in it than meets the eye, and it is richer than its detractors will claim. The author's attempt to bring our agricultural past to light and life is a worthy and underemphasized task that deserves more attention from professional and popular historians alike.

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**Partners in Furs: A History of the Fur Trade in Eastern James Bay 1600-1870** by Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz. Kingston and Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1983. pp. 203, tables, illustrations, maps and figures.

**Bringing Home Animals: Religious Ideology and Mode of Production of the Mistassini Cree Hunters** by Adrian Tanner. St. John's, Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1979. pp. 233, tables, illustrations, maps and figures.

Over three centuries the record of the Canadian fur trade presents a series of variations on simple themes. In the beginning, an exchange of surplus goods occurred between the original inhabitants and the newcomers who (to borrow an image from Robin Fisher) appeared to be a new "and particularly wealthy" tribe in the area.[1] A partnership arose based on the natives' control of food and fur resources and on the traders' access to foreign markets for supplies, credit, and sale of furs. Gradually the traders' assets proved more resilient and powerful than those of the natives, and the fur business stopped being a true exchange of surplus commodities. Natives ended up selling their labour as trappers and in exchange drawing the necessities of life from the trading post.

If the progression from contact to commercial domination and aboriginal dependence had been complete and uniform throughout the fur trade, its history would be rather dull. If the transition had been as fast as once was supposed, there would be more reason to concentrate study on the feats and foibles of the Euro-Canadian traders. Exaggerated views of both the greed and the technological superiority of the traders used to encourage simplified views of the decline of aboriginal social and cultural autonomy. In the past twenty-five years more detailed studies have begun to suggest that rapid subordination was not inherent either in commercial capitalism or in the technological gap between incomers and native peoples. Two important new books make these points with particular force for a region and a culture whose experience of the transition has been exceptionally prolonged.

In *Partners in Furs* Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz have shown the transition down to 1870 to be far from dull, the stages along the way

far from uniform, and the natives' response to the fur trade to be as complex as anything happening among the traders. *Bringing Home Animals* is Adrian Tanner's report of 18 months' anthropological field work among the Nichicun band of the Mistassini Cree. Without denying that capitalism by 1969 had become the dominant economic system in the sub-Arctic, Tanner analysed a wide range of non-capitalist beliefs, practices and social relations which still characterized Mistassini life, especially in winter. These two books suggest an alternative way of looking at social change in the fur trade.

Far from enslaving Indians through technological superiority, the incoming society may be viewed as entering a symbiotic relationship with the indigenous one, and developing a set of institutions not wholly derived from either culture. The historic fur trade was capable in certain circumstances of developing an equilibrium between the technologically better-equipped trader and the ecologically better-adapted Indian. Survival of this precarious equilibrium depended on the constancy of several factors: stable viable ratios of human population to fur-bearers and game animals; absence of aggressive commercial competition; and maintenance of a stable external market for furs. In rare cases, the absence or disruption of the balance could result in a check for the traders—the HBC's withdrawal from Ungava in the 1840s is an example. Almost any other disruption led to an erosion of the strength of the native members of the partnership.

Some of these factors are suggested in previous writings, such as Arthur Ray's portrayal of the HBC's nineteenth-century monopoly as a tool for prolonging sustained-yield production of furs.[2] The distinctive element in *Partners in Furs* and *Bringing Home Animals* is that the authors have portrayed a region where change came very slowly. One of the main devices Francis and Morantz use to emphasize the fact of partnership is their constant reference to the dependence of white men on country food supplied by Indians. An important contribution by Tanner is his insistence on a transformational rather than acculturative model of social change (p. 66). Natives do not discard traditional practices in order to replace them with imported ones: they are more likely to respond to the opportunities (or threats) of change by creating new institutions not precisely drawn from either culture. Traders also have to adapt. (Morantz's work on "trading captains" illustrates a good example of a transformational institution).[3] Of course, such institutions do facilitate absorption of Indians into the dominant mode of production, but they are not in themselves evidence of personal domination or the death of traditional culture. The East Cree area as a whole in the late 1960s had a fur industry worth $300,000 a year and a $3.8 million meat industry (p. 69), but both activities were conducted in a largely undifferentiated manner through a single social institution, the multi-family hunting group. Every evidence of cultural continuity

produced by Tanner for the 1960s is ample confirmation for Francis's and Morantz's argument about the weakness of acculturative forces in the same regions before 1870.

Because of the nature of their respective research materials and methods, Tanner is more successful than Francis and Morantz in portraying the fur trade from the trapper's side of the trading counter; but both works make it clear how little time was actually spent in face-to-face relations with the trader. (An exception is the home guard bands, whose special position receives attention in *Partners in Furs*). Trying to view the fur trade from the Indians' point of view is not new: its modern expression can be traced to E. E. Rich's examination in 1960 of the imperfect working of the profit motive among Indians in the early Canadian fur trade.[4] *Partners in Furs* is a valuable addition to the list of studies that try to detach themselves from the traders' point of view, and its authors frequently compare their findings with those of Ray, Bishop and Fisher. Tanner, on the other hand, expresses the problem of trader-trapper relations in terms of the mode of production, and not the system of exchange and distribution. To Tanner, a central issue is whether the dominance of capitalism in the trading part of the relationship necessarily means that the trapper has been assimilated (and in this case subordinated) to the capitalist mode, with its norms of individuality and competition. His answer, persuasively argued (pp. 64-72), is that the Mistassini Cree neither perceive nor experience a difference between hunting "for use" and trapping "for exchange," and that the social organization of production in the winter or "bush" sector of the economy is non-capitalist in form, practices, and beliefs. Though Tanner writes in the present tense, his preoccupation with change or the lack of it is central to the concerns of historians.

*Partners in Furs* is also quite modern in technique and in outlook. Francis and Morantz have used ethnographic methods to wring new information from old sources, and they are aware of the descriptive power of simple statistics, judiciously used. Read as British Imperial history the book's findings fall within the broad outlines of Ronald Robinson's perception that imperial ventures work best with indigenous collaboration. Therefore the work also conforms to the widespread modern historical effort to rescue past classes and cultures, now perceived as subordinate and dependent, from what E. P. Thomson called the "enormous condescension of posterity."[5]

In this case the condescension has been found in the quotation from E. E. Rich (at pp. 167-8) to the effect that Indians became utterly dependent on European trade goods within a decade of contact. Not so. Dependence in James Bay was the outcome of generations, not years; inland bands were less dependent than contemporaneous coastal ones; and as long as the whites chose to trade in a district they might have to depend as much on the Indians for food as the natives did on

the traders for manufactures. Francis and Morantz drive their point home by saying that there were "a number of different fur trades," not a monolithic enterprise showing the same unlovely face everywhere (p. 167).

At the same time the authors give ample space to the geographic, economic and ecological factors which govern the pace and direction of change. The questions are simple: how much hunting and trapping could a given district sustain? How many traders and post labourers could the hunters feed? And how easily could inland rivers be navigated? These factors governed the HBC's efforts to tap the trade of inland regions east of James Bay (pp. 23-40, 104-9, 121), to generate more trade to the north (pp. 77-8, 136-50), and to earn profits from Ungava, from which the Company ultimately withdrew (p. 135). A district which could not feed itself could not often justify the expense of a post maintained on imported provisions. Perhaps, too, it was the sparseness of resources which prevented the emergence (p. 156) of mixed-blood hunting, trapping, or trading populations analagous to the Métis of the prairies.

Competition was the crucial economic factor in the trade. With several river routes to Canada, the HBC's eastern James Bay posts met competition in their hinterland (except for a few years after 1760) until 1831; then the same Company won control of overland access. Francis and Morantz document the familiar evils of competition—the proliferation of liquor in the trade and the increasing violence of competing traders against each other and, what is less easily explained, against Indians as well.[6] Monopoly too had its evils—lower prices for furs often meant more power for the traders to direct individuals' efforts as trappers, food producers or freighters.

These situational factors aside, native culture incorporated major checks on the ability of a trading company to organized production. There is a hint of ethnocentrism even in formulating the problem in such terms: the central argument of *Partners in Furs* concerns the tenacious vitality of the Cree social organization and economic behaviour. In eastern James Bay as elsewhere the Cree chose not to accumulate possessions but to take surplus earnings in leisure or in consumable or portable luxuries. Lacking much acquisitiveness, Indians as trappers (and later as labourers) were immune to some of the economic pressures which, for example, at the same time gave the HBC access to semi-proletarianized white workers for the permanent labour system[7] Francis and Morantz point out that innovations in Company policy therefore worked best if the Cree were already predisposed towards them, citing the assignment of hunting territories to families (pp. 95-6, 127) and the related question of conservation measures (p. 129). Credit, moreover, functioned in James Bay, as elsewhere, more to benefit the trappers than as a system for controlling them. (See also Tanner, pp.

63-66, for some important observations on the "debt system"). Presents worked in a similar way, especially during competition. In these respects native cultural norms either complemented or took advantage of the traders' policies.

An almost uncharted century intervenes between the end of *Partners in Furs* and the time of Tanner's field-work on the eve of the James Bay Hydro-Electric project. Tanner's work, which has been well-received by anthropologists,[8] rests on an unusually long period of field-work and a flexible Marxian line of inquiry. In his search for ways in which the traders and trappers each seek to perpetuate their own societies—reproduce their own modes of production—Tanner accords roughly equal space to economic and ecological description, to description of social organization, and to the religious ideology referred to in his title. This includes the role of religious practices in preparing for, conducting and returning from the hunt, and the ritual relations between hunters and game animals before and after the kill. Tanner chronicles many interventions by outside society in the organization of the trapping and hunting economy; yet his conclusions about the Nichicun band in 1969 emphasize the striking historic continuity in their relations with each other, with the HBC, and with the land and the animals.

Tanner has recognized the considerable theoretical interest of these issues and has called, elsewhere, for the development of "an adequate theoretical perspective to analyze the form taken by fur trade society."[9] It is precisely at this point that *Partners in Furs* is somewhat disappointing: its authors' insistence that there were "many fur trades" implies that despite correspondence between their findings and those of other writers, they do not intend to encourage the search for a general theory of the relations between the Euro-Canadian fur trade and "primitive" societies in the northern half of the North American continent. Yet Tanner's concept of dominance[10] and the theory of transformational institutions, linked to Francis's and Morantz's own view of the importance of ecological, demographic and competitive factors, offer the most promising avenues for exploring the reasons why the evolution away from traditional native social organization and ideology proceeded so unevenly. Eastern James Bay provides an excellent laboratory for the examination of dependence.

The debate on dependence has generated some heat in the examination of social change among natives engaged in the fur trade.[11] A recent point of departure has been a remark by E. E. Rich, already noted, about the rapid adoption of firearms by both coastal and inland tribes in the 18th century, and the consequent decline of traditional survival skills. Francis and Morantz challenge this at the descriptive level of material culture, arguing that in some areas Indians were slow to adopt a technology which they were not capable of reproducing. But

however this question may be resolved for specific localities at the level of material culture, Francis, Morantz and Tanner all offer abundant evidence that physical reliance on imported technology did not inevitably bring about social and economic subordination to the trading company. Indian skills as food producers, as trappers and as travellers in the Canadian shield assured the James Bay Cree of a way of life that was easily recognizable as a development of their society in the immediate post-contact period. To Tanner the snowmobile, the mid-winter airlift and even the summer subsistence on transfer payments are analytically of no greater weight than the persistence of multi-family hunting groups, of trapping to pay off a known debt but not to compete with other trappers for material wealth or money-based status, and the retention of religious rituals in the different phases of hunting. In the nature of colonial capitalism and its relations with hunting societies there is no watershed with autonomy on one side and subjugation on the other—and if there were such a division it would not be clearly signposted by the hunting society's adoption of particular manufactured items.

These two books broaden and enrich the stream of modern work which emphasizes that whites as well as Indians had to adapt in order to exploit the fur trade, and that dependence was reciprocal even if it was often unequal. The concept of transformational institutions is important, since it is antithetical to simplistic determinisms. Transformational institutions ought to be examined to encourage discussion, first, of the factors which accelerate or retard economic dependence and social change, and second, of the interplay of those factors in particular local circumstances. One can learn about natives by studying their relations with commercial capitalism, but the reverse is equally true. Knowledge of the remarkable protraction of change in eastern James Bay ought to make it easier to discuss each geographic and cultural region affected by the Canadian fur trade in terms of its local situation; yet it should also be easier to generalize more confidently about the characteristics both of the fur-trade as an aspect of commercial capitalism and of post-contact hunting societies in the Canadian north and west.

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## NOTES

[1] R. Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), 41.

[2] A. J. Ray, "Some conservation schemes of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1821-50: An examination of the problems of resource management in the fur trade," *Journal of Historical Geography* 1: 1 (1975): 49-68.

[3] T. Morantz, "Northern Algonquian concepts of status and leadership reviewed: a case study of the eighteenth-century trading captain system," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 19: 4 (1982): 482-501.

[4] E. E. Rich, "Trade Habits and Economic Motivation Among the Indians of North America," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 26: 1 (Feb. 1960): 35-53.

[5] R. Robinson, "Non-European foundations of European imperialism: sketch for a theory of collaboration," in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the theory of imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972); and E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondworth: Penguins, 1968), 13.

[6] Cf. W. A. Sloan, "The Native Response to the Extension of the European Traders into the Athabasca and Mackenzie Basin, 1770-1814," *Canadian Historical Review* 60: 3 (Sept. 1979): 281-99.

[7] Cf. P. Goldring, "Lewis and the Hudson's Bay Company in the Nineteenth Century," *Scottish Studies* [Edinburgh] 24 (1980): 23-42.

[8] See reviews by Jay Miller in *Anthropos* 76 (1981): 277-8; by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *L'Homme; revue française d'anthropologie* 20: 3 (juillet-sépt. 1980): 146-7; and by Edward S. Rogers in *American Ethnologist* 8: 1 (198): 207-8. Rogers calls it "one of those special studies that does not happen very often."

[9] A. Tanner, "The End of Fur Trade History," *Queen's Quarterly* 90: 1 (Spring 1983): 182.

[10] This concept, borrowed from E. Tarray, is summarized at p. 11 of *Bringing Home Animals:* Terray defines dominance "as the condition where the mode of production in question subjects the other modes of production to the requirements of its own reproduction. . . . But . . . each mode of production transforms and shapes the other."

[11] See for example T. Morantz, "The Fur Trade and the Cree of James Bay," in North American Fur Trade Conference, *Old Trails and New Directions* eds. C. M. Judd and A. J. Ray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 39-54; also Richard Glover's review of Morantz's argument in *BC Studies* 50 (Summer 1981): 57-60. See also *Partners in Furs*, 61-64.

**No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941** by James Struthers. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. pp. 268 + x.

This is a timely book. With unemployment persisting in double-digit numbers, it pays to recall the history of earlier periods of unemployment in the country and the political debates that it engendered. Struthers traces the evolution of attitudes and policies relating to the unemployed through two major recessions and the full-scale Depression of the thirties. Official attitudes evolved rather slowly: the English Poor Law notion that the unemployed must shoulder much of the blame for their misfortune persisted into the thirties and with it the notion that the unemployed must remain sufficiently poor to scare the working poor from choosing to leave their jobs.

Policy reflected a Poor Law bias. Unemployment was not regarded as a national problem requiring federal invervention even when unemployment levels were high throughout the country. Even in the thirties, both Mackenzie King and R. B. Bennett insisted that municipal and provincial governments should shoulder the responsibility for providing relief to the unemployed. The weak state of municipal finances forced the federal government to provide the provinces with large grants for relief but only gradually were such grants accompanied by a recognition of the need for long-term federal involvement in unemployment policy.

Struthers cites a variety of factors that retarded the growth of a national policy to deal with unemployment. Long after the rural-urban population balance had begun to tip in favour of the cities, governments and the well-to-do, not to mention the farmers, continued to