relationships. Dene children in their readings had to learn they were discovered by Columbus. In this history, what was said about them and other aboriginal people was new to them. The derogatory remarks left them with low esteem of themselves and their parents, uncles, grandparents, ancestors. In order to redeem themselves they were coerced to believe in the religion of the Mission school, learn English, and someday, get a job.

In so doing they could become like "everyone else in the Western world" and earn a living in the new world' and forget about the 'old world' of their parents.

The term providing took on an entirely separate meaning. Within the context of mission schools, 'providing' meant in part learning to use abstract concepts mentioned above in order to get a job in later life.

Education was to be the necessary tool for the Dene children to survive in the 'new world.' But the skills young girls learned for the purposes of 'providing' included homemaking (only the older girls learned some cooking), particularly embroidery, knitting, mending, and sewing. Homemaking skills acquired at Mission schools were to prepare young girls to become useful mothers and domestics in the 'new world' (White 1987).

Knowing how to make tools and moccasins was not emphasized. Bigger boys helped in chopping and gathering wood for heating, and cooking in the mission schools. Some were even allowed to set rabbit snares. But the primary emphasis were on learning in the classrooms, cleaning and praying.

What skills they would have learned in the indigenous Dene society were compressed into two summer months when they returned home to their families. The clash between what was morally right in the Dene society as compared to the residential school environment meant that many Dene customs were forgotten or were modified. For example puberty rites which were so important to young women was no longer possible to practice except by chance that this event took place during the summer months.

Time took on a new meaning - time by the clock and not by the moon and season- which was marked by the hour to eat, to work, go to school, to pray, to sleep etc. There was no positive mention of what it meant 'to provide' in the indigenous Dene society, in the context of the mission school environment. The consequences under these circumstances created confusion among Dene children - some have described it as living in twilight.

Dene Women and Western Feminism

In the previous sub-sections of this chapter 'nurturing' and ‘providing were explained as the fundamental features in the role of Dene women as well as how these responsibilities were learned and taught. It was stressed that the integrity of these responsibilities depended on the puberty rites custom of the Dene. With the introduction of Christianity and other exogenous influences the puberty rites custom was eradicated according to the Athapaskan women who spoke with Cruikshank (1975).

The demise of this custom has concerned the female elder ever since. The task here is to put into a broader context the changing circumstances of Dene women. The context of Dene women's work in theoretical terms will be discussed. Second, will follow a discussion of how salient points made by feminists and feminist geographers on the 'production' and 'reproduction' relate to the concerns of Dene women and their predicaments in their work situations. Finally, there will be a discussion of the notion of aboriginal feminism' which is the term to describe a kind of ideological mediation between tradition and present social and political situations.

Dene Women's Work

The concerns of the Dene female elders over the demise of their puberty rites custom are well founded. Without experiencing these rites, young women have not benefited from an overall education of Dene customs. Customs outline basic moral obligations. Without this education, young women (and indirectly, young men) have not learned Dene social relations and most importantly, how to 'work.’ Two issues are emphasized here.

First, the encompassing changes to their society have not necessarily been an improvement for the family.

Second, customs and changes, notwithstanding, most women regard their role as 'work.’ Informants included elderly women whose upbringing was primarily in the 'bush' and younger women who grew up in the community and have had some formal schooling in their community or have gone to larger communities to go to school.

Having talked with women of all age's then three meanings of 'work' have been identified:

(a)work in the 'bush' where the way of life is based on hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering;
(b)work in the household setting of domestic work; and
(c)work outside the home, commonly known as 'having a job'.

Table 1: Types of 'Work' in the Dene Setting

	'Bush'	Household in the Community	Industrial and Formal Economy
Time	-seasonal and flexible	-determined by clock -some flexibility -dependent on service hours	**Determined by Clock** -time means money
Benefits	-whole family -sharing of resources	-some families -some sharing -dependent on available services and commodities	-individual - provides income and employment as well as experience in wage economy
Ideology	-egalitarianism -sharing	-division of labour -some sharing	-capitalist

Source: Nahanni 1990: 22.

The quality and goals conceptually inherent in these types of work are not complementary in terms of ideology, time and benefits. Consequently, they present great difficulties for Dene women. These difficulties are further explained in chapter 4. It should be noted that, work in the bush, is interpreted by elderly Dene women differently than it is by younger women.

Perspectives on the quality and goals of each of the three meanings of 'work' and their relationship with each other become a little clearer when regarded within the context of Dene society as well as within the framework of the two economies, formal and informal. But if Dene women are to assess the benefits of the changes whether it is from the point of view of finding support systems for their culture or their families, they must include in their assessment a critical look at how other women fare in the informal and formal economies. This critical look must necessarily be from the feminist perspective.

Western Feminism

Feminist literature (the main source of reference on Feminism in Canada is from Burt, Code and Dorney 1988) is now abundant and revealing many facts about the conditions of women historically and in the present. For example, the historical basis for male-female differences in western society date back to Greek/Roman times in Europe.

Over the years, feminists have attempted to understand how these differences have created "oppressive social practices that disadvantage women" (Code 1988:18) and to find ways to change them. Although feminists (in Canada there are four main ideological groupings of feminists - liberal, radical, socialist, and French feminists) differ on where the emphasis should be, they do agree on certain common themes. Outlined below are commonly recognized and basic issues of western society which have created social and economic inequities between men and women.

Table 2.Basic Issues of Female-Male Relations in Western Societies

Philosophical Premises	Capitalist Economic Structures	Economic-Social Constructs
Aristotelian	Production Reproduction -sexuality -socialization	Created (a) gender inequalities (b) Spheres –public **-private** (vary historically, culturally. racially along class lines)

Ideology, Patriarchy. Source: Burt et al **1988.**

Feminist researchers assert that patriarchal ideologies have their origin in the philosophy of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) - "the male is by nature superior and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled..."(Code 1988: 22).

The philosophy of Aristotle on human nature has been the basis of western theory up to the 18th century. Code suggests thus, patriarchal ideals have influenced and shaped political and social procedures and economic structures in western society throughout that time. For example, socialist feminism draw upon Marx's analysis of class oppression.

They say that capitalist economic system oppresses women as a group just as it oppresses the working class as a whole, in the following ways:

(a)through its economic structures of production and reproduction created and controlled by a hierarchy of men, which function to maintain the subordination of women,

(b)by alienating women's work as well as men's work, by placing at a disadvantage, women as housewives whose work has no monetary value and who are excluded from recognition in the 'public' workplace.

The patriarchal capitalist system perpetuates disadvantages to women: first in the nuclear family structure where women's work has no monetary value, but where she is expected to biologically reproduce the labour, power; and second, if she decides to join the workforce, she inherits the double duty of working for wages and performing unpaid work at home - a situation which the socialist feminists argue, have not altogether been liberating for women. Socialist feminists promote a radical restructuring in the economy where women will get equal pay for work of equal value. Social change they say, must include an alternative to the capitalist mode of production and to the patriarchal organization of the family and other social institutions.

1.5.3. Feminist Perspectives in Geography

Since the early 1980s geographers have recognized concepts in feminist theory and practice. The women and Geography Study Group of the British Geographers (IBG 1984) recognized the theory and practice of concepts such as patriarchy and gender. It was suggested by this group that patriarchy can be defined as "a set of social relations between men which although hierarchical establishes an interdependence and solidarity between them which allows them to dominate women" (IBG 1984: 26).

This group further suggested that such concepts underlie daily decisions in the work and home places, space tune and production/ reproduction relations (IBG 1984:28), and that geographers are interested in these finds of factor.

Feminist discussions of the dominance and subordination relationships issues are also found in the Marxist. the Phenomenologist and Humanistic approaches. To the t\•min ,st analyst's, geography offets (a) materialism which is the idea that change can only 111.:cur with the analys1-; of social and technical mode of production of a society, (b) study of the stall' as an apparatus for the ruling class or a neutral institution within which social

description and self-revelation to find the reasons for gender incqualittl'S

The analyses of social and technical mode of production of a so1:icty is w1 y complex and beyond the scope of this thesis. (For example. the analysi-; by SL'l..'.'combl' [1980: 25-99] of domestic labour and the working class household is laye1ed with other modes, such as the mode of appropriation, mode of distribution and mode of consumption, to find some explanations of labour production and 1cprodul..'.'tion p10l..'.l"i'>l'!. of the proletariat). In the section following, Iintroduce some thoughts on this t:oncept (see also chapters 3 and 4).

The discus5ions among geographers on 'gender' and 'patriarchy' and 'gendt•1 and locality' while of interest to the analyses of capitalist (,Conomic structuie a1e not 1 ,lll"i to the traditional economy with similar intensities. While social relations in the t, aditional economy is an issue now, it is relevant in so far as its inherent ideology conf"lich with social relations introduced with the modern economy (sec Table I). 'fhe potential l'Xt',l., for such in-depth analyses in a cross-cultural situation in the modern economy of lite Canadian North. In this thesis interest is primarily with recognizing the contribution or women's work in the traditional economy and its yet to be accorded value in the ovc, all education of the Dene.

t issues. However, their interest is also to maintain their ties with their cultural communities and have a voice in the future of their indigenous societies.

Becoming involved with the contemporary society at large makes them more aware of the need torr.st.,.:! the continuation of the aboriginal identity in their homeland.

The issue of 'universality and diversity' within the Canadian feminist perspective provides the framework for recognition of diverse contemporary concerns of women belonging to ethnic minoritic and aboriginal societies. It is the author's observation that the Dene women (including many women in the working-class) do not have time to take a critical look at their situations. However, in the last fifteen years, \\-Omen have allied themselves with organizations who were struck to represent them or intervene on their behalf whenc.'ver government policies and laws have to be challenged. Consequently, aboriginal women through their organizations have been able to advance constructive c1itiques of their situatiom. Thc.'se have been heard at Canadian constitutional conferences and meetings such as the one mentioned above.

Recently, an article on 'Indian Feminism' appeared in an anthology (Shanley in Brant I988· 213-215). Shanley tries to ans\\oer the questions, "why do Indian women a\'oid the cksignatwn feminists? or do they? what is a feminist anyway?" (ibid:213). Her answe1s an• from a political perspective.

individual level, Indian women struggle to maintain the survival of social structu1es of the family according to their aboriginal traditions, (2) on the societal level, Indian woml'll join the st1uggle for sovereignty as a people to maintain legal and spiritual lin"-s with the land in order to survive.

Shanley's presentation on 'Indian feminism', although very general in scope, provides a framework for discussion. The distinctions between uboriginal and non aboriginal women are primarily historical and legal (Jamieson 1978) The fact" and awareness about the colonization of aboriginal people were not public 1--nowledge until the civil rights decade of the 1960s. This was a tune of renai sance for many including the aboriginal people, women, blacks and other people of color. The time was right fo1 the aboriginal women to raise their own issues. In the 1970s certain legal cases brought to the attention of Canadians generally, that Section 12 of the Indian Act (1955), the Fcdcial law imposed on all aboriginal people called Status Indians, discriminated agaimt Indian women.

In taking this action, Indian women revealed two realities First, they cxpo\l'd the extent to which Indian men were colonized to believe that the Act was the ideology of their own societies. Second, in defying the right of Indian women to take such legal actions, the Indian men demonstrated the paradox complicating the lives of lndianc; generally - they hang on to the

truggle is primarily internal *or* within the aboriginal family and soc\t!ty. Aboriginal women realize that this is a necessary first step before achieving a satisfactory solution to the level which means elf-government in Canada.

The other dimension of the struggle for aboriginal women in general and Dene women in particular is to face economic realities. Dene society is drastically different from the non-aboriginal Industrial society. The example commonly used is hierarchical structures of the Industrial society. They do not exist in Dene society. The Industrial economy has affected the Dene in two ways. First, it has relegated them to a lower labour class category of that economy; second, it has classed women as secondary or subordinate to men. 1 he application of the hierarchical system to analyze the role of Dene women in their society is useless because it assume!l that Dene women occupy a statu<; 1n the Traditional economy similar to that occupied by other women in the

lndu trial economy. This assumption 1s a distortion of their social and economic contribution in the traditional economy. Therefore, other factors have to be considered in the analyses of Dene women as compared to non-aboriginal Canadian women. And to do this, we have to look at Dene women in the mode of production process.

Furthl'rmore, recognition has to be given to the suggestion that in discussing the mode of production 1tis importar-.t to give particular attention to reproduction and family f10m the

ideological difference, primarily because in traditional society thl' womt'll ha\'l' 'ownership' and 'control' over the means of domestic products and property.

Finally, Dene women as nurturers have to consider political and social changt•s that have influenced their culture when they assess their present predicaments and tht•i, future. They have to look from where they arc locally, in relation to the wo1ld a1ound them. Their experiences in the role they have as the binding force in the 11aditional economy broadens their perspective.

11wolves knowing both the ways (cultural traits) they discovered for themselves and those they acquired from other culture groups.... The quality of understanding sought is that of analysi!> of origins and proccsses...[and]...the all-inclusive object of spatial differentiation of culture. (Sauer in Johnston:19131:66)

Saucr's words set the context for the presentation of the historical overview of the Dene in this section. In the field of geography, as indeed in the fields of ethnohistory and anthropology, historical reconstruction has enabled some understanding of culture ad functioning of societies. Culture, as the term is used here, refers not only to the !>imilarit1e!> and differences among people but also their comprehension of themselves and their homeland 1hrough their own language.

1 hi thesis cannot go into depth on historical reconstruction. There is a need however, to '-;)" '• some early historical ground to know who the Dene are and to comprehend a little of Dene ancestry. Ancestry, means the transfer of the Dene ways from one generation to the next, including knowledge of their groupings, relations, movements and localizations. For the overview of Dene historical movements and trading relations, reference is made largely to secondary information. While yet many questions tt•main about the Dene and their society in prehistoric and historic times, certain facts are now known. These include Dene movements, approximate populations, 'tribal wars,' starvation, infantkide, epidemics, diseases and trade relations **with** Europeans and other fo1 ms of contact. Summa, ies of some of these events will be provided.

1. The History of Movement and Contact

Events that are known to have occurred among the Subarctic people in Nm th America, have been summarized by Athapaskanists and other academics u ing diffrtl'llt time periods. Helm and Leacock (1971:350-372) regard the years up to 1820 as till' c,a of early contacts; the years following 1821 as a stable time when missions and the fur t, ade were established; and the years following 1940 as the government and indust1 ial stage. Usher names three major phases of development: "Discovery and Commercial Pcnct1atio11" occurred between the early 16th Century and 1939; "Administrative Coloniali\111 and the Welfare State", between 1940 and I950; the "Transition to an Industrial Mode Or Production", between 1950 and the present (Usher in McCann 1982:423-436). ·1he primary i::tterest of Helm and Leacock was to provide a hi'itory of the Dene and Or the events surroundfog their contacts with outsiders; while the interest Or Usher was to detail the events related to the Dene's economic development and relations. Ihave comidcrl'd both, and have chosen to organize this thesis according to the following t11ncdl",ignat1un', pre-1820, 1820-1945, 1945 to present.

2. Pre-1820: Early Contacts

Prehistorical information about the Dene in the Mackenzie River Valley area of the

Yerbury (1989:13), who also conducted research on Athapaskans, divides the pre-1820 years into three major eras: Prehistoric, which ended around 1680; Protohistoric, 1680-1769; and, Historic,1770-1890.

The last ten years of the **Protohistoric Era** are significant because ethnohistorical research indicates a major shift during that time in the movement of people, including the Upper Mackenzie Drainage Athapaskans. However, their prehistorical location continues to provoke controversy. Gillespie (in Helm et al:1981:161-158) insists the records of Alexander Mackenzie are too ambiguous to be interpreted with certainty. She asserts that "...others like Gallatin 1836, Morton 1973, Jenness 1932, Innis 1956 and Curtis 1907-30 to also cautiously interpret them." Using the evidence and conclusions of a study by Dyen and Abeile (1974: 251) Yerbury (1980: 27), citing "their linguistic matrices and maps of innovations, and the shallowness of the archaeological sequences," states that the "displacement of indigenous population by force" was instigated by the Cree expansion of the fur-trade competition. This Cree invasion of the Canadiaa Athapaskan in the Athabasca Lake region and the displacement of the latter to the Mackenzie River trnnsition boreal forest zone is estimated to have taken place betwern the years 1759 and 1764.

Yrrbury bases this assertion on nichaeological findings and on the,"remarks of Ferdinand Jacobs, Samuel Hearne (l971·354-

At this time the Cree and the Chipewyans were the middlemen in the t1:Hk with these northern and western Athapaskans, as the latter were not in a favo1abll' position to take advantage of the fur trade.

Concurrent to their displacement, and before they had ev •n liad contact with thl· Europeans, the Athapaskans were subject to other new European 11nposit10ns Thl'Sl' included diseases which reduced tlieir population by 9/10 (Morice: 1904) and t1adc gooth (Yerbury 1981: 43). In addition, this direct and indirect contact thrnst the Athapa!-ihan!-1 into 'tribal wars', infanticide (particularly female infanticide [Helm 1980, Ye1bu1y 198hl, and starvation (Fumoleau I973, Helm 1980, Yerbury 1986).

The **Historic Era** (1770-1890) consists of three periods related to the fu1 11ade the Earl/ fur-trade period, I 770-1800; the competitive period, 1800-1821; and ·11 ad ing Post Dependency Periods, 182.1-1890 (Helm and Leacock 1971, llelm 1981: 146-157).

The third period will be discussed in section 2.3.1., Periods of Tran'>ition (1820- 1!M5)

During the Early Fur Trade Period (1770-1800), there was indin:ct and dirci.:t trade with European traders. The trading stations that were established were temporary. as the aboriginal groups did not regularly visit them (Helm 1981: 148). Being hunte,., and gatherers, the Dene travelled widely. Their dispersal in groups made it difficult for the original recorders to estimate their total population. 1 heir custom!> were difficult to understand due to their

Resolution in 1786. In 1787, Pond was replaced by Alexander Mackenzie who in 1789 decided to explore the river that flowed out of Great Slave Lake. Along the way he encountered Indians and saw land rich in furbearing wildlife: the conditions were ripe for the establishment of new Northwest Company trading posts.

·1hus began the direct contact between the Slavey and the fur traders, and the increased 1ixposure of the Slavey to the diseases that would decimate their population..

In the **Competitive Period (1800-1820)** competition became fierce between the Northwest Company (which consisted of Canadian and American business peoples and which, in 1787, replaced the French traders operating fr:Jm Montreal) and the HBC (which was owned by the English). However, this competitive rivalry did not occur in the North (Asch 1976:8). The HBC, which had its main post at Fort Churchill, did not have permanent posts m the Mackenzie River area, and so, the Northwest Company took advantage of the situation by establishing several posts along this main river and :,,urrounding area. Fort Liard was established in 1804.

Although one might imagine that the competition between the two companies would have resulted in the Slavey Dene becoming involved in trapping, this was not the i.:asc. Thl' only trade goods of interest to the Slavey were metal implements, such a i.:ooking pots (Asch 1976:8). Their subsistence way of life was little changed in this

making Fort Simpson its mam administrative centre. Goods of all sorts were sent tlk'rt', including wool blankets, beads, powder horns, clothing, dried food (llall 1986: 12).

The Athapaskans were given names by the traders, and their terntorit•s were identified (Helm 1981: 161). Most of the Dene shunned trade goods such as guns. Ihr Slavey-speaking Dene, for example, still used rnd1genous tool., for hunting, fbhing, and snaring. they lived on bush resources such as fbh, small game, moose, cat ihou, and a limited range of furbearmg animals (Asch 1976. 8). They gathered a va1icty Or wild berries, roots, and herbs.

By 1850, however, the HBC had replaced their canoes with l:11ger Vl'S'icl<., and began to bring in goods in even greater quantities. While the Dene continul'd to movt• seasonally on the land they began to make two annual trading post visits - one in tht• fall and the other in the spring.

By the 1870s the Dene were begin drawn into the fur trade, induced by a 1angl' or available trade goods. The HBC introduced the percussion rifle, which they 11adcd only for fur (Asch I976: 9), and established a credit system.

Between 1875 to 1885, fur prices were high: bear pelts Jumped from $7 <)O to $11.48, and beaver pelts from $2 *56* to $4.09. Silver fox pelts were the mo'>t valued al $53.53 each (Hall 1976:15). With the introduction of dogs for transportation and '>tccl traps,

Valley during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897 and a number stayed on there.

Among government officials there was considerable debate over the issue of signing a treaty with the Indian concerning the land that extended north to the southern hores of Great Slave Lake The missionaries in the area were particularly insistent that the federal government offer assistance to the deprived and starving Indians during the last dccallc of 19th century (fumoleau 1975: 30-39). Although the federal government dtd offt>r assistance, allowing the HBC to distribute the goods they were providing for the Indians, they did not agree to a treaty with the northern Indians until the possibility of minc1al wealth was ensured (Ibid. 39). The events around the signing of T1eaties 8 in 18()9 and 11 ,n 1920, and the activities of the Morrow Commission of 1973, which investigated the facts a1ound these events, are extensively covered by Fumoleau (1975).

Doubt contmues to cloud the notion that the Dene signed away or extinguished their rights to their land through the signing of these 'friendship' treaties.

The Slavl'Y D('ne became dependent on Western trade goods in the first decade of till' 201h Century (Asch 1976). Once they were induced to join the activities that su, rounded the fut ttade, tht.>ir visits to the trading posts became frequent. Their subsistence economy began to include trapping for the purposes of trading for these good. In the t.'nsuing twenty yrars they took full advantage of favourable fur prices.

government was disinterested in the North because "the land within lht• 1egions inhahitt•d by [the Dene] were not required for settlement" (fumoleau 1975:36). In the l'nd, thl' government considered that by settling with the Indian people they wcrl' doing thl'm a favour. (SLlch negative attitudes towards Indians were prevalent at the t1nw.and Wl'll' expressed openly by government officials such D.C. Scott and Loring (c;cc White 1987:119)). Treaty 11 was sig,,ed by the government and Dene groups in summcn, of 1920, 1921, and 1922.

The Great Depression of the 1930s affected the Mackenzie Valley. h11 quantitil', and prices declined; trapping was restricted to Indians and tho e already holding l11.'.t•nn·, Many posts closed down, and all the competing companies failed except the Ill!(' Following the Depression, fur prices never recovered and the Dene in the Mad,l'lltrt• Valley experienced economic hardships that la5ted through to the l960s.

2.4. The Modern Perio•I: 1945 to the Pre'ient

In the years following the Second World War, the Dene gradually moved to permanent communities (most community infrastructures were ec;tabli'>hed by gove1 nment with government services and public works) while continuing to ea,onally hunt, t1'.h, trap and gather in their traditional areas. Many did not continue to travel thl' I ull l'Xtent of the areas they previously used.

period meant an increase in available seasonal wage employment for the Dene men. This new source of wealth was sufficient to induce many families to stay in the community year round, living on the earnings of their wage-earning spouses or sons rather than going into the bush. Others managed to balance these summer jobs with their winter and/or spring trapping seasons. J-Javing cash meant to these hunters and trappers that they could purchase skidoos and other equipment that could assist them in their trndit ional work. The fact that they pa,ticipated in the 'mixed economy' (Cox J987:256-264) as unskilled wage earners did not necessarily mean that they accepted the ideology of capitalism. It merely meant that such employment supplemented their traditional economy.

However, as oil and mineral exploration and seismic activity increased in the 1970s the Dene of the Mackenzie Valley and other northern aboriginal peoples became alarmed about the environmental damage to the land that provided them with survival resources. The political responses of the Dene at the time were based on their own ci.:onomic needs, and on the lack of unde1standing on the part of government and industry of the extent to which the Dene depended on the land for their livelihood. The Dene became politicized in the process of making this point. This was most evident during the t-.lackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry of 1976 (Berger I977). Usher's analysis encapsulates the

While the debate and the negotiations have been political, nnd haw occu11cd onlv intermittently since 1973 (when the federal government agreed to negotiate on till' ba\1 of land use and occupancy), the real concern of the Dene is to ensure tht. • continuation of **their way** of life on and from the land. Versions of this concern have been l'Xpressed in numerous ways over these years.

groups which were provided to them by the Algonkian Cree from the south. While they did have names for themselves, if the Athapaskans had any objections to the names assigned to them, these were not recorded.

Using Petitot's references, Cornelius Osgood in 1936 proposed the distribution along linguistic differentiations of the Northern Athapaskans (see **Fig. 4)** which is considered the best reference of their distribution at that time. Osgood identified the Slave Territory of slavey-speaking Athapaskans to include in the south, the western drainage of the Great Slave Lake and the Slave River, parts of the Lower Liard drainage area and along the Mackenzie River nort.h to Ft. Wrigley while Jeness has included the area north of that to include Ft. Norman, (Asch 198 I: 338, see **Fig. 5).** The following communities in existence now are populated by these groups: Ft. Nelson in British Columbia, Assumption, flay Lakes, Ft. Vermillion, Meander River and other small settlements in the northwestern area of Alberta, and in the Northwest Territories, Ft.

Liard, Trout Lake, Nahanni Dutte, Providence, Kakisa Lake, Hay River, Jean Marie River, Ft. Simpson, Wrigley, Ft. Norman.

Recent mformation from the Dene themselves verify that they traveled the full extent of the a,ca shown on Fig. 3 (Dene Land Use Study 1976, unpublished). Two sources generally concur with each other on the Slavey territory: Helm et al (1981) and the Dene

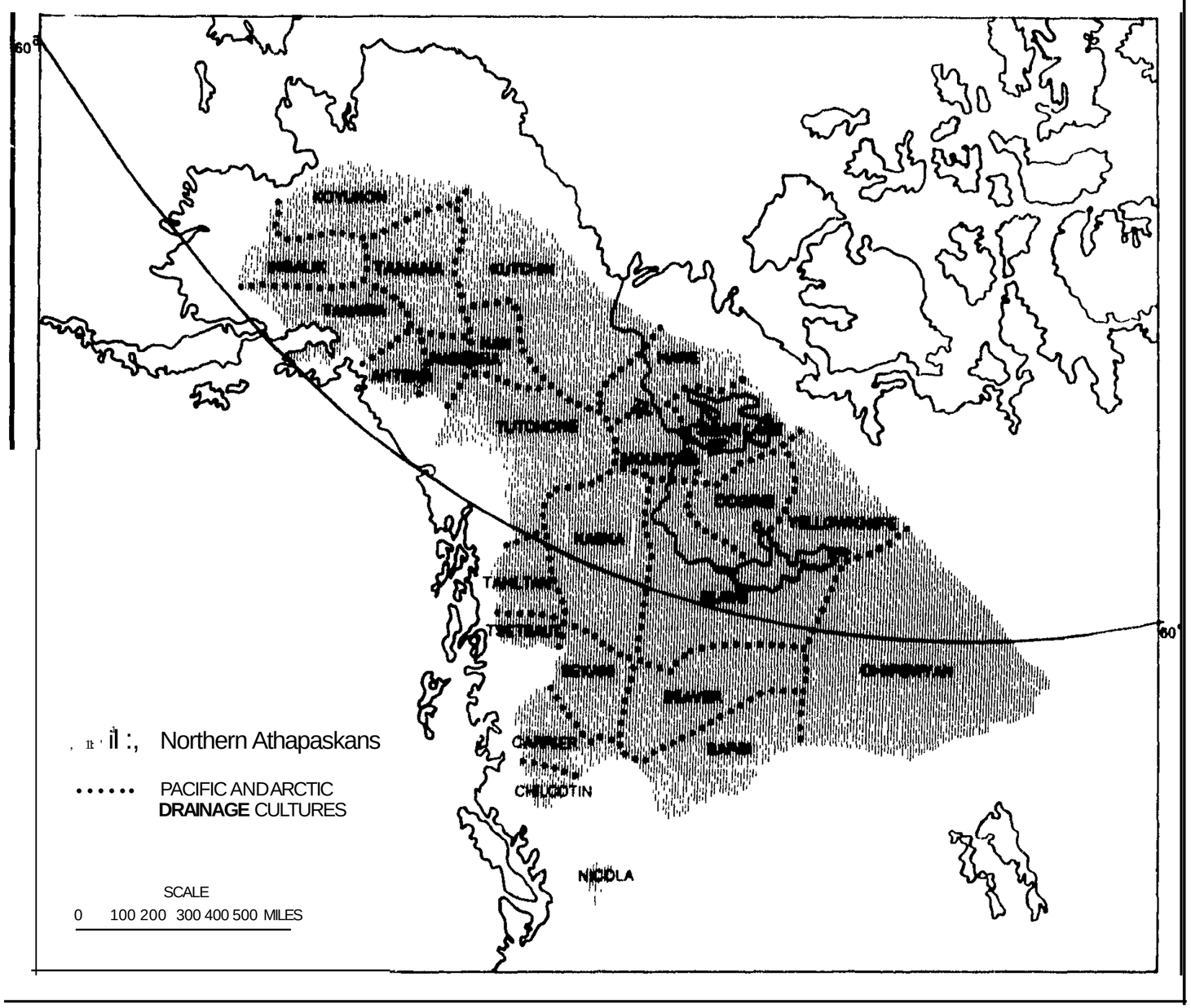


Figure 4

Distribution of Northern Athapaskans
Adapted from Osgood 1936: 4.

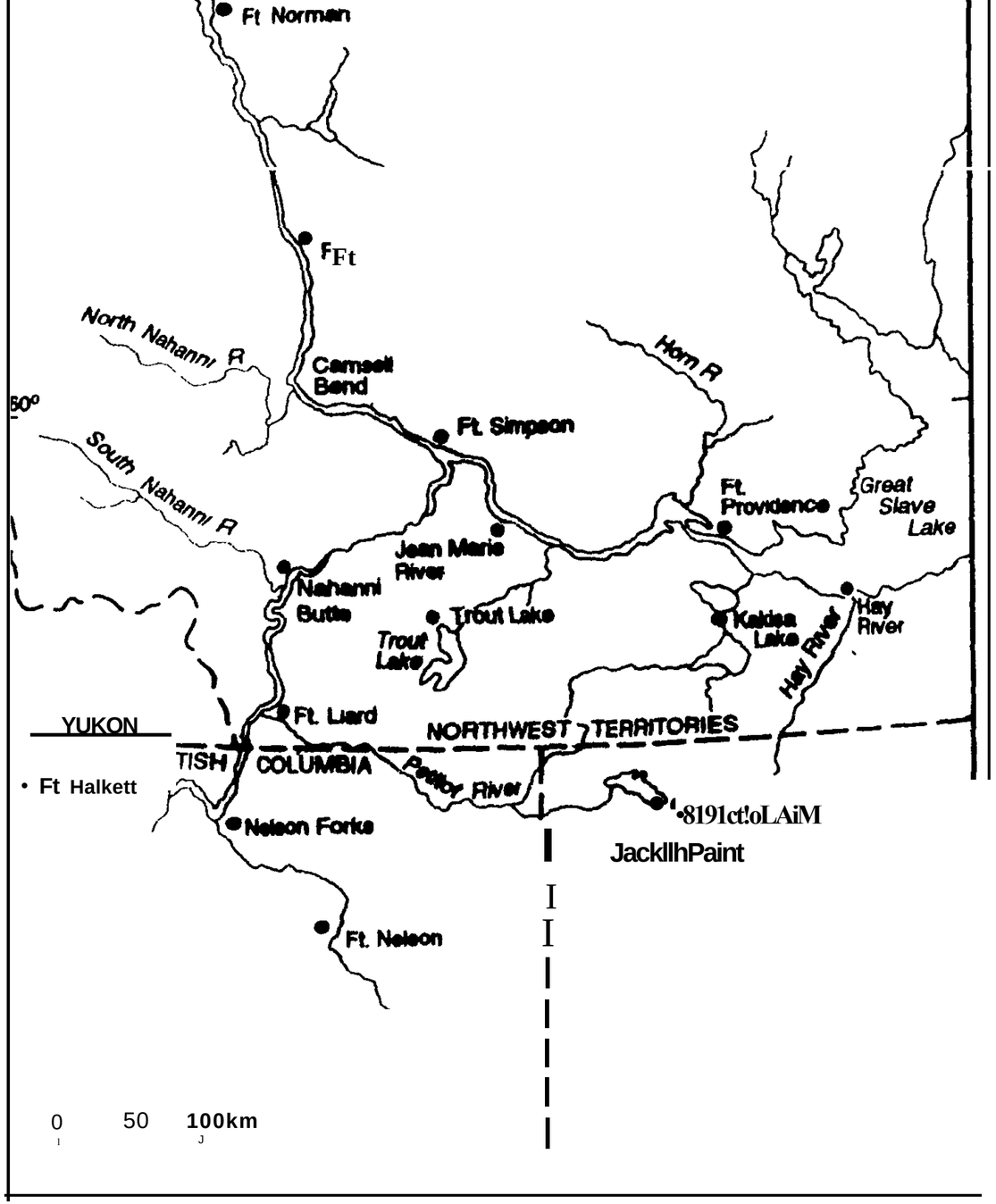

Ft Norman
Ft
North Nahanni R
Camsell Bend
Horn R
60°
Ft. Simpson
South Nahanni R
Ft. Providence
Great Slave Lake
Jean Marie River
Nahanni Butte
Trout Lake
Trout Lake
Kakisa Lake
Hay River
Hay River
YUKON
Ft. Liard
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES
TISH
COLUMBIA
Petitot River
• Ft Halkett
Nelson Forks
•8191ct!oLAiM
JackIlhPaint
Ft. Nelson
0
50
100km

Figure 5.

within two major physiographic regions in no11hwestern Canad:l' till' Co1dillt•1a to the west and the Mackenzie Lowlands to the east. The Selwyn Mountains in the Cordillera divides the Yukon Territory from the Northwest Territories.

The Lower Liard region comprises the area where tributaries flowing south of thl' divide eventually join the Liard River. This major tributary has it origin in the Pl'lly Mountains, Yukon Teiritory. From its source it winds it-; way in a southwa1dly diH•ction into northern British Columbia then in a northeasterly direction into the N.\\'.T. wht•1l' it meets the Mackenzie River at Ft. Simpson. The Li:.ud River Ba in comp, i,l", thl' southwest extremity of the Mackenzie River Drainage Basin. ·**1**he major t1ibutar il", of the Liard River Basin include the Beaver, Whitefish, LaBiche, Kotanalcc, Pctitot and Mu'>kl•g **(Fig. 3).** Other numerous rivers and tributaries flow from the hills and mountarnou, terrain in the western area of the Liard Basin, cutting through the floodplain'> and lowlands to the east. The water level of these river<; fluctuate with ca'>on and precipitation. In the early spring with the ice break-up the Lian! River will

'>Wl'll up

from the silt-laden mountain runoff carrying in its flow, huge blocks of river tCl' anti driftwood that will flow northward to assist ice break-up in the Mackcnlie River at 1-1 Simpson mid- to late May. Throughout the !ipring and summer the water level will continue to fluctuate until mid-August to late Augu!it when the volume of 11wunta111 stream

experience within this larger region. The Bore::il Forest Region of Canada is the area '>outh of and congruent with the treeline (a transition subzone called tundra forest) that

,;trctches from Ala'>ka to Newfoundland in North America. In some major physical geography researches on Canada, the term sub-arctic is used synonymously with the Boreal Forest Region. Sub-arctic zone is the latitudinal zone adjacent to the polar zone. K Ol'J)pf:'n used it to group climatic distinctions in his cold zone (D) where there are some month when the air temperature is above I0°C and the precipitation and evaporation are low. The common understanding is that in the Boreal Forest Region, the climate is sub

arctic and the vegetation is borcal. The terms are conceptually and geographically linked and will therefore be used interchangeably.

In the Northwest Territories, most of the weather recording stations are located in the Macl--enzic Lowlands or the Interior Plains and not the Cordillera in the Lower Liard Rl•g1on of the N.W.T.-Yul--on Territory border, consequently no continuous and general weather data exists for the Co1dillera portion of the study area. The weather data at Ft. Nt•lson, and Ft. Lia, d, weather stations p1ovide a general range of easonal tempeiature for tht• Lowland portion of the study area. The July mean high is 22. 7°C and the low is

10.8 *C* while till' January mean high is -20.2°C and the low is -29.3°C. The annual (Ht•cipitation is gt'ncrally around 44.9 cm (13.3 cm rainfall and 193.8 cm snowfall)

3.1.2. Land Uses and Practices

In the protohistoric times (1680-1769) the Lower Liard area was populated by unspecified groups of aboriginal people. In the early years of the historic era (1770-1800) traders recorded having met Slavey as well as Beaver Indians in the Lower Liard area, to Fort Simpson (Innis 1956: 203).

In 1804 the Northwest Company established a trading post at Fort Liard. The earliest HBC post in this community was in 1805. Except for a brief period of about seven years, the HBC maintaine .. trading post in Ft. Liard since that time, (Usher 1971:66). "Two traders writing in 1807 mention the possibility that the Indians of Ft. Liard and Fort Simpson regions (later designated the Slavey) were once Deaver Indians." (Helm 1981:167) Helm disagrees. She argues that the Deavi>r and Slavey are linguistically distinct. However if these peoples were the sa1ne then separated, this separation probably occurred in the late 1700s, " when the Cree were making their farthest northern and western excursions with firearms in hand" (Ibid).

Pre-1920 population figures for the Dene were difficult tu determine. Early recorders did not understand the seasonal movements of the Dene. In the study area, interaction with neighboring groups like the Kaska, Beaver, and Sekani to the south, and the Mountain to the

meat and hundreds of pounds of fish from their fish lakes. In exchange they received items such as blankets, axes, metal pots and implements.

1listorically, Slavey-speaking Athapaskans consisted of families and family sub groups who distinguished each other by the type of clothing each wore, lhe language and dialect each spoke and the kind of terrain each inhabited. When describing themselves or other groups the Slavey used as the root term '-ttine' (meaning, from there) with the descriptive references on ways, clothing and place. People along the Liard River (in the N.W.T.) were called 'Ettcheri-die-Gottinne' people of the swift current (Helm 1981: 348) and people of Fort Liard were called •Etcha Ottinne' or 'sheltered people', (Ibid). The Slavey in this area also describe themselves as "Dene" (person or people) to distinguish themselves from outsiders such as Whites and Cree as well as adopt the label Slavey or Slavey-speaking for the purposes of distinction with other Athapaskans (Asch in Helm 1981: 338). Today, Slavey-speaking Dene will distinguish themselves by specifying the community from where they and their parents live. The community of Ft. Liard is now called 'cchareottine koh', (Outcrop 1984: 134) but most people from Liard call their community 'Mch chon lah koh' which in Dene means 'community near the Petitot River' that flows past Fort Liard and into the Liard River.

The move to permanent dwellings in Ft. Liard was gradual. Until the early 1950s, most

Fort Liard was recorded by the R.C. Mission (see fig. 6) which apiwa1s to be consistent through to the subsequent recorded movements of pcopll• in this community in 1976 (part of the Dene Land Use Study 1974-76 which 1eflect-; thl' N.W.1. Dene land use dating back to the turn of this century).

Like the other Dene in the Stavey Territory the Dene of the Lowl'r Lia1d, travelled widely. The composite of use by a third sample each. of three communitie-; in the **N.W.T.** Lower Linrd - Fort Liard, Nahanni Butte and Trout La!.,.c-include six map sections (scale 1:250,000): Maxhamish, Liard, La Biche, Sibbeston. Trout Lal.,.e and Toad River. The following areas have been documented as used by the Fort Liar d Dl'lll' up to 1976: the southeastern Yukon Territory; the area within 100 km of the northeastL't n a1ea of B.C. (including west of Caribou Hills, north of Fort Ncl5on and cast of Dca\e l.akl'); the areas west as far as Trout Lake, N.W.T.; west and east of the Lian! River in the N.W.T. as far as Nahanni Butte and Netla (see fig. 3).

The hunters and trappers (predominantly male) told us in the Slavcy language, about their lives' history Most of them learned to hunt and trap in their youth from parents, uncles, and grandparents. Some travelled west far into the mountamouc, 1c1!ion'> and beyond, some even west as far as Alaska. Others had gone far south as far a>Lowl'r Post, B.C. - vast distances to travel on foot. Their accounts were cxten•,ivc and beyond the scope of

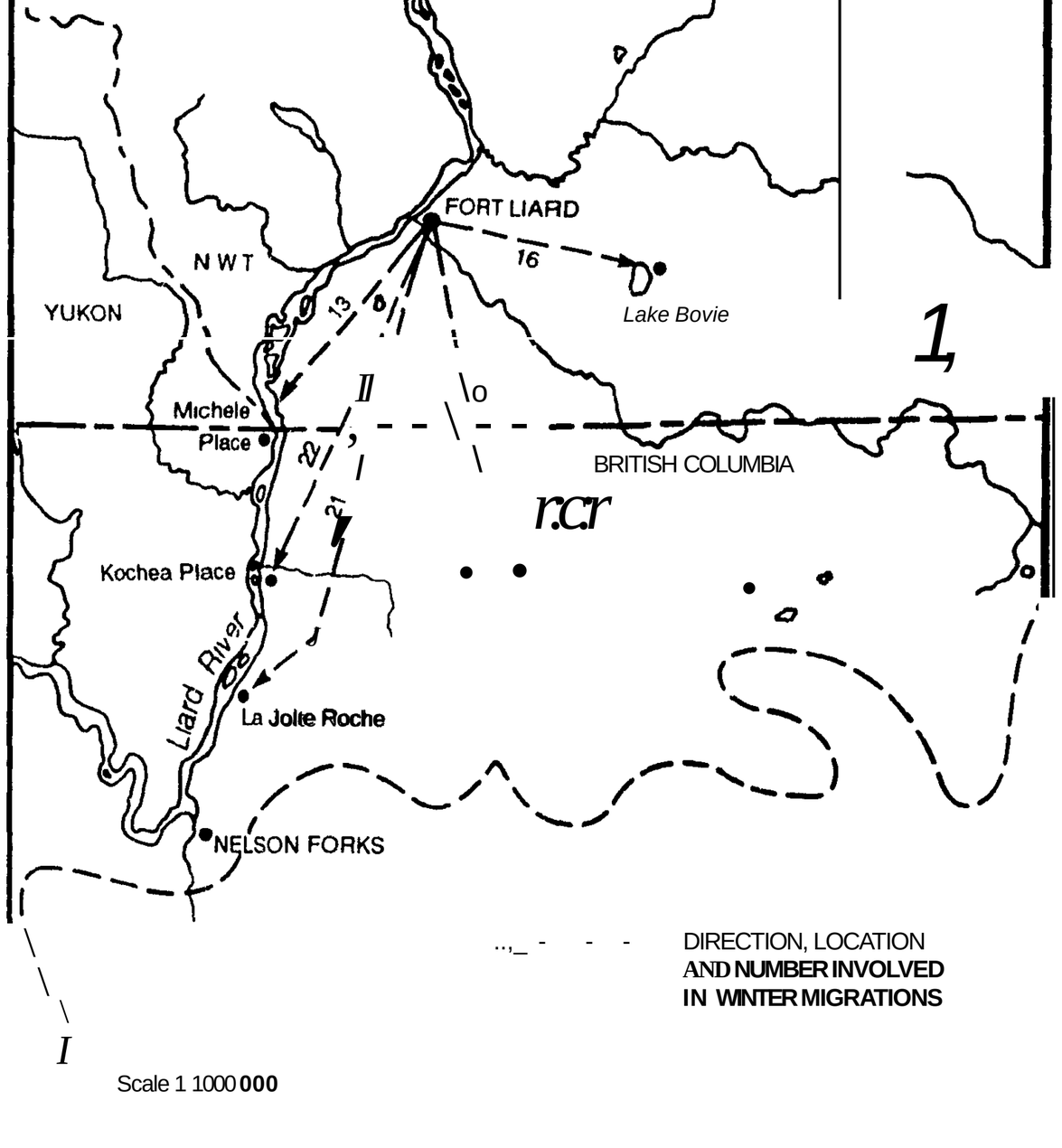

FORT LIARD
NWT
YUKON
16
Lake Bovie
13
Michele Place
BRITISH COLUMBIA
21
Kochea Place
Liard River
La Jolte Roche
NELSON FORKS
DIRECTION, LOCATION
AND NUMBER INVOLVED
IN WINTER MIGRATIONS
Scale 1 1000 000

Figure 6

The purpose here is to focus on how the Dene maintain their traditional economy. It should be noted here that while the Dene communities politically govern themselves through elected village or community councils and band councils, they practice their traditional customs of organization within the family and in the bush environment. Each family and sub-groups of families have seasonal hunting, trapping and fishing areas which are recognized by the community.

The traditional economy includes land and water use for subsistence and fur production. Land and water use for subsistence purposes are identified by major place names, camps both permanent and temporary, harvest kill sites and areas, fish lakes or fish camps and trapping areas or traplines. Subsistence activities include hunting, fishing and gathering. Trapping is the primary activity in fur production and exchange.

Several studies of the traditional economy have broken it down into its basic components. Usher (in Mccann 1982:422) has sugge!:.ted that the traditional economy comprises two major components, the Subsistence (or domestic) and the Commodity (or exchange) units. Irimoto (1981: 56) divides the Subsistence sector into the domestic (family) unit and the hunting (task group) unit. Basso (1972), Christian and Gardner (1975), Rushforth (1984,1986) and Brody (1987) offer several important insights, some which will be discussed briefly in subsection 2.5 on Cultural and Environmental

domestic unit hunting unit

production consumption
-hunting -trapping
-food processing -fur -food
-clothing -food
-manufacturing
-clothing, utensils, etc.

Source: adapted from Irimoto (1981) and Usher (1982).

Women arf! primarily involved in the domestic unit of the subsistence sector while the activities vi nwn are in the hunting unit. However, it is obvious that their activities are interdependent. Also, some measure of cooperation and sharing is required to harvest, retrieve, prepare and consume the wild food. Each of these steps are not generally an individual activity. Irimoto describes the subsistence sector of **the** Chipewyan as cooperation of activities.

The function of the domestic unit is subsistence, production and consumption of food through the performance of daily activities in a common rhythm. (1981: **58).** The hunting unit, which is bilaterally linked domestic unit(s}, is another level of cooperative unit; that is, cooperation of activities and transmission of skills and knowledge for subsistence are observed among its members, (Ibid: 56).

In the following, Iwill describe activities around domestic units first from my personal experiences having lived in bush camps and from my field observations in the

drying is also bilateral. some sPem to be mort' adl'PI at tht'\l' Bllth mt.•n and women, often accompanied by their children, snare and hunt for !>mall ganw t"hildn•n learned to snare and hunt by observing their parents Dy the time child1 t.•n 1ea1..·htht.• agl.'.., of four to seven, they are able to make fire, fetch wood, and water and set \llall"- By tht.• time young men are 14 years of age they are able to go on big game hunh with tht.•11 father or their male relatives and if they arl' fo1 tunate thl'y gl't thl'ir I11..,1 nHH>>t \\ hilt big game hunting is not cntirl'ly clo ed *to* women, and women a, ' hncm ' *tu* In, *c* harvested big game, this task is genC'rally left to the men Ihl' womI''II a1 t.' 111\III\ t.·d 111thl' skinning of the harvested large game and in dividing the meat to lw ha, l'd \ı 1th the11 own as well as with other families.

Two field observations a1e described below, one in late '>IIIIIIIII'I and tht· otl1t·1 111 **mid-winter.**

3.2.1. Late Summer Field Trip

Late summer in the Lower Lian! area 1sAugu t. In 1986, on my \\;!}' *t u* I*ut* Liard, I stopped to vi5it Nahanni Uuttc. T i u i!, a small commu111ty of ai ound 81 pl',iplt•, consisting of four families. The M:ucellai5-V1tal family 111vited my D:1dand Ito i;cJ \\ 1th them to one of their bu h camps for one week It wa<, a good t1111e to '>Urve'.) thl' :trl',1 11,1 wildlife and 'go for beme5' Altogether, there were three nuclear familie'> - Jc,na'> and Elsie

and wood, the adopted children stayed with their mother to packed belongings, collect prucc bough for the tent flooring (I Joined them after Iset up my tent), the daughters and the one daughter's children set about separating toys from and arranging the beddings and clothing first then began preparrng food. Once the fire was underway, the cookmg began, then the eating followed by conversation and stories. The men ate f11,t, the children and the womL'n After all the dishes were cleaned and pached away, till' motht•r and fathe1 began talhing ovc1 plans for the next few days.

During thL'lll'\t frw day . Lbic (the mother) was always the main refe1cnce. St•vt•ral **trail** emanated from thi little camp The mother determined on which trails the -.nare (for 1abbit) wen• to be et When we went for berries, the mother steered us toward tlw diH•ction for blue he1rrt• - a huge mush.cg arc·a (musket areas are usually dry enough for l"a,y walh111g 111 Augmt) that had been burned by a forest fire several years previous :ind wa, nm\ abundant \\'1th lwrr1L• The men spent most of the time among themselves, geltrng wood, cuttrng overgrown grass with a scythe or fishing and hunting along the 11\l'I

One "hole day \\:ı'- dt'\Oted to tanning a hide that Elsie (the mother) had prepa1ed thL' 1H•1•ı-. lwfo1e at hL'tlwnw 111Nahann1 Bulle and was waiting for the perfect tanning d.t\ - dr . - „umh111e and light li1L'L'Ll' Weather 111early August days are often like this.

the fire was lit, sewed, told stories to he1 children. dranl,. tea and talked \\ 1th na·.

She did not leave the hide unattended all day a king ht.•r g1andchild1l'll and ad11pted daughters to relieve her for short periods of tune. This was to mak ull.' *till'* Wllod did not flare because that would singe the hide. Then around 5.00 pm she dt.'Cllit-ll till' l11dl•was ready. After checking the depth of the tan to be certain, she rt.•movl.'d it, undid thl' stitches, shook the hide and hung it up to air for about one hour. She tlwn \l't about getting **th** size of my Dad's *fret* She took the measurements, t·ut out the p1t'l't'\ and began sewing and by 7:30 pm, he handed my Dad his new pair **Of** f1111\hed IIIIIII'l'a•,im (A photo document I prepared of this proce s was exhibited at the McCi1II Opl'n Ilt1u\t' 111 October **1988** and with Elsie's approval, has been donated to the Pri1H:e of Wal1·, Mll\l'llll in Yellowknife, N.W.T.)

These observations were made. rhrce p1cvailing event<; were occur 1111gol tl'n simultaneously. First, the adult were con tantly doing thing and talh111 : with tlit·11 children. Often this is the way Dene children learn about the Dene view of their surroundings and how to do things the Dene way 1 hi'i procc!'.'i i') rl'Pl'akd and can gl't a•, complicated as the individual is able and willing to allow. Secondly, the motht•r wa thl' main protagonist. Her decisions prevailed for several events, uch a') 111 the tanning process and where to go for berries and the boundaries of the play an·a for thl' l111ldrl'n Her decisions were equally

J.2.2. Field Trip lo Winier Camp

·r h1<;trip took place in Dec mbcr 1987. My transportation to this camp was in a CL'
\na 185 owned and operated by the Liard Dene Band. Tlus winter camp is one of
three belonging to llarry Fanta'>que (H.F.) in the Liard Plateau area of the southeastern Yul,.on
Territory. This one is located on the bank of Larsen Creek. Neighboring this camp are two
other within 50 "m range to the north Camps belonging to other people
arc to the Wl' t of **H** F • camp. One is a Dene, Francis Nande (F.N.) from Fort Liard and
the other arc a couplt• of white trapper . All traplmes are registered in the Yukon I
e1ri101y and <p11.F. and F N. have registered lines here.

Two cabin and one storage shed and a cache are built here. At the time of this f11•ld Ir
ip,II F., one ingle teenage daughter and one married daughter with her spouse
and three child1l'll were II\ing there for the winter. He shared his two-room cabin with h1,
ll'l'nage daughtc1 - tlll'y e:11.:hhad the11 own space identified. I was invited *to* share
till' daughter's W:11.'.l'

Durmg the srx day-, spent here, the weather was mild, hovering around -IO C.
I hl' snow was thick, pa "ed hard in some places. The tall black spruces we .! covered
\\ 1th IIII\\ t\lthough the C11'1'" was frozl'n, two holes were darly chiseled open for water and
, ·l' frsh111g, l'i1t• woud \\ a... abundant. R::ibbits and the occasional fish seem to be the

They hunted and fished along the way.

The first time he shot a moose was when he was a young boy. Ilehad Sl'l'II tlw moose two days before. It was the time he ltved with l11sgrandfathl't a..:io!:.s frnm hi.., cabin in Larsen Creek. When be saw the moose he told his unclt.•s about 1t l'lll'y didn't believe him, so he showed them where the moose stood, then they belit.•vl'd h11n.·1wo days later he shot his first moose. lie said he later use to come this way with anotlw1 Dene trapper. When he married he came here with his family and has ui,ed lhe area l'\'t't since. **He** has a registered trapline now: so do two other Lia1d Dene mt.•n. Ill' wa.., go1111:toinclude the headwaters of the Whitefish River because he u!:icd it but gaVL'1tup tlwn

H.F. has been to many places on this !:iide of the mountain range Ile ha'>bl'I'II to Francis Lake and Watson Lake. He has shot many big game over hi life t11ne-gt 111l1L'>, black bears, mule deer, sheep, moose, woodland caribou and has caught many fur lll'all'I', He said the HBC used to buy rabbit from him, $1 for the meal and $1 for the lwlt-. IhLYalso bought dried meat. As for the weather, he said, the weather all over hl'rl' ,., variable. Often it is not windy here, Just a slight cold wind from the '>Outh It had snowed three times since October The 'mow on the trees will likely '>lay until March, when it gets windy. The weathe1 here i5often different from L1artl wcathe, ·1hi•, wintl'r there is a fair population of rabbit but hardly any fi5h. On hi!:i traplinc, a two-day 111p because of the short

turned on the horl-wavc radio for weather and news from Ft. Nelson, B.C.. As

'>oon as there is a bit of daylight, around 8 am, every other day, H.F. starts off to visit lw, narc

and trap and rctu1 ns around 2 pm with squirrels and rabbit. Meanwhile, there

arc many chore-; that keeps u\ bu'>y during those short six hours - wood to cut, chop and pile,

mcab 10 prepare and d1'ihes and pans to clean, cabin to tidy up, fire to keep going,

ice to chi'>l'I to open the water hole While I was there, the young women had moose hide'> to cll·an

but did not plan to do this until spring. The younger daughter n1 a int ained

the tool'> uch a'> the chain '>aw. thl' axes from go111g dull, and the skidoo. During the

afternoon, wc would go to the other daughter's cabin to listen to the trappc1s news over

tlw mobile 1ad10 and play with thc children.

My olN•r vat ion ate till' following Very little verbal communication takes place

bl•twt'l'll father and daughte1 n.cept 111 the early morning hours and sometimes in the late

en•ning. As soon a **11.r.** utter a few words of my possible needs or suggests a direction, lw,

daughter Ulll'r!. them to llll' in [nglish as though to confirm that I understand. Their low-kl'Y

commun1cat1on is plea!,1ng, lihl' when one goes hun tin 6. The strategy is uttered 111f\ words or

k!.!>,aneed, a str,1tegy, action e g. get wood, a meal, whether to check

,nail', fish hook . Not h:I\ing a son around docs not seem to hamper H.F. To visit his l\\o-day

trapl,m• he employed hi!, son-in-law. Uefore I arrived, his daughter went with

made. Living in the bush demands a lot of the survivor. It ts cold - if you can't adapt you will not survive. Adaptation involves a 1-.ind of willingness and po itiH• **attitude.** Cold weather requires getting used to - whether wori..ing or relieving 01wsclf - so that bodily requirements are met and bodily functions regulated. To intt'lll·ctually survive, a great deal of improvisations are requi1cd One cannot wish fo1 till' anwnitit•i:; of modern living . Eventually, a great deal of weeding of needs begin to take place and only the important tools and requirements are singled out. It appeared that tlw weeding had taken place and family was prepared to live there throughout the wmter into p1111g.

3.3. Cultural and E1niron1111.-11tal Knowledge

Like most of the Dene communities in the Northwest Tcrritor ie'>the '>mall community of Ft Liard is surrou11dcd by borcal forest. It is virtually impo'>'>ibll' not to appreciate the importance of the forest environment, the "Bush". For the Dt•ne, liv111g 111the bush means all actions arc guided by Dene *cw,toms.* The ability to \pc:1k and understand the Dene language(s) facilitates comprehension of the meaning of \:ll'>tom<,

For example, the proper Dene pcr!>pective on kin relations or on hunting Both cx:11npll", are explained with references from Christian and Gardner (1975) and my di!>cu'>'>IOll'> with elders, personal experiences and f1cldnotes.

way the sire'>\ 1 on having the proper perspective. One of !he primary Dene customs 1s that proper pcr!,pectivc and respect be accorded to other Dene, the environment and wildlife This custom of having the proper perspective enables one to undcr5tand otlwr Dene cu!>to,m So, perform111g tasks like hunting, fishing, carving a harvc!,tcd moo'>c, di>1J0!:>111gof the v1<,ccra, sharing the meat and so on, requires the Dene pt'r'>pectivc. ·1hemoo'ie give up ibelf so that Dene can continue to live and therefore gratitude must be cxprc '>cd by diligently carrying *out* customary practices of disposing of the vi'icera in a respectful way bach to the earth and sharing the meat with others. This I\ an example of !,omc a'>pech of a Dene hunting custom. And because the Dene way of lifr revolved around hunting, fi'>h1ng and gathering customs evolved, therefrom.

Intellectually under!,tanding the custom is often easier than finding the opportul'ity to put it into p1act1ce. for example success in large game hunts is increased by lsnowmg not only a , ange of environ mental factors, but also '1aving the openness to the related custom of drl'am111g Dene elders mention that to dream about a moose is a \lgn and gu1dl' to that food !>Dill i:1' (Bwdy 1981, 1987). Following that dream means tl'ta111111g the detail impn1 tant 111the drl'am to distinguish the symbolic from the reality. Ihl' rl'ality is that there arL' real en\'ironmental elements to face, such as the weather, the months (by thl' i:yde of thL moon) and !>easons. Therefore, 'people just don't go an\'where' (thL' latL'

ine:\perienced hunter would prefer to be placed near a lahl' or ıive1" (William Bethale, personal communication, Fort Liard, 1986)

The proper Dene perspective is a positive one because it mahcs the 'bush' thl' place to live. It is a good place to find food, find one's true capabilities, cwc11en L' places and areas that our ancestors walhed and lived on and withd1aw 1'10111till' no1'>t' of the community, in short, it is "home".

Two major conside1at1ons in deciding where and when to go arc environml'nt and weather. Knowing the environment means, knowing the terrain and tlistarn:t• of ttaVl'I either by foot or dogteam or skidoo. The direction depends on the 1--nowledgL' of tt•11ain, vegetation and animals. Being able to predict the weather is definitely an a t•t. 1he elements are observed fastidiously - wind and precipitation. Mo t expL•11t•nced hunter/,.rappers are able to predict what the weather would be like for thret• day:, ju'>t by looking at the cloud formation. They have observed the rcoccurrence uf five yl'ar Lycft'> For example, in October they can predict what the winter will be like, hy ob\er vine !he size and behavior of the rabbit (if skinny and fur stays dark longer an fall, it will lw a mild winter; if fat, it will be a cold winter) and the beaver and how it colleel'> it Iood (ii it hauls in its food after the ice formation then it will be a cold winter) 'I Ill', kind ()f folk knowledge cannot be proven with certainty; one can only ol)',crvc the Iinal outcomt·, but many

the signs - willow, leaves eaten, tracks - fresh in mud, flie!> m track'> i>Ihour old.

In conveying llm info, ma1ion to me, the wives of the hunters were always 1iresent. The5e women also know the proper Dene perspective because they also grew up practicing and par 1ic1pa1ing 111 the p1cparing for the hunt, setting up camp and then in the !>haring of the harvl' l. In the !>ection followrng **1**will concentrate on the workplaces of Dene women that incorpor aH!>their knowledge of the traditional economy and adJu!.lmenls 111 lhe modern rconomy.

widely in family groups, periodically visiting the trading posts. Sincl' tlll'n tlwi1 movements gradually decreased in scope and their annual visits became St'a!>onal vbits to the certain trading posts. Dy the 1940s most Dene families had settled in tlll'ir homt•s 111 the present established communities throughout the year. From the scttlrnll'nt , they traveled seasonally and for most of the year, to hunt fish, gather ::mdtrap, 111 arl':ts that became known as family territories. These changes have affected the livt'" of Dem• women.

First. to the spatial perspective of traditional living in open terr rtm y wa, added, a focus on settlement or community living in close proximity with many othL·r famll1t'\ Second, the means of travel - from foot and dogteam to shidoo, to cha1tc1l'd ailpla1lL•- have drastically reduced travel time. The reduction in travel time coupled with the caw in travel meant that transportrng family possessions and children drd not rc'>t only on the women. Third, their possessions which they transported on the exten<,rve travrl were scant compared to what they accumulated since they settled. Ihey could 1101 11avel extensively with the kinds of possessions they took with them on their <.ea<.onal 11•P', to their fish and bush camps, pos e sions uch as stoves, metal cookware, etc ·1hc11 travl'I', were reduced to one or two bu h camp in a year. From there they carried on tlH·1r traditional pursuits.

In this section Iwill incorporate the foregoing mto the follow1ng de<.crrp!Hlll', 1>f the work of Dene women in three dbtinct workplace : (a) the 'bu<..h', (bJ the "hriu•.ehrJld",

4.2. The 'Bush'

One of the first published documents on the lives of slavey-speaking elders was compiled by Margaret Thom of Fort Providence, N.W.T. and Ethel Townsend, a Dene teacher at the time (now a Member of Parliament for the Western Arctic in the House of Commons), in this community (I 987). In this document elders spoke of their lives, work and "bush" workplace which are applicable to Dene women in Fort Liard.

I began to sew with quills even when I was quite small. When my mother was busy I was the one who cooked, visited the nets and made dryfish. In winter time J repaired the nets and hauled wood. By the time I was thirteen years old I really was a big help to my father. I worked harder than a boy. (Elder born 1927, in Thom & Townsend: 1987:9)

I used to make quill armbands for my husband, hats made of duck wings and jackets of beaded moosehide. We lived in moosehide tents with a fire and a grill over it in the middle. We used a twirling sling for killing chickens...we only had one rifle. I used to love to travel all the way to Trout Lake. You can see just miles and miles of lake from. (Can you imagine anyone walking that far nowadays?) (Elder b0rn 1897 by Burnt Island near the mouth of Great Slave Lake. p.39 in Ibid)

When my husbancl was on the trapline, I used to worry all the :me about my children going hungry. D L. and I worked constantly to make sure L,IUt would never happen. I used to set nets and shoot ducks. (Elder born 1911, p. 91, in Ibid)

Life is espedally hard for the women. When the man is away the woman has to feed the children. No matter how cold it was I had to check the snares. Before I left the children, I had to tie a leather thong around the waist of one and tie the end to something stable, put another in the swing cradle, and leave the eldest to watch them all. That's how we used to live. No one taught me to work. I watched others and then I'd try. If I didn't sew something properly I'd

some wire to prepare rabbit snares; they were asked to carry wood; they WLt ʟ' taught to make a camp fire. Around the age of six years, they would begin to twcompany tlwi1 parents on small game hunting. They learned to be quiet. Most by tlw age Or ten YLa1s were familiar with land, rivers and wildlife. They began lea, ning associat1011s with plal.'.L' names, who generally travels in an area, what the land is like and what !-.ind Or wildltfl' can be found there, and stories were told about those places.

In addition to performing small tasks, children began to learn social cu 101m. Custom included learning how to perceive the situation or the matter at hand, how tu respond and ask questions. By learning their custom they began to learn scve1 al categories of knowledge. Children were told who was a member of the extendl'd lamtly, an aunt, an uncle, cousins and so forth (Asch 1988, Helm 1960, Rushforth 198'1, Sue 1965) and how to address some of them in a particular fashion. For exampll•, extended family members would explain who was to be called 'eh mo' (aunt), 'ch tah' (uncle) 01'c•h tSVJ or eh tsieh' (grandmother or grandfather) and so on. The hi tory of the family background was included in conversation with emphasis on the importance Clfcu,tom and language. Children were also told about different aspects of the phy ical and bwlog1cal environment - how to recognize animal tracks, types of terrain, uc,eful herb, wt•le identified (Blondin 1990) different types of wood, how to recognize c,ea,onal change-; and the advantages

the,r *pm1twn* rn the f:imily The perception of history was of wide open space,

indcpcndencl', and the ever prc!>cnce of the pir1ts of relatives long ago gone

4.2.1. Lifccyclc of a Woman

/\<, a young girl, the Dene \\Oman was generally treated equally, although her

characte1 would dctL·1m111e\\ hethc1 !,he needed more or less attention. She played and

made up ganll".> with hL•l 1>1others She al!,Operformed small tasks and watched her pa1t•nh

an extended family a tlll'y went about their daily chores.

-, hen the lll0'it important 11am,ition begins 111 the life of an Athapaskan woman wlll'n she ha

hL•rfirst ml'll'>C (between the ages of 9 and 14 years). Some ehnohistorians

haH' 5:wl that till' in1t1ation of the t\thapasi..nn girl into womanhood included being

...ccludcd from till' mall• nwmhcr s Of the rxtended family for up to a year (Cruihsh:ink

1975; llonigmann 19,H,) and being required to wear certain types of clothing in a certain

way and eating only ce11a111 kinds of food. Others have also said that such initiations ha\l.'

dit•d away by the lwg111111ngof the 20th century in many places (Osgood I936). The

fir t hand 111fo1mat1011 Iha,t' b that this practice was still going on in the 1950s among

\llllll' SlaH'Y families w1w e gir Is did not go to residential schools. The seclusion period "a\

ll'du ·ed to lHll' month. Ik1t' is some of what was related to me (personal c11mmu111cation with

respect for herself (hygiene and modesty) and other members of the family, how to care for their property and clothing and not to talk to strangers. She learned how to make fire, the meaning of fire as one of the gifts of life. In the earlier days flint stonl'5 would have been used. She learned to prepare food and cook. She learned to prepare hide and tan hide and sew for her immediate family. She was inspired to become strong to be nbll• to perform tasks that required physical strength, carrying and bearing and nurturing children, preparing hides, run a dogteam, hunt, and fish.

Sometimes the young girl found herself in a predicament where neither her mother or female relatives were able to teach her so she learned how to 'work' on her own or by watching, without the lessons she would experience during her menses initiation. In the time from the 20th century this was often the case. Family members were loss to the epidemics and diseases.

My mother was blind so she wasn't able to teach me any of the skills I needed to know so I had to learn on my own. I used to watch other people work, that's how I learned. (Elder born 1923, in Thom & Townsend, 1987:111).

When I was 15 years old, and I became a woman, my mother was very ill. I married an older man because he was a good provider. My mother-in-law who Icalled 'eh tsu' (grandmother) taught me everything I needed to know - how to prepare moosehides for tanning, how to make sinew for sewing, now to sew with porcupine quills, colored threads and beads and how to sew on birch ba1 ks, birch bark baskets. (personal communication with Martina Kochea in Fort Liard 1990.)

nec<l for this rigorous training.

"My mother was my teacher, I don't ever remember not listening to my mother." (personal communication **with** Pauline Sassie in Fort Liard 1990)

"Among our people in the old days, we had a saying that goes something like, 'if you don't listen to your mother you don't live long'." (personal communication with Martina Kochea in Fort Liard 1990.)

Marriages in the earlier times and into the 20th century were not ceremonious (except if the couple became Christians then there would be a church wedding) among the Slavey. Often marriages were arranged between families sometimes after a great deal of scrutiny by the parents. Ideal arrangement'l were when blood brothers of one family married blood sisters of another family (Asch 1988) to ensure alliances and ensure that there wcie men a,ound to hunt and help with the physical work (Honigmann 1946).

Bearing children. Women have related to me their experiences of giving birth at their fish lakes. Some were not as difficult as others. One woman said twice when she was at 'Tha kkc' (Sandy Lake) she was all by herself when giving birth. She used sinew to tic the umbilical co1d. The placenta was wrapped and placed in a tree.

Rearing Chiltlrcn. Just as her parents taught her, the young mother begins her life as a pa1ent to young children and the cycle continues. She looks to her parents for

4.2.2. Seasonal Acthiti"-.

Her workplace was wherewr the family was in the 'bush' 'I he t• pl.ll'l" "l'r l' specifically chosen for resourcefulne s - access to water, wildlift>. f1..,h. f11l'\\ood, burldlllg material. Often however, the place they chose to camp WI'IC the 1cgula1 fi'ih l':tlllP\ (\l'l' **fig. 3).** As soon as the camp site is cho!'icn everyone including tht• d11ldH•n ht•lp 111collecting firewood and water. The children are told whe,c to play, thl' ful'" nwk *tw* tea, the areas for sleeping and reliev111g oneself arc establi!:,hul Once the tea ha.., liel'll drunk, the women and children !>Clout on trails to set snan·s for rabh1b I he r1H·n put the fish nets in the water, women also do this. The grandpa,ent<;, if they art• ablt•, will prepare meals and help keep the fire going.

Once everyone was fed and the cookware washed and put away 111 the t•vt•nrr1g, the stories be,gin. Women begin their sewing ancl repairing moccasin.., and tooh I ht• mt·11 may be busy making canoes, repairing fishnet5, preparing to go huntrng fo, a frw day'> (Hall 1986).

If a moose hunt is succes!:>ful, there arc food preparations and J>re<,crvatioll', to lit· done. The hide is set aside for later preparation until food prcparatio11<, arc done 011Lc that task is completed the women turn to the hide - a collcctrvt actrv,ty f111'

<,even in the evening If he 1 alone, she will depend on her children to help her cook and 111111d the low mouldcr111g fire that tans the hide. Elsie and Jonas Marcellais

dcmon trated tlm art of tanning while Iwas at their bush camp at Swan Point.

Fi.,h camp<, In earlier t1me5, fo,h was the staple. When there is a fish run, and fa11111lt•<, arc at their fo,h camps, women are busy making dryfish ExperiLnced women will generally clean fourll'cn fr,h an hour, for drying. As much of the edible parts of the fi..,h an• u l'd Ilw remainder arc given to dogs or thrown back to the lake or river.

In w1nt<.'r, fr,h 15either cleaned and tocl--ed or stocked and cleaned when ready to use.

.2.3. 'lhe Mature Dene Women

As her child1en g1ow, the Dene women can spend more of her leisure time sewing and perfecting hc1 emb1oidc1> l-.1ll5, (Hancock 1990). (But, the older Fort Liard women emphasized, ub 15tl'IH.:c in the bmh is not learned in school, it is learned by doing and pat ticipating in it and they urged the children to listen.)

By the tune she 1sfolly, the mature Dene women is preparing her daughters to becoming women. She will encou1age her daughters and her daughters-in-law to sew. She also 1s the1c to teach othrr young persons, her craft (Hancock 1990).

As shL'hl'coml's a g1andmother she is accorded respect from her family and 1sL'\.Pl'Cll'd

through knowing the customs, egalitarianism, cooperat1on, controlling 01w· ıı\ı' of tln•
resources, and self-sufficiency. The overall benefit inclmkd thl' cont111ued replenishment
of resources, stability and predictability within thl' family, and k1H1wkdgt•
(education) by knowing how to observe the physical and biological l'llVirnnn1t·111 In thl'
context of the life in the bush. time was viewed as a valuable oppo, tunity

breakdown of the family and the angui•,h of many mothers and fathers. At first parents rnntrnucd their !>ea,onal round'> whtle their children were at residential schools. Parents and cluldrcn reunited at the settlements in the summer months. They observed that their children were not lcarnrng how to work the way they and their parents had - from the family and the bu!,h environml'nt ln!>tcad, children were learning different kinds of behavior and s1–tlb that oppo\l'd the continuation of their customs and languages. Their c.:h1ld1en Wl'rc learning <,h1lh to prepare them for the industrial economy: boys to become heavy-equipment opt•1aton, :rnd girls *to* become nurses aides, cooks helpers, hairdressers and sccrctaric Sl–rlb ll'ar rwd for *tlw* bush c•nvironment gained no recognition in formal l'ducatron.

In the context of cttlcmcnt lrfe, tanning hides became archaic in light of the leather goods that could be purcha<,cd from the local stores. The dedication that women put into their a, tof mal-ing moccasins, parkas, and so on was overshadowed by the abundance and simplicity of clothing available in the local stores and mail order l'atalogucs. Scttlenwn! life facil1tatt•d the accumulation of goods. Now the Dene could not easily pid up their lwlongings and travel. To remain in the settlements, the Dene had to wo1 ⊢ for mmwy, money that would enable them to buy food and clothing at the 101:al stoics Wlwn \\01k could not be had, they could apply for wrlfare from the local gover llllll'llt offices.

the language, parents and grandparents could not easily transfrr c1itkal knowledge for the Dene way of life.

The next generation of Dene were learning in a school environml'llt f1 (1m a ,t ii f desk. They learned a new meaning of time. Time became a concept of linl'ar and compartmentalized segments divided into minutes and hours rather than the n,ghl and day and seasonal changes.

There was confusion over moral behavior. Rather **than** learning nwial lwhavior from the family, Dene children were learning good and bad behavior f1om t,angt'I!. Thus it .vas generally instilled in their innocent minds that a good pcn,on Wl'llt to l'11t11ch and a bad person did not. Memorizing and learning institutional rules was far morl' valuable than experiencing and learning the characteristics of the wcatlwr and sl'a,on, they were told.

The Dene children were returned to their parents more confused than thl'11 parents. Grandmothers and mothers had to bear the anguish as they patiently wa1<:.11ed their children struggle to adjust. In addition to the anxictie<; b1ought on by the lo>>or control of what their children learned, parents had to get on with providing for their families. To stay in the communities income had to be earned for food and clothing to be bought from the stores. Adjusting to this new situation began with the nwn finding seasonal jobs for wages while women stayed home to look after home and childn·n.

important work.

Work in the 'bush' household is not the same as work in the community household. llousehold work became housework in the settlements. In the context of the 'bush', women and men could balance their responsibilities in the maintaining of the home with the practice of going out on the land to see what was going and learning from the land, bringing their children along with them. For women work in the bush was and is physically difficult but there were always other members of the family to help. There

was a sense of order and predictability in the way people related to one another.

IIouscwork in the community was comparatively difficult in that women often found themselves alone in the nuclear family setting. In most cases, they were provided with government built homes which were often not big enough for the large Dene families. So these large families were either crowded together or divided among houses which we1e not located within proximity of each other. Where is the prestige in living in the community for women? What benefits did they enjoy? There is no glory in being isolatt'd and overburdened with housework which is not recognized as important work in the wage economy. And yet men are able to 'go to work' because their women support them by keeping their clothes clean and pressed a. ·d meals prepared. On the other hand, life in the community is easier for some women. But the price they have to pay is to give up if not to postpone the sense of ideology they

sew for enjoyment. Now even the awkward moccasin sewer sews because a few dollars could be earned from the final product. If their husbands arc successful hunters and the women are in a position to prepare the hides as they always did iu the bush environment, they will have the material to make traditional clothing to sell to the local arts and crafts outlet or to sell directly to the tourists. A wealthy and fortunate Dene family is one who owns a motor and boat or a car that will enable them to return to the 'bush' environment at any time.

Among other types of work that women do on a voluntary basis is to care for the elderly. Even voluntary work, is becoming a burden because of social pressures felt by women, such as those caused by alcohol and drug abuse. Social services in Fort Lia rd can attest to such social problems. This subject is extemive and beyond the scope of this thesis.

So far, I have attempted to describe the meaning of work in the context of the bush and the community environment. To my knowledge no attempt has ever been made to establish the value of women's work contribution in these two environments. What is attempted here is to provide some interpretation of the predicaments faced by Dene women as they experience the transition from the bush to the community and how they fare in the changing conditions of their socioeconomic circumstances.

women worked outside the home to *earn* income to pay the bills, maintain their hu!,band's credit at the Bay for tools, clothing and food, or to have extra cash for personal needs. Now, lJcnc women either work, arc ecking work or finding ways to become self t•mployed and balancing the,c a!,pirat10ns with family responsibilities.

In a mall ettlemt•nt uch as rort Liard, regular jobs are limited and most are !,ea!>onal in nature. The rt•gular jobs include those available at local enterprises, such as ca'>ual labor at the 'Bay' (now called 'Northern'), support and cleaning staff in government offkc5, hotl'ls, nur ing tations and schools. The seasonal jobs originating in or dose to the settlement indudc omc tour ism, certain kinds of public works, recreation, forestry and parl-.s. When there me no jobs to be had in the communities, there are always the bush camp to which the Dene can turn. However, not all Dene have this option nor are tht'Y 111 thepo 1tion to depend solely on the traditional economy.

As mentioned in Chapter I, subsection I. I. I., two recommendations were made to 11nprovc the northern economy:

(a) dcvt•lop the non-ll'lll'\\:Jbh' fl'Sources sector, and

(b) provide t•nhanced education and training for the northern native people.

Fu, tht.'t down 1wish to mention the measures taken by government and industry to employ woml'n. Let IIII' say at the outset that where it concerned women, government and

U.N. assessment of the achievement of the Decac1e of Women (1975/85) p1epa1t•d a 5-yt•:11 action plan on Equality of Women and, in addition, stated its policy on [quality lktwt'l'll Women and Men. It is an impressive plan of action on paper and WL'all hopl' tlll' t• plan, are carried out successfully (cf. Government of the N.W T 1987)

To determine what employment interests and goals women had in 111du t1 y and what problems and obstacles they faced if they wanted this type of employnwnt, Iynda Lange (1984) conducted a 3-year study into the employment of native women at till' Norman Wells Oilfield E....pansion and Pipeline P1oject. She interviewed woml'n from tht• communities of Fort Norman, Fort Franklin, Foll Simpson and Wrigley. Iour observations are significant in that they clarify the preferences ol the woml'n L'mployl'd. 65% would like full-time jobs: 68% stated a definite preference for other than offkt• work; good social environment at work is important; 65% did not comidcr 11a p1ol>le111 10 do a job considered 'men's work.'

A number of obstacles and problems were identified (Lange 1984: 123-128) of which I want to mention the following four:

(l) The employment seemed to be closely related to the number of grade'> of ',chool111g completed, whereas employment in the home community seemed to be related to the training courses taken. Existing jobs in the community that need filling will cn:alc

(4) Many cxp,e%ed \trongly, that being native affected them more than being female. Prejudices with re pect to race and gender prevailed. One quarter of those who answered <;aidthis affected them mo'it. 'Male chauvinism' is an obstacle for native women in indu!'itry. This chauvinism wa!, reflected in non-native employers rather than native members of their own communities

4.5. Rc..ult Or Interviews and **Quc..tionnaire, 1990**

In my attempt to a!>se s the general knowledge of Fort Liard women of their 'role' in 1elation to their 'work' 111 the three workplaces and how these related to 'seclusion' or Dene pubetty rite\, 1 did the followmg. I interviewed four older women (over 55 years of agt') who had fi1!-.t-hand knowledge of seclusion. With the help of three young Dene women (who did not pat tic,pate in answering the questions), I developed a short quc!>tionnaire containing six questions to be directed at young women between the ages of 10 and 45 Yl':trs (appendix I). My interview with the four older women was conducted in Slavcy (so met imcs with some help to translate colloquial terms). Iasked them to interpret f1om tht>ir iwrspccti,c the concept 'worl,' and how they learned to 'work.' Iasked them

to dcscrilw their liH•s growing up and whether they were 'secluded' when they first l'Xpl'r ienCl'd 'ala sagh Ii' and what information they knew about the customary practice of

they learned about keeping a family, and practicing personal hygicnl', including th disposal of clothing after mensus. Information about childbearing and rL•aring w1'11' imparted. A taste of hardship during seclusion not only prepared thl'lll fo1 their futu1t• but they also felt a new level of friendship with mother and grandmotlw1 and other female kin. The four women said they grew up knowing their kin and custom-; ·11wi1 responsibilities to lie primarily with their immediate and rxtendcd familie 'I hey lo<;l control of their responsibilities of teaching their children when formal education wa._, introduced.

A sample of twelve Dene women between the ages of 20 and 45 yea1c, (1th1ghly, this is J/3 sample of this age group) were asked six questions. The rir t two qlll",t1011.., were personal (age and marital status) and whether they spoke and under•;tood ">laVl'Y· In the third, fourth and fifth questions they were asked to rank from mo'>t to lea-;t 1mpo1 t111t (or J, 2 or 3) which in their view constituted the work, caring and providing role or women. The final question was intended to determine whether and how much the'-iL' women knew about puberty rites and seclusion of Dene women upon their fir..,t men·,u·,

Six had common-law husbands and six married in a Chrt'>tian church. ·1L'll WlTL' able to speak and understand Slavey and the remaining two unclcr!,tood '>lavcy

5 chose learn from and care for elderly.

The fifth question asked the respondents to rani: 3 providing roles as part of thL•ir sharing in responsibilities within the family. Within 36 units of choice : of the 12 choke for the first rank, 7 chose provide for children; of the 9 choices for the second rank, .t chose provide for family members; and of the 9 choices for the thi,d rank, •Ichem• provide for elders.

Finally the respondent, were ashed to answer with a yes or no, whetlw1 thl'i1 mother or grandmother ever talked with them about seclusion or puberty ritL",. 1lll'y had the option to comment on their answers. Six wo·11en said yes and six said no. Some who said 'no' added that the reason for their lack of hnowledE;C W8S related to the pa\\ing away of the mother, negative attitudes in the family inhibited her, or imply did not know because it was never discussed in the family. Those who said 'ye • included in thl'11 responses, that their grandmother told them about puberty rites and how in the old day'> women were secluded with strict instructions on conduct. Apart from the cxpcrn·nce'> Or being secluded, women were told to avoid hunters, eye contact with men and re5tnction of movement during monthly menstruations. One women stated very clearly that her mother explained to her that this ritual had not only to do with the power of wonH·11

qualitatively two fundamental rcsponsib:lities of Dene women: nurturir1g (social reproduction) and providing (production).

In constructing a general context for this thesis, I made use of the theoretical framework of tht: formal and inforP1al economies proposed by Ross and Usher (1986). r:xamination of the two economics by Asch (1979) and Usher (1982), who analysed them using the concept of the mode of p1oduction, were also consulted. Usher has specified that the mode of p1oduction concept involves not only the factor of produciion - land, labour, :–nd capital - but also ideological systems and social organization. Both Asch and Usher have juxtaposed the two economies and have identified their links. These links appear in the commodity exchange, labour, and welfare sectors. Of particular interest are their analyses of the t1aditional morle of production. In determining the value of the traditional economy concept, Asch and Usher have applied quantitative measurements to calculate the annual fur harvest anct, occassionally, to assess the replacement value of country food as compared with the store-bought variety. The distribution value of country food is difficult to quantify. Dene women participate in all aspects of their economy, especially in the distribution process, but little is known about their role.

An aH mpt was made to determine the role of Dene women in these contexts hrough an e\anunation of what women consider their 'role' and their 'work.' This l'\ammation had to

5.1. "Nurturing" and "Pro,iding"

In contemporary Dene society, 'nurturing' and 'pro\-idmg' are f1agnwntcd concepts. The general results of the questionnaire reveal this There appL•a1s to he a social re-ordering in process, a search for some kind of standard, a rcluctancl' or 1nabil1tv to state what the standard really is.

Older Dene women who have had a traditional upbringing and cxtcn">iVI.' experiences **in** the bush workplace tend to have a more holistic picture of family /\-, mothers, they see themselves as being the source of family stability. ·**1**heir roll' a, 111oth•1 was **at** one time reinforced by their role as teacher, but since the introduction **Of** fo1!11al education and Christianity to Dene society this role has been dimrni!-.hcd. Still, thl' t•

women continue to instruct by example. In Fort Liard, cider"> arc not difficult to find In summer, they still prefer to live in tents that have spruce bough<, for floorin1:, and tht'y have outdoor wood stoves for cooking. The women will be found preparing 11100•,c htdt", for tanning. They will be happy to sec you. They will give you some dried meat or bannock, and serve you some tea. Some inhabitant5 of Fort Liarcl view the">e cider<, a> relics of the past who have no real authority over community matter!-., but many other"> do not share this opinion. This

in the community. Second, the availability of separate accommodation for the nuclear family and their elders reduces family interaction to occasional v1s1ts llowever, without lengthly consideration of several sociological factors (level'> of education, for example) such conclusions can only be regarded as preliminary.

One of the po sibilitic Irai ed in the course of my research was that elder Dene women of l·ort Liard had traditionally learned to work, and had thus known how to 'nurture' and 'p1 ov1dc' from childhood through to their time of 'seclusion.' Young women (most had small children) who participated in my research did not learn to work in the same way thcrr raothcrs or grandmothers did, and consequently their conception of work differed greatly from that of their elders. Their conception of 'work' had to have been the result of their formal education of training courses. Without having examined tlw kinds of training courses that each may have taken, Icannot comment on the quaility of their 'nurturing.' But Ican propose that 'nurturing,' as the term is defined in this thesis, was probably not relevant Hence, we see the fragmentation of the concept of 'nurturing' and 'providing' when they are understood from the Dene perspective.

5.2. Sonu.• Critical h,;ue,; for Dene Women

Dent• wonwn h:I\ e begun to add1ess several critical issues that deeply affect their

jobs; the fact that the training programs available to them do not lead to SL'Cllll' Jnb-., and, general insecurity about the future.

Such preoccupations cause great amiety. Calm is sought in cxplo1111gtlw bush. fishing on the river, berry picl-.ing, or by sewing or making traditional hand1c1aft (birchbark baskets decorated with porcupine quills, for example). Practical nwa,ull"> taken by women to maintain a sense of community include participation in lm:al committees. Several of the women who participated in my rc ca1 ch im1 tcd that thl",L' committees consume too much of their time. But, without committees, and without till' participalion of these women, it would be difficult for the community to 1-.ccp up with 11.,own shifting and changing and to maintain ib spirit.

In the North, at the territorial level, Dene women are rcprc entcd by the Nat Ive Women's Association (NWA) of the N.W.T. (incorporated in 1978). One of the many functions of the a!">sociation is to address the social problems that an<ic r,om the subordination of women by their own society. The association has al\o concentrated 011 implementing a number of practical programs involving foster care, home managemt•n t, and pre-e,mployment, among other things. With the help and encouragement of womt•n from communities such as Fort Liard and of national women's group'>, the NWA of the **N.W.T.** has articulated the social and economic problems experienced by Dene, Mct1'>and Inuit women. Women at the local, territorial, and national level<. have de111011<t1atcd that they need

reference Ihey have to rely on the tr oral tradition. It is therefore critical for the Dene to continue u,rng their languages Language 1stheir main tool for tt1e transmission of l11storical and cultural information. One goal for the younger Dene should be to acquire the ability to articulate questions in Dene that elders can und ...-stnnd and to which they can rc<;pond with the added a surance that the11 answers will be understood. It was related to mem r·o, tLian! and in other northern communities that it is not difficult to talk to elders, but 11is difficult to understand their replies. Many speak in symbollic ıı'ıııı an'old' Dene. Older women often alter their speech to make it colloquial. Some \ay that the cider would rather forget the painful past - a past that included starvation, l'JHdemics, b1ol-,.cn prom,,..,es - but maybe they need to talk about it. And perhaps even more 11npo1t:int i the fact that 1fthe Dene lose the ability to speak fluently in their native languages and to comprehend them with equal ease vast quantities of invaluable i.:ullural infor111at10n will be lmt to them fo,ever.

S..l. The Future for Women Under Changing Conditions

G(•1w1ations of Dc.'lll' since the turn of the century have experienced very drastic M1i:1al changl• Tho e born smcc.• the 19–10shave had more experience with Christian lwltt•fs and ommunity li, ing than thei1 predecessors. Those born in the 1960s grew up in 1101tlw1 n

puberty rites through which they a<;young gi1 Is, lwl·anw responsible adults. Some contend that since this custom was abandtrnt.•d, adole ceri-:t• ha.., been unduly ex tended. T11e1e is a need to assess th is asscr tion and to dt•tt•r 1111m• hnw widely it is supported among Dene women. The broad conte>.t for such atutly would have to be the general range of problems that afflict the Dene family.

In this thesis Ihave attempted to address the transition mentioned abon• thrnugh the examination of the concept of 'work.' My research, of rwce sity, ha, lwl'n l1111itl'd, I was able to focus on only a few aspects of the rich hi torical and contempo1a1 y ltVl">of one group of Dene women. There 1sstill much work to be done.

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children

2. Understand slavey_ Spk/Und slavey_

3. What to you, is women's "work"? explain if you wish.
   a. bush life
   b. household or home in settlement
   c. job or wage job

4. Rank in your view which is the primary role of Dene women
   a. care for children (teach)
   b. learn and care for family (also includes teaching)
   c. learn from and care for elderly

5. Rank in you view , the role of Dene women (sharing concept)
   a. provide for children
   b. provide for family members
   c. provide for elderly

6. Has your mother or grandmother ever talked to you about seclusion or puberty rites?.
   yes_ no

   a. If yes, what