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Canadian Geographer; Summer 2004; 48, 2; Research Library Core
pg. 101

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Since the 1970s, the tapping of James Bay's hydroelectric potential has been synonymous with the tapping of divergent national imaginaries for native and non-native people in Québec. Exploitation of natural resources in the region has activated different narratives of political identity for each community. I explore this evolving political context by examining how, for each group, water has emerged simultaneously as a physical entity possessing economic value and a social artefact supporting the consolidation of national boundaries. I do so by analysing three phases of changing relationships around resource management, namely: hydroelectric development on the La Grande river in the 1970s; the Cree opposition to Great Whale in the 1990s; and the recent agreement concerning a new relationship between the two parties. In each of these phases, nature has been both the symbolic and material tie that binds different national identities and materialises their boundaries. While these are not boundaries in the traditional geopolitical understanding of the term, the forging of an equitable framework of development in the region depends on the recognition of nature as a historical and political formation that answers to different sets of national preoccupations.

Depuis les années 70, le développement hydroélectrique de la Baie James a favorisé l'expression de deux imaginaires nationaux dans la province, celui des autochtones en parallèle avec celui des non-autochtones. L'exploitation des ressources naturelles de la région a donné lieu à des récits identitaires propres à chaque communauté. J'explore les changements dynamiques de ce contexte politique en examinant comment, pour chacun de ces groupes, l'eau est à la fois une entité physique possédant une certaine valeur économique, ainsi qu'un objet social capable de consolider les frontières nationales de chaque peuple. L'analyse se fait à travers trois phases de gérance des ressources: la construction du Complexe La Grande dans les années 70; l'opposition des Cris au projet Grande Baleine dans les années 90; et la signature récente d'une nouvelle entente entre les deux parties. Dans chacune de ces phases, la nature a constitué un terrain à la fois symbolique et matériel consolidant des frontières nationales divergentes. Même s'il ne s'agit pas de frontières 'géopolitiques' au sens propre du terme, la création d'une structure de développement équitable dans la région exige que la nature soit perçue dans toute sa dimension historique et politique afin de dégager les différentes priorités nationales qui s'expriment en son nom.

The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien 48, no 2 (2004) 101–118
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> Prolongement du corps social, l'espace est un amputé potentiel. Mais il est aussi la cave ou le grenier, le lieu où sont entreposées les richesses futures. Et parmi celles-ci l'hydroelectricité qui, non seulement occupe une place essentielle dans l'économie actuelle du Québec mais qui, de plus, occupe l'une des places fortes du champ symbolique québécois. Autrement dit, ce qui est en cause dans la relation entre les Autochtones et les autres Québécois à la Baie James et dans toutes les régions où il est question de harnacher des rivières, c'est l'intégrité territoriale mais c'est aussi le développement économique et l'image que les différentes communautés du Québec se font de leur avenir. (Vincent 1988, p. 239)

Introduction

In talking about hydroelectricity as an economic as well as symbolic resource for the people of Québec, Sylvie Vincent points to the conflicted geography of hydroelectric development in the province, especially since the beginning of the James Bay project in 1971. Indeed, the tapping of the region's hydroelectric potential for purposes of economic development was also the tapping of divergent Cree and Québécois geographical imaginations and their corresponding physical spaces. Within these geographical imaginations, water flows freely through any purported division between nature and culture: a 'natural' resource, it is also the product of the social, political and cultural aspirations of two self-determining peoples. Imagined from southern Québec, the geography of hydroelectricity has displayed a set of neocolonial relations, forming a mental map where objects are named and placed in hierarchical relationships with each other. The main floor is to the attic in the same way that culture is to nature, white to native, South to North. As elsewhere in Canada, the global geography of development is here turned on its head, since it is the resources of an underdeveloped North that are channelled south to feed the power grid of large Canadian and American industrial centres (Cohen 1994, pp. 35–36).

For the Francophone population, the dialectic between northern and southern Québec is an important building block of the national and historical memory (see Morissonneau 1978; Hamelin 1980, 1998; Lacasse 1985; Courville *et al.* 1996; Courville 2000a,b). If, in the nineteenth century, movement towards the North enabled the pushing of the settlement frontier, that expansionist drive was pursued into the twentieth century more specifically under the rubric of 'development'.[1] For the Crees and other native inhabitants of the region, there is nothing abstract or imagined about this spatial order that channels resources away from local populations.[2] When the initial phase of development was undertaken on the La Grande river, the building of roads across the territory accompanied that of power lines; it is through these conduits that hydropower, as well as important forestry (and some mining) resources, flows from Eeyou Istchee towards the Québec population belt and beyond.[3] Cree people have taken part in those economic activities through employment and through their own companies, yet much work remains to be done to increase that involvement and achieve an equal balance of participation.

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[1] Gérard Duhaime captures this continuum very well when he states: 'Dans cette conquête, les coureurs des bois, cultivateurs, bûcherons, pêcheurs, draveurs, mineurs, et les autres, jouent un rôle central d'unification identitaire. Ils sont successivement les Canadiens, les Canadiens-français et les Québécois, ceux-là qui, suivant les préceptes de leur foi, domptent le pays pour le bien de leur foyer et de leur patrie. Les héros mythiques les plus récemment admis au panthéon du pays, "gars des chantiers" de la Côte-Nord et de la Baie James, légitiment également l'insertion de la race qu'ils représentent dans l'action économique, autrefois réservée aux Anglais, vainqueurs sur le champ de bataille des Plaines d'Abraham en 1759, vainqueurs sur les Patriotes de 1837. Leurs employeurs ne sont plus seulement les entreprises canadiennes-anglaises ou américaines, comme autrefois; ce sont aujourd'hui des entreprises d'État comme Hydro-Québec et les myriades de ses sous-traitants de toutes les régions de la province' (Duhaime 2001, p. 196).

[2] The Northern part of Québec, nearly two-thirds of its territory, is inhabited by some 20,000 native people. Numbering approximately 13,000, the Crees form the bulk of the population in the eastern James Bay region. Although the Inuit and the Naskapi have also been involved in negotiations over the use of resources in the area, my analysis focuses chiefly on the Crees. Also, there are other communities in Canada that bear the name 'Cree', notably in Ontario and the Prairie provinces. My use of the term refers specifically to the Eastern James Bay Crees who form about 10 percent of the Cree population of Canada. The latter are part of the Algonquian language family that includes, in Québec, the Montagnais-Naskapi, Micmac, Malecite and Abenaki. See Morrison and Roderick Wilson 1986; Penn 1995b; Frideres 1998.

Although a territorial agreement was signed between the Crees and Inuit and the governments of Québec and Canada in 1975, the new land-use regime it put into place has been regarded as largely inadequate to implement equal partnership with local communities in the development of the region.[4] The dualistic geography of North and South then seems to have placed the population of each sphere at the end of a relationship of production that keeps them apart by virtue of keeping them connected; and yet, even as it separates them economically, hydroelectric development aspires to bind people and places into a single territory. The desire for territorial integrity in Québec finds a powerful symbol in the hundreds of kilometres of power lines that run along the territory, seemingly weaving together regions that could otherwise drift apart. For all the conflicts it has generated, the hope remains that hydroelectricity can act as a go-between linking James Bay and Montréal, Cree and Québécois, North and South, through the mutual empowerment of each. When the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) agreement was signed, North and South were optimistically represented in the Québec press as a unified geography, linked by their power lines if not by their cultures, the main floor and the attic to be sure, but still two parts of the same house. More recently, the public witnessed a similar attempt to create unity rather than division through the shared exploitation of resources in James Bay. On 7 February 2002, a new agreement was signed between the Québec government and the Crees of Québec that seeks, once again, to harmonise relations between the two parties. At both times, 'nature'—whether understood as resource, environment or economic potential—has acted as a key agent in the shaping of a new and quickly evolving political geography in northern Québec.

I want to explore this evolving political geography in James Bay by examining the production of Québécois and Cree national boundaries in and through their interaction with nature.[5] I will do so by analysing the changing relationships around resource management in the region: first, I look at the 1970s when a first phase of hydroelectric development was undertaken on the La Grande river; second, I discuss the early 1990s when another phase of development was meant to go ahead on the Great Whale river and was subsequently aborted because of organised Cree opposition; finally, I examine these phases in the light of the recent signing of 'La Paix des Braves', which was presented as an agreement 'from nation to nation' (Le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec 2002, p. 1). Owing to the encounter of Québécois and Cree nationalisms in James Bay, I suggest that the pursuit of an equitable framework of economic and environmental management has necessitated negotiation not only over land resources but also over scales of political citizenship. Furthermore, the development, since the mid-1970s, of international structures for protecting indigenous rights has linked in several consequential ways this 'domestic' debate to the global scale (see Soyez and Barker 1994; Soyez 1995a, 1996; Bellier and Legros 2001; Legros and Trudel 2001; Morin 2001). An important lesson James Bay teaches is that, in contexts where past colonial relations continue to unfold into the present, struggles for political recognition are fought in the environmental arena through culturally specific constructions of nature, land and resource management. The production of nature and natural resources is simultaneously the production of national identities and territories: In this process, the meanings attached to nature by each cultural group are constitutive of the practices of development. Although they are physical entities, natural resources are also socially produced through the historical processes that guide their access and exploitation by different social groups: 'Resources are not; they become'.[6] The latter forces us to see nature as always simultaneously natural and social: here, water, trees or fish are both the symbolic and material ties that bind different national identities and materialise their boundaries.[7] While these may not always be 'boundaries' in the traditional geopolitical understanding of the term, these new lines of power clearly hold sway over the future of Eeyou Istchee, Québec and Canada as political entities, in addition to determining their common environmental future.

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[3] The Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee) (2000, p. 9) estimates that, because of the signing of the Canada/U.S. Softwood Lumber Agreement in 1996, cutting in Eeyou Istchee has increased by 45 percent. The appellation Eeyou Istchee ('Cree Land') became more widely used with the publication of two important works published by the Grand Council of the Crees that presented a Cree perspective on the question of Québec sovereignty in relation to the 1995 referendum [Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Astchee) 1995, 1998]. Note that, given the difference in alphabets, Eeyou Istchee has been spelled in different ways, among them 'Eeyou Astchee' and 'Iyiyuuschii'. This effort to name the territory in Cree represents a key step in political self-determination for the Eeyou. In this paper, I adopt the term 'Eeyou Istchee' in referring to Cree land but retain the English term 'Cree' (as opposed to 'Eeyou') to refer to its people, since it is, for the time being, more generally used.

[4] The agreement has been known as the JBNQA. An important feature of it was its division of the land into three categories with variable rights over each of them. Category 1 includes Cree and Inuit villages and lands reserved for exclusive native use (1.3 percent of the whole territory); category 2 encompasses public lands with exclusive hunting, fishing and trapping rights for natives (14.4 percent); category 3 corresponds to public lands where natives retain their harvesting rights (84.3 percent). Several restrictions were imposed on the choice of lands to be designated in each category with the result that, in practice, Cree and Inuit communities were not always able to select areas for exclusive use that reflected their contemporary territorial organisation (Penn 1995b, p. 29). For a critical assessment of the agreement 10 years after its signing, see Vincent *et al.* 1988; Mainville 1993.

[5] I must say from the outset that, given my background as a Québécoise, I necessarily have a greater understanding of Québécois nationalism than Cree nationalism. My doctoral research focused on the Québécois nationalist discourse around James Bay, particularly how it connected with the spatial logic of hydro-development to lay claim to the resources of a vast territory. This is only a partial look at James Bay, and my present research focuses more directly on the dialectical relationship between the Crees and the Québécois, or northern and southern Québec. The Crees have their own historically and culturally embedded territoriality, which is reflected in their approach to nature and the nation. An analysis that would do justice to these complex relations is beyond the scope of this paper. My goal here is infinitely more humble: I want to outline, albeit unevenly, some of the ways in which nature folds into national identity for each cultural group and suggest that the elaboration of better nation-to-nation practices of development necessitates an engagement with these questions.

James Bay, Act I: La Grande

James Bay is home to the Eastern James Bay Crees, a traditionally nomadic people who have hunted, gathered and fished across the territory for thousands of years. The earliest dated signs of occupation (near the La Grande and Caniapiscau rivers) are 3,500 years old, but archaeologists have estimated that human presence in the area precedes this by 2,000 years (Morantz 2002, p. 29). Following contact with Europeans in the early seventeenth century, the Crees became active in fur trade, with the result that various trading posts established throughout the territory became permanent communities (Francis and Morantz 1983; Scott 1992; Duhaime 2001). Today, there are nine permanent villages in Eeyou Istchee, four coastal and five inland, with a total Cree population of 13,000 people. Despite their long-ranging occupation of the territory, the Crees were excluded from the initial decision-making process concerning hydroelectric development. When Québec Premier Robert Bourassa initially announced the damming of the La Grande River in 1971, he did so without an environmental impact assessment and without consulting with the local population who would be directly affected by the ensuing ecological change.[8] The La Grande Complex consists of eight powerhouses and five reservoirs for a total installed capacity of approximately 12,000 MW. The Crees and Inuit obtained a court injunction to stop the project in 1973 (see Malouf 1973); it was quickly overturned, and construction was resumed, but the court battle and the negative publicity it generated led the government to negotiate a settlement with them which became known as the JBNQA, signed in 1975. While the agreement was generally celebrated by the Québec and Canadian governments as a progressive document that would enable a new era of social and economic development for the Crees, other more critical leaders, advisors and activists have insisted that the agreement is only as good as the context of its negotiation. Seeing that the project was going to go ahead with or without their consent, the Crees and Inuit had little choice but to engage in negotiation. Furthermore, in trying to assert a legal claim to the lands they inhabited, they needed to demonstrate, in accordance with the Québec civil code, that they retained usufruct rights in James Bay, that is, they had to show proof of its continuing use for subsistence purposes as well as of the predominant role of wildlife resources in their economic organisation. As Alan Penn has noted in a critical assessment of the JBNQA prepared for the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, this focus on the preservation of a hunting economy to gain recognition of Aboriginal title in James Bay has had repercussions in the overall design of the agreement: '[The Agreement] was therefore not designed around the needs of an expanding and diversifying native society (Cree or Inuit), and it certainly did not address the problems of equity and participation in the subsequent development of natural resources in the James Bay territory' (Penn 1995b, p. 18). Although the agreement sought to create a framework of resource management where economic development and traditional lifestyles could coexist, the implementation of this vision has been greatly hampered by the pressures, limits and contradictions of the original context of negotiation (Feit 1980; Vincent *et al.* 1988; Diamond 1990; Mainville 1993; Penn 1995a; Saganash 1995).

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[6] Zimmerman 1951, quoted in Le Billon 2001, p. 565.

[7] Different theorists in political ecology have explored the complex interactions between nature and society. See, among others, Blaikie 1985; Hecht 1985; Peet and Watts 1996; Braun and Castree 1998; Keil *et al.* 1998; Castree and Braun 2001; Collin 2002.

[8] *Strangers Devour the Land* (Richardson 1991) has become a standard critical account of these early events. Although all the villages across the territory have experienced the impact of the dams in varying forms, the people of Chisasibi can be said to have been more directly affected by the initial development on the La Grande river since their original village of Fort George was relocated from its island to the mainland. The relocation occurred because of the potential danger that, after damming of the La Grande, the faster debit of the river would increase the rate of erosion of the island's banks.

Another important factor of this initial context is the political atmosphere of the time in Québec. Stretching between the Quiet Revolution and the first referendum for sovereignty, the initial phase of the project (1971–1979) coincided with a wave of nationalism in the province that had its roots in the 1960 election of Liberal Jean Lesage and his 'équipe du tonnerre'. After 16 years of Maurice Duplessis' conservative rule, Lesage's arrival brought about the secularisation of the provincial state and the deployment of a series of in-depth reforms that would gradually redefine social institutions and reshape the character of Québec society, especially for its francophone members. The central plank of his second election platform in 1962 was the nationalisation of electricity, which was advertised as the 'key to the kingdom' that would put the francophone majority of Québec in control of its own territory, industry and development (Hogue *et al.* 1979, p. 277). Since its creation in 1944, Hydro-Québec had gradually expanded its management expertise through the building of other large hydroelectric schemes, notably on the Manicouagan river which showcased local skills in both technical and aesthetic design.[9] The role of Hydro-Québec and hydroelectricity as agents of decolonisation and national pride for the Québécois is well known: in ushering a new era of social and economic development under the slogan 'Maîtres chez nous', Jean Lesage's election prepared the ground for the symbolic role James Bay would play as both an engine and a tangible manifestation of that aspiration (see Hogue *et al.* 1979; Lévesque 1986; Linteau *et al.* 1989). Robert Bourassa espoused this program during his own leadership as Premier of Québec from 1970 to 1976 (he was later re-elected in 1985 after a landslide victory against the Parti Québécois and its leader René Lévesque). Although he was not a separatist, his approach to resources and development was imbued with a certain economic nationalism that was largely congruent with the vision of his predecessor and the buoyant nationalist sentiment it fostered.[10] Thus, during the 1970s and 1980s, Québécois nation building intersected in several important ways with the large-scale building of hydroelectric facilities in what was stereotypically perceived at the time as *terra incognita*: a rugged, uninhabited land and a natural extension—physically, culturally and economically—of southern Québec. Québécois electro-nationalism, therefore, is reminiscent of other earth-moving schemes across Canada and elsewhere, be they related to irrigation, industrialisation or the harnessing and development of other forms of energy. References to the Tennessee Valley Authority (and to some extent the Columbia River system) abound in the discourses surrounding James Bay: what all these projects have in common is that, by virtue of their spatial scale, they support secular nationalist discourses of Promethean modernisation and their attendant practices of territorial conquest (see Worster 1985).

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[9] In all, Hydro-Québec produces hydroelectric energy from a series of installations located on 12 different river sites across the province. See http://www.hydroquebec.com/production/hydroelectrique/index.html

[10] Sean McCutcheon recounts an interview with Bourassa where he stated in awkward English: 'If we want to be a proud, strong people, it's not with independence we will achieve that goal, it's with economic strength. Where Quebec could increase its economic strength? It's with its natural resources, which are almost illimitable. Where we could have those natural resources? It was the North' (McCutcheon 1991, p. 30).

Given this context, the building of a series of dams, reservoirs and powerhouses on the La Grande river was also the production of a new, or at least renewed, political geography for the Québécois nation, one in which the latter would strive to acquire a clearer and expanded image of its North—this more than half a century after the extension of its frontiers to the Hudson Detroit in 1912 (Vincent 1995, p. 118).[11] James Bay occupied an important place in this imaging/imagining of the national territory because it offered a concrete representation of its nature—both symbolic and real—and more specifically of what such a space contained. If Québec was increasingly concerned with the extent and the boundaries of its national territory, that concern can be said to have been performed in James Bay through constant attention to the resources of the land, be they understood as concrete physical entities (mostly water, wood and minerals) or as a more abstract economic potential. As construction works progressed, this attention was no longer the sole province of engineers and planners in charge of calculating the debit of rivers, laying the blueprint of hydroelectric structures or drawing the ecological profile of the area. Indeed, once tensions had diminished in the years following the signing of the JBNQA, the project became more widely visible as a way to educate the broader population about it and, hopefully, alter the negative perception that had arisen out of the initial court battle with the Crees. As dams went up, the slow transformation of the region was something to be watched, and increasingly so closer to the inauguration of the first powerhouse of the La Grande Complex (LG2) in 1979.[12] Fragments of James Bay floated south of the 49th parallel to surface in newspapers, magazines and television screens, thereby assembling its face for non-native viewers in southern Québec.[13] To render the scale of the hydroelectric scheme, many images were taken through aerial photography. In these distant, two-dimensional views, the dams looked neatly fitted into a space that had been cut up to both contain and display them. Gazing at those images, it is easy to forget that their presence rearranges an entire geography—that of the native communities on the ground—from an environmental point of view but also from a social and political one. Yet, throughout the late 1970s and beyond, these representations were often the only ones available to southern residents who were unfamiliar with that part of northern Québec. For that reason, their analysis still plays a crucial role in trying to improve communication between the two communities, especially in the wake of the newest agreement. Detached spectatorship on the part of non-local residents reasserted the colonial imagined geography of the North as a wild, empty space, devoid of local subjects and existing only for the viewer: as the pictorial vocabulary of these images suggests, this intended viewer is gazing North from his/her location in the South.[14]

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[11] The territory of Québec was first extended to the Eastmain river in 1898 and then in 1912 to its present Northern frontier with the 'Loi d'extension des frontières du Québec 1912' (Duhaime 2001, p. 120). Towards the end of the 1960s, a special commission was assembled to study the question of territorial integrity in the province (known as the Dorion commission). The commission advocated the transformation of Indian reserves into municipalities as a way to eliminate territorial enclaves that would not fall under provincial jurisdiction (Vincent 1995, p. 118).

[12] The inauguration of LG2 was broadcast live in a special program by Radio-Canada. One of the objectives of the event was worded as follows: 'Amener les Québécois à partager le sentiment de fierté de ceux qui ont participé à une telle oeuvre, en les associant par divers moyens aux succès de cette réalisation' (S.É.B.J. Relations Publiques 1979, p. 2). René Lévesque, who was Premier at the time, was shown boarding a helicopter and surveying the installations from the air. The culmination of the ceremony was to be his official setting into motion of a first group of turbines in front of television cameras. The event was never broadcast, however, due to a satellite malfunction that lasted for the entire period of time Lévesque spent inside the powerhouse. Hydro-Québec archives indicate that the origin of this technical failure was mysterious and that Radio-Canada would pursue its own investigation (S.É.B.J. Relations Publiques n.d., p. 22).

[13] Before the inauguration of LG2, a 10-month countdown was organised by the project's public relations sector where regular reports in the press, radio and television showcased the last stages of construction and reminded the population that 'la Baie James c'est pour les Québécois'. In addition, an information stand toured the major cities in Québec; it included a slide show, models of the dams and written documentation about the project (S.É.B.J. Relations Publiques n.d.).

[14] For a detailed critique of this 'detached spectatorship' or the interaction between culture and different 'ways of seeing' see Berger 1972; Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Mitchell 1989a,b.

Native communities on the ground were doubly erased in this visual discourse: not only were they absent from such representations of their traditional lands, they were also marginalised as potential—and potentially critical—viewers. If, despite its progressive intentions, the JBNQA 'did not address the problems of equity and participation in the subsequent development of natural resources in the James Bay territory' (Penn 1995b, p. 18), the challenge of rectifying this gap is made all the more difficult by the legacy of these images of the region where native presence is disproportionately absent from the space of dams and development.

Framed in such a way, the hydroelectric landscape could be inserted into a larger imaginative geography of the North that celebrated the ascension of the Francophone settler state into new territories. Using Edward Said's concept, this mode of representation can be understood to function as an 'Orientalism of the North' (Feit 1995, pp. 105–106). In speaking about imaginative geographies, Said reminds us that 'we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate' (Said 1979, p. 71). In the same way that the Orient is constituted as a stage 'whose audience, manager, and actors are *for* Europe', the North that appeared through the building of the La Grande Complex was, I suggest, a space of economic development predominantly scripted for and by the South. Premier Bourassa, who was the chief proponent of the project in its early days, exemplified this kind of geographical bondage:

> Le territoire du Québec est immense et en grande partie inexploré. Pendant que les Américains et les Russes se lancent dans l'exploration de l'espace, il y a sur notre territoire, tout près de nous, à l'intérieur de nos frontières, un des plus beaux défis à relever: la conquête du nord québécois, avec ses rivières tumultueuses qui sont autant de fleuves grandioses, ses lacs immenses qui sont autant de mers intérieures, ses forêts de conifères qui cachent des ressources inouïes en gisements miniers de toutes sortes. Mais il y a aussi sa faune presque inconnue dans le Sud; sa flore qu'il faut inventorier et protéger; il y a l'inconnu irrésistible qu'il faut découvrir. C'est toute l'histoire du Québec qu'il faut réinventer; c'est le courage et la volonté de nos ancêtres qu'il faut répéter au XXe siècle; c'est notre territoire qu'il faut occuper; c'est la Baie James qu'il faut conquérir; nous avons décidé que le temps en était venu. (Bourassa 1973, p. 12)

Bourassa's imagination of the North drew clear political boundaries around it by, as it were, 'spatializing nature'. By this I mean that his own culturally inflected understanding of nature was conflated with the territory and the resources it contains. In this framework, James Bay could only be awaiting development because nature—in line with southern Québec's neocolonial imagination of the North—was constructed solely to be occupied by a modern settler society. Consequently, constructions of James Bay's nature by the South became constructions of who had a right to claim such a space for purposes of (narrowly understood) economic development. The Crees' own modes of occupation and interaction with James Bay and its resources could hardly be represented in this imagined geography since it did not admit multiple frameworks for understanding and interacting with nature, which it regarded as an objective category. While knowledge of James Bay for Southern actors was generated in a particular social context, the sharply unequal balance of power at the time worked to universalise that context and thus predetermine whose knowledge would influence policy decisions in the area. This, of course, is a complex set of relationships that has been widely studied in both academic and non-academic fields, and a fuller engagement with these debates cannot be undertaken here (see Said 1979; Todorov 1982; Mitchell 1989b; Gregory 2001). What is important to emphasise for my purpose here is how cultural constructions of nature are spatialised through development and even more so in a (neo)colonial context. Nature has a historical and cultural depth that cannot be left out of our analysis of the environment and conflicts over resources, no more than it can be left out of the legal frameworks that seek to resolve these conflicts. Moreover, as the struggle between Québécois and Cree people over James Bay demonstrates, political boundaries are made through the environment, because nature is so often the terrain of identity claims and a synonym for the nation. I now turn to another important phase of the project to further explore this point.

James Bay, Act II: Great Whale

Despite the force of the geographical imagination that presented James Bay to the South as solely a landscape of development, for the Crees, of course, the region never ceased to exist as Aboriginal territory. Because of conflicts over hydroelectric development, the political meaning of place has emerged ever more forcefully in the designation of James Bay as 'Eeyou Istchee', our land, Cree land. As in every culture, the concept of land for the Crees is a multifaceted one, expressing long-ranging relations that pertain to modes of ownership and survival, economic organisation, spirituality and cultural continuity across generations. None of these parameters, however, is static or isolated from the changes that have shaped Cree communities over the centuries, be they the result of internal or external forces. A good example of this fluidity is indicated by how the political significance of the land was increasingly gathered into a focal point by the Crees in the early 1990s, shortly after Bourassa announced (in 1989) that the Québec government would go ahead with another phase of the project, involving development on the Great Whale river.[15] Bourassa had been given another mandate in 1985 after making the continuation of hydro development in the North an important element of his election platform. This time, however, he and his government faced a ready opposition by the Crees, led by a new generation of leaders and political organisers who had expanded their structures of governance since the 1970s.[16] In addition, proponents of the project now had to contend with the fact that Cree leaders had forged political alliances that reached well beyond the frontiers of Québec and Canada and were supported by internationally recognised institutions for the defence of Aboriginal rights.[17]

In their opposition, the Crees did not adopt a strictly anti-development stance but rather insisted that any further decisions should respect their autonomy, protect the environment with a view to ensuring cultural continuity and foster greater involvement of local people in the overall process of development (Mulrennan 1998, p. 19). In this approach, the Crees found allies with a variety of non-local interest groups: their association with environmental non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace, the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society is well known during the awareness campaign that brought Great Whale to public attention in Canada and internationally (see Posluns 1993). Yet, to some extent, the opposition against Great Whale also received the support of actors who sought to maintain a public debate on energy and were critical of Hydro-Québec's unchecked authority over the energy choices made by the province (Hazell 1990). Although many people in Québec (notably environmental activists) shared the Crees' concern towards the government's attempt to go ahead with the project without a proper environmental impact assessment, the Crees' appeal to the courts and the media as well as their lobbies with key actors in the eastern U.S. energy markets produced a backlash in the francophone public opinion that projected a highly dualistic and simplified picture of the conflict (see Rioux 1991). Political tension between the Crees and Québécois reached a peak during this period, and racial and other prejudices surfaced on both sides. For the Québécois, the view that the Crees had challenged the 'alliance' they had entered into with the JBNQA by making an appeal to external allies was no small part of this tension. The willful challenging of the old North and South binary in the Crees' search for political allies clearly conflicted with the Québec government's efforts to maintain James Bay as the site of a 'domestic' struggle (Soyez 1995a). Furthermore, by establishing new scales of governance—simultaneously political, territorial and environmental—that linked James Bay to a set of foreign actors, the Crees challenged any claim to the region as the terrain of a single nation in the making, that of the Québécois under which they would have to be subsumed. The fact that they became successful in their approach could only add insult to injury: in March 1994, the New York Power Authority cancelled an 800 MW purchase agreement with Hydro-Québec, and that same year, the project was shelved indefinitely by the recently elected Premier Jacques Parizeau (Mulrennan 1998, p. 17).

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[15] Further development was being undertaken in the La Grande watershed at the same time as the Crees were bringing international attention to the proposed damming of Great Whale. Ironically, the ongoing works at the time were flooding approximately as much land as the proposed Great Whale development would have done, and yet they went ahead without resistance neither from the Crees nor the environmental groups that supported their cause. The fact that the waterways that would be impacted had already been damaged in the first phase on the La Grande is one explanation for this silence. In addition, '[B]y reaching a deal with Hydro-Québec not to oppose "La Grande Phase II," the Cree were making the best of a relatively weak position. The deal enabled regional leadership to make a significant concession to the pro-development minority within their own constituency, and solidify regional opposition to the Great Whale Complex' (Mulrennan 1998, p. 15). Each ideological position adopted by the Cree leadership in their political strategies towards development necessarily called upon different symbolic portrayals of nature and nation. I am grateful to Alan Penn for bringing this to my attention and to Monica Mulrennan for sharing her insight into why this phase did not receive the same amount of political attention.

[16] These structures include, among others, a Cree Regional Authority in each village, a Grand Council of the Crees with its head office in Montréal and a Cree embassy in Ottawa.

[17] Along with about a dozen other Aboriginal groups, the Crees have consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which holds debates on the rights of indigenous peoples. Through this tribune, the Grand Council of the Crees has worked with other indigenous organisations around the world and taken part in international activism centring on the recognition of indigenous rights.

As Jane Jenson and Martin Papillon put it, the Crees challenged Québec's 'citizenship regime' (Jenson and Papillon, 2000), a regime that was established through borders but also through the specific imagination of identity that was enabled by these borders:

> It is through the exercise of, or claims for, citizenship rights and through democratic practices that the borders of belonging and collective identities are defined. This is why challenges to the citizenship regime, which are often challenges to the very definition of the political community—who belongs and under what conditions—are often framed in terms of identity claims (ibid., p. 246).

In James Bay, many of the identity claims of the Québécois have been articulated through nature, with water occupying a central position. The emotional tone of the debate around Great Whale is perhaps the best example of the social investment Québécois people have had in their national identity through territory and territorial resources. Commenting on the Cree lobby against Great Whale in the U.S., Lise Bacon—who was the Liberal Minister of Energy at the time—denounced the Crees for unfairly undermining on the international stage Québec's most sacred institution, Hydro-Québec.[18] Bacon's observation brings into sharp focus the extent to which Hydro-Québec has acted as a conduit for many Québécois identity claims, by mediating the relationship between people and place through large-scale projects, as well as by exporting Québécois hydro-engineering expertise abroad. A slogan popularised by Hydro-Québec during the building of the La Grande project exemplifies the reach of identity into nature, and a natural resource such as water, through the public utilities corporation: 'Nous sommes Hydro-Québécois' ('We are Hydro-Quebecers'). Understood from a non-native perspective, the expression was meant to inspire pride, pride in dominating the natural environment, in the technical feat of building an extensive energy network in a remote region, but pride mostly in accomplishing all of this in French.[19] The conjunction of these two terms—one referring to a natural resource (water as hydropower) and the other to identity (Québécois)—brings nature and nation together into a single signifier (Hydro-Québécois). Another example of this play on nature and national identity can be found in a slogan used by Hydro-Québec in a more recent publicity campaign. The following quote is taken from a magazine ad featuring the Daniel-Johnson dam on the Manicouagan river:

> L'électricité est dans notre nature. Au Québec, 96 percent de l'électricité que nous produisons découle d'une source d'énergie renouvelable: l'eau. Hydro-Québec qui compte 32 000 km de lignes de transport, quelque 51 centrales et 300 groupes turbines-alternateurs hydrauliques, est devenue un chef de file mondial dans le domaine de l'hydroélectricité et du transport d'électricité à haute tension.

The accompanying image is reminiscent of images that showcased the installations on the La Grande river: The dam is viewed from above, and its elegant arches seem to hold the waters of the reservoirs effortlessly as the structure draws a clean, unwavering line across the page. Both the image and the words suggest that, like electricity, the dams that generate electrical power are in 'our' nature and can exist harmoniously within it. This peaceful coexistence, however, depends on whose nature the possessive refers to. Given the history of hydroelectric development in northern Québec, the privileging of one form of knowledge over another—white settler over indigenous—in reference to nature has been synonymous with the recognition of one set of national preoccupations. As is common in European constructions of the nation, Hydro-Québec's appeal to nature circles around notions of essence: the slogan—'L'électricité est dans notre nature'—plays on the double understanding of nature as both the physical space of the nation and the core identity of its members. Nature is a convenient symbol of national identity, since it is purported to always remain essentially the same and is thus imagined to have the capacity to guard against changes in the core of the nation.[20] If nature and nation are complementary symbolic categories, both of them are materialised through the specific resources of the land, which lend themselves to management, exploitation and development. This, as I have already suggested, forces us to rethink water not as an external object to be acted upon by development but as a nexus of relations through which entities such as the territory of Québec, the people of Québec or Hydro-Québec itself, are sources of pride and from which the Québécois identity is formed.[21] Since water is embedded in the land, this brings into focus how—even though they are no longer a predominantly rural people—Québécois society still retains some important ties to the land in the form of natural resources: In that sense, they are perhaps more similar to Cree society than is generally assumed. In the light of this, the recent effort we saw during the last referendum campaign to signify Québécois nationalism as 'territorial' to guard against the threat of ethnic nationalism falls short of its goal (see Venne 2001). As divergent cultural constructions of nature attest—or the countless political conflicts centred on land that have led to open violence—territory is surely the most ethnically charged component of the nation. Finally, what is important to note is that, as these society/nature relations thicken, water becomes ever more closely intertwined with the cultural, economic and political becoming of the people who live within Québec's borders, including the Cree and Québécois. As each group's articulation of the relationship between land, nature and identity demonstrates, their respective cultural constructions of nature produce, as well as call upon, a different citizenship regime. The Cree campaign in stopping Great Whale created the backlash in Québec because it contested the further expansion of Québécois political borders into the North under the rubric of development. In turn, it is the development of natural resources that had been regarded by Southern viewers as exclusively belonging to them that prompted the Crees' opposition to unchecked development in the area and, in the process, the formation of new political ties within and beyond Eeyou Istchee.

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[18] The movie *Power: One River Two Nations* by Magnus Isacsson (Cineflix Productions 1996) chronicles these events.

[19] I am grateful to André Bolduc for helping me trace this expression to the original publicity campaign and for sharing his thoughts on its impact in the context of the time.

The predominance of water in the Québécois national imaginary of James Bay meant that to oppose the 'citizenship regime' that the Québec government sought to expand in native territories, the Crees had to contest the specific constructions of nature that supported this regime, this in addition to contesting the uneven geography of North and South. If Cree and Québécois national boundaries have been drawn around contested notions of North and South, they have in turn been secured through divergent cultural constructions of nature, and natural resources, across the territory. Against the Québécois production of water solely in terms of its hydroelectric potential, the Crees have asserted their valuing of water as a medium for maintaining a different set of social, cultural and economic relations. For Cree hunters, one of the important functions of water was to facilitate travel across the land: 'This river, the great river we call "Chisasibi" was the main concern of our people. And this river was used to travel from one hunting ground to another. This was our people's highway, and today we are not able to use this river as much anymore...' (Great Whale Environmental Assessment 1994). In addition to providing a network of transportation, the layout of the hydrological system offered points of reference for families travelling across the land and meeting other groups at different times of the year. The alteration of that system due to flooding and river diversion has therefore brought irreversible changes to a long-established social structure, although some of these changes may have still gradually come about through the evolving practices of new generations.

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[20] I have explored these questions elsewhere in Desbiens (2000, 2001). For an analysis of the nature/nation dynamic in the Québec context, see also Groulx 1980; Bureau 1984; Handler 1988. For an analysis of the nation as a European construct see Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Bhabha 1990a,b; Smith 1991.

[21] Michael Watts has made an analysis of this process in Nigeria which is particularly relevant to the Québec context in relation to water: 'Standing at the center of the Ogoni struggle is oil which is necessarily and unavoidably artifactual—a product of science, technologies and social relations—and natural (crude black gold). If oil as nature is in a strong sense constructed—oil as a set of discourses, as a form of wealth and value, as an embodiment of social relations in the form of the state and transnational capital—it is also the case that some fundamental social identities—the Ogoni people, the Nigeria nation state, Shell oil company—cannot be understood apart from nature, that is, apart from oil as a natural resource. It is not simply that these central forms of identification are contested on the social and ecological landscape of late twentieth-century Nigeria, it is that all these identifications are, as it were, channelled through nature, through the oil nexus'. (Watts 1998, pp. 245–246).

Over the centuries, material practices on the land have imbued water with an important symbolic value as a primary source of life and there are several examples of this perspective in various Cree testimonies about the impact of the dams: 'Water is also our life. There is life in our waters, if only we understood what the water stands for' (ibid.). There is a strong sense that water, like all forms of life, renews itself and that this renewal is what sustains the balance between all parts of the ecosystem, including humans. This notion is made concrete by the practice of fetching water from a fast flowing water current to 'flush out' the stomach of a baby born in the bush: 'This water was given to the baby to drink to flush out what he had in his system while he was still inside his mother's body' (ibid.). Each of these testimonies redrafts a picture of James Bay that was obscured by the South's overdetermination of water as an object of development.[22] In this picture, water emerges in a different form and speaks of different national preoccupations. If, for the Québécois, water is capable of sustaining the economic life of the province, for the Crees this role of sustenance starts at a more basic level: In the bush, water sustains life at every stage of daily practice. Changes in the quality of that resource affect communities in subtle yet far-reaching ways. At a broader scale, it is the changes in the shape of the landscapes where water is embedded that have the most serious social repercussions. Speaking about the disappearance of a key fishing site (First Rapids or *Upichuun*) due to the building of the LG1 dam, one Cree hunter asserts:

> I didn't want to cross over to the other side because I was afraid. I had never crossed at a place that looked like that. I was too scared when they wanted to drive across (the dam). We had to turn back. We used to get so much food there. Look at what it looks like now. There used to be so many people there. They pulled in nets (kakawpichaanuch). You couldn't see the place (where they pulled in the nets) at all when I saw it. People got so many fish there. People dried fish for the winter (nimaashtaakuch—dried fish). Today, it cannot be done at all, to hunt there (ibid.).

Another Cree hunter echoes this experience when he says:

> So-called economic development does not take into consideration the lifestyle and resources we Cree people have survived on and lived with for so long. Our emotional attachment to the land is not simply a ploy to gain economic concessions. We live and die out there. Our land is our life (Dixon 1995).

Seen through these perspectives, water and development emerge not as objective categories but as cultural objects with a highly subjective value. To be a Cree hunter or a Hydro-Québécois implies the valuing of different qualities in the water and the territorialising of different political boundaries from its use.

In transforming what used to be well-known landscapes of everyday life, the presence of the dams has shaken an overall trust in the wholesomeness of water in ways that cannot be underestimated. Wrapped up as it is in social meaning and practice, the tapping of the water system for the production of hydroelectricity has remade this natural resource into an unpredictable force: as much as water could sustain life, the flooding of land to create reservoirs has understandably made it a source of destruction for many Crees. This remaking of water as life into water as destruction offers an important lens for understanding how a seemingly objective 'natural' element is in fact specific to context and culture: While the two may be interrelated, water in its river form is a wholly different resource than water in the form of a reservoir. The 'abundance' of water in James Bay, which constitutes a rich energetic potential for the needs of the industrial South, has confused what used to be familiar landscapes of practice by erasing the hydrological network that hunters relied on to orient themselves on the land. The accumulation of water behind the dams has transformed it into an unfamiliar element, unrecognisable according to previous cultural maps of the territory. Rendered alien through these changes, water understandably became for many Cree people untrustworthy. Asked about the quality of drinking water in Chisasibi, one interviewee responded:

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[22] This often-quoted passage from Bourassa's book *L'Énergie du Nord, la force du Québec* has become emblematic of the narrow understanding of water that prevailed in the initial phase of the project: 'L'eau qui coule dans les nombreuses rivières québécoises, sans avoir généré l'électricité qu'elle est susceptible de produire, est perdue à jamais' (Bourassa 1985, p. 145).

> I don't drink it. If someone could see what I saw, a person would not think to drink this water either. I saw where this water comes from before the land was flooded. This is from the camps that are inland. They put stuff that looks like blue paint into the water and other colours too . . . it floats in the water. This is why I can't drink this water. There is so much construction there and there is so much stuff going into the water, it goes into the water. This is why people get sick so often. Some people think that they can get sick from drinking this water. Some don't feel well right away after they drink this water. Some feel pain in their stomachs. This is why so many people can't drink this water (Great Whale Environmental Assessment 1994).

This lack of trust was compounded by mercury contamination, which was the result of an accumulation of methylmercury released by plants and trees as they underwent a natural process of decomposition once they were submerged by the reservoirs. Although mercury levels have been monitored since the 1980s in the populations affected (Roebuck 1999, p. 81), the mistrust that pervades the communities simply cannot be countered by scientific reports or medical assistance, since this mistrust is related to the modification of landscapes that were a primary base of knowledge for the Crees.[23] Hydroelectric development in James Bay has produced a profoundly unequal distribution of costs and benefits across the social and cultural space of Québec that further territorial policy must work to rectify.

Yet the most acute aspect of this changed relationship to water is that it has also become the grave of ancestors that had been buried on dry land. Since the Crees moved extensively across the land in search of game, it was common for them to bury the dead in different locations on each hunting territory. Several of these graves are now under water because of the flooding. Although a memorial at LG2 acknowledges their presence in the reservoirs, no sufficient effort to systematically inventory and/or rescue these remains was undertaken before filling up the reservoirs. Therefore, the obliteration of the past felt by many Crees because of the loss of their traplines was experienced at more than one level by the loss of some important markers of their ancestry on the land: 'Our gentle Elders were broken-hearted as they witnessed their way of life being jeopardized—in their face! They saw their great grandparents' burial grounds being drowned by a force they were not equipped to understand. Their way of life on Mother Earth had not prepared them for this type of destructiveness committed by man' (Mianscum 1996, p. 19).

These, and many more, are some of the reasons that make water a radically transformed resource for the Crees and explain why the adaptation to that change remains an ongoing process. James Bay water, which the South often regards as a provider of renewable and 'clean' energy, has been perceived by many of the Crees as alien and unsafe to carry the basic functions of everyday live, especially fishing and drinking. These divergent experiences of water express how differently positioned native and non-native citizens in Québec are in relation to one of the natural resources that is found on the territory they seek to share. For each people, evocation of the La Grande river calls up a different collective past and future. Increasingly, as decision-makers realise, the fulfilment of these futures has given rise to parallel—yet not necessarily mutually exclusive—national projects. When they organised an opposition to the proposed development on the Great Whale river, the Crees voiced to an international audience not only their traditional modes of relating to the land but their current desires for the political future of Eeyou Istchee. Significantly, they expressed these through the medium of water when residents of Whapmagoostui and Kuujjuaraapik built a hybrid canoe/kayak—the Odayak—in their communities and journeyed from Ottawa, down the Hudson river and to New York city to attend an Earth Day summit on 22 April 1990. As one of the organisers of the project put it, the idea for the Odayak was to recreate what had happened to the rivers in James Bay in the consciousness of people in New England and New York: 'I think you can do that by having the people who live at the mouth of the river build a large paddling canoe to become an ark, a symbol of their way of life, their culture' (Posluns 1993; p. 49). The journey of the Odayak was a way to reconnect North and South and show their interdependence with each other. This was particularly important in relation to electricity, which, like most forms of energy used by industrialised societies, is so radically severed from its source.[24] Using water to cross national boundaries and deliver their political message, the Crees have redrawn nature and natural resources in James Bay into a new political geography. They sent a message that elders have repeatedly asserted, which is that: 'Without the Land we cannot govern ourselves' (Elder Robbie Matthew Sr. in Nicholls 1997, p. 11). This close tie that exists between national governance and the natural resources embedded in the land for both the Crees and the Québécois is, I suggest, a factor that needs to be understood more fully if the latest partnership 'from nation to nation' is to fulfil its promises. I briefly explore this new agreement before I turn to my conclusion.

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[23] Regarding Cree knowledge of the land, Tanner makes the important point that: 'This knowledge is to be seen as parallel to, rather than identical with, Western scientific knowledge. Because it is based on intimate and highly practical experience of the environment on which the survival of the Cree depends, it is not a body of knowledge that can be dismissed as uninformed' (Tanner 1999, pp. 122–123). For studies on mercury in the reservoirs, see Penn 1995b; Roebuck (1999). See also the annual reports of the 'Comité de la Baie James sur le mercure' (1987, 1988, 1991, 1992).

James Bay, Act III: Hoping for a New Relationship

One of the important outcomes of hydroelectric development in northern Québec since the 1970s is that it has placed the environment at the centre of the making and unmaking of political boundaries in the region. By refusing southern Québec's constructions of James Bay's nature and natural resources, the Crees have invoked another nature as a reference for political identity.[25] In doing so, they have refused the imposition of a Western construction of the nation and imagined another nature for the community (Anderson 1983). More than the resurgence of a traditional ecological knowledge, I suggest that we view this also as the emergence of a different political practice, one that posits the environment and the intelligent use of resources as the primary fact not just of community but of political identity and governance. For the Crees, and many indigenous peoples around the world trying to retain sovereignty over their lands, existence as a people has become a political project founded in large part on resource conservation. The latter is a message that the Québec government has had to take seriously to negotiate further access to the hydroelectric potential of James Bay. On 7 February 2002, Cree Grand Chief Ted Moses and Québec Premier Bernard Landry signed a new territorial agreement that seeks, once again, to ease relations between local and provincial actors before the building of a new dam on the Rupert river. There is great worry among the Crees and other people in Québec that another dam project will further impact the Crees in negative ways; yet, at the same time, there is also much hope that economic benefits from the project will, this time around, be more equally distributed.

Eighty percent of the people of Eastmain—the community that will be most directly affected by the diversion of the Rupert river and the building of the Eastmain 1 dam and reservoir—have voted in favour of the agreement. As Eastmain Chief Edward Gilpin stated:

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[24] Bill Namagoose, then Executive Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees, similarly reconnected the commodity to its source when he stated: 'There are two ends to a hydro line. There's the luxury end, the comfortable end. Lights, heat, cooking, there's music coming out of the other end of the line. But at our end of the line, we don't hear music. We hear massive destruction' (New England Environmental Conference, Medford, Massachusetts, March 1991).

[25] I have examined Cree and Québécois constructions of nature through the lens of water, but forestry resources have been just as implicated, if not more, in the divergent perceptions and uses of the James Bay territory. A similar comparative analysis of trees could be made to shape more paths of cross-cultural communication. In fact, the new agreement came about as a way of resolving long-standing conflicts over logging and forestry practices that led to court cases worth roughly the equivalent amount of money the Québec Government will transfer to the Crees over the next 50 years (3.5 billion dollars). The new agreement details these court cases and states that: 'The parties agree to take the required measures to bring an end to the pending legislation between them or in which they are involved to the maximum extent possible and so pave the way to a new era of cooperation' (Le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec 2002, p. 38).

> With this agreement we will begin a new and cooperative relationship with the Government of Québec. The Agreement will give us a stake in development. We will receive funding over a long-term that we need for community and economic development projects of various types. While parts of the land will be impacted by this project, we will use some of the funding from the Agreement to help those most dependent on the land to be able to continue our way of life [Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Astchee) 2002a, p. 1].

A consultation process before the final signing of the agreement took Grand Chief Ted Moses, the Chiefs of the nine Cree communities as well as Billy Diamond (former Grand Chief) and Matthew Coon-Come (former Grand Chief and presently National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations) to the nine villages where they spent two days in each community between 9 January and 27 January 2002. On 30 January, Romeo Saganash met in Geneva with the Working Group on the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations to report on the agreement on behalf of the Grand Council of the Crees. He stated that the agreement represented 'the only instance in Canada of a governmental authority recognising and implementing the operating principles of self-determination called for by the Human Rights Committee under ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]' (Grand Council of the Crees [Eeyou Astchee] 2002b, p. 1). Significantly, Saganash highlighted several elements of the agreement that indicate Québec's commitment to develop measures that recognise principles of self-determination for the Crees, as defined by the U.N. Human Rights Committee. These include: indigenous 'consent' for development on indigenous lands; sharing of resource revenue from electricity, mining and forestry; recognition of the Cree people's right to determine their own economic development; and acknowledgement of the existence of a nation-to-nation relationship between the Cree people and the Government of Québec (ibid.).[26] The Grand Council of the Crees also recognises that the agreement seeks to implement recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples regarding access to resources on native territories and sharing of benefits from these activities (Grand Council of the Crees [Eeyou Astchee] 2002a, p. 1). After spending millions of dollars in litigation to have the James Bay and northern Québec Agreement implemented and respected in its 'spirit and intent' by Hydro-Québec and the Québec government, the Crees see in this recent agreement the possibility of a new vision of development based on the cooperation and the mutual benefit of each community (Moses 2001, pp. 2–3). For all these reasons, Grand Chief Ted Moses has stood firmly behind the agreement and lent support to the efforts of Premier Landry's government to move negotiations through:

> We saw that it was in our mutual interest to make the JBNQA work, and that it served no government's interest, or any other interest to prevent its implementation. Our new agreement with Québec is the beginning of a new relationship between the Crees and Québec, one built on cooperation, a will to understand one another, and a *commitment to develop the territory together* (ibid., pp. 3–4, my emphasis).

In these various statements and in speaking of an agreement from 'nation to nation', the two parties have indicated their mutual, or at least desired, recognition as politically empowered groups, with cultural and geographical boundaries that are at once distinct and shared. In front of so much optimism and faith, the stakes are clearly very high for this new chapter of James Bay development. It remains to be seen whether the new agreement will succeed in realising the idealistic vision that brought native and non-native leaders to shake hands in 1975. If the same gesture is being performed once again more than 25 years later, legitimate concerns still exist regarding whether the context of that gesture has indeed been changed by the experience and lessons Northern development has made available to people in Québec. As I have wanted to show, the articulation of national identity, self-determination and regimes of citizenship through nature is one of these lessons that should be taken seriously. In the struggle around hydroelectricity, water has emerged as a resource but also as a social artefact (Watts 1998), that is, an object that is human made and bears the imprint of the culture that created it. As Cree and Québécois people undertake to materialise a new relationship in James Bay, they will continue to carry into this relationship their own nature-as-artefact, as they will no doubt continue to see it transformed through their ongoing cooperation with each other. I believe that it is important not to lose sight of just how 'social' nature can be, whether in the form of a river, a tree or a particular vision of what should happen to these resources through their use and development. Attention and openness to this factor is an implicit goal of the latest, optimistically called, 'Agreement Concerning a New Relationship between Le Gouvernement du Québec and the Crees of Québec'; it cannot be allowed to slip away from the framework of governance that leaders hope to establish in the near future, for to call upon the cultural contours of nature is to open a space of exchange but also to guarantee that the one-sided practices of development that have so far prevailed in James Bay are kept in check by foregrounding their roots and purposes and asking for whose benefit these practices are being pursued. This, I believe, is the largest challenge of the new agreement and one that could easily derail it if not attended to by its key actors, no matter how well intentioned and optimistic they may be.

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[26] As the debates that have already arisen from the new agreement demonstrate, gaining consent among the Cree people regarding further development will by no means be an easy process.

Conclusion

I have discussed how, starting in the early 1970s, the Québec government has deployed a neocolonial approach to accessing the resources of James Bay. This approach was supported by discursive constructions of North and South as two poles that are necessarily related, even if blatantly uneven. In strengthening itself through the nationalisation of electricity and the building of large-scale hydroelectrical complexes, the Québécois nation expanded a geography of resource exploitation that already had a long history in the province. This is a geography that is not particular to Québec but is reproduced, in various guises, across the whole of Canada. What is worth noting in Québec, however, is the force with which the Cree population has subverted this boundary making and peacefully retained some measure of territorial control through its political institutions. In a trend that is irrevocably changing the Canadian political landscape, the Crees have developed a strong international presence, managing expanded political structures, crossing, displacing and redrafting borders to re-inscribe their own national scale inside 'official' borders. This agency is a useful reminder that, for native people who before the arrival of European settlers had their own political structures among separate nations, the borders that now give us Québec, Canada and the United States as political entities have been constructed in a historical context that ignored their presence. Several hundred years later, it is the Crees who now ignore these borders or rather strategically link, unlink or trespass them as they shape a new political geography for the people and the resources of Eeyou Istchee. Faced with the difficulty of gaining an equal voice because of colonial erasure in their own country, they have travelled far from this local context and targeted global partners as well as other native allies in the protection of their environment and way of life. Woven together, these alliances form political scales that keep sovereign—or in the case of Québec, 'would be' sovereign—entities in check regarding native territorial rights. As James Bay illustrates, the political boundaries that were made through colonial conquest are presently being unmade as this conquest continues through the unsustainable use of resources, chiefly because the impacts freely trespass boundaries that are socially produced. As geographer Dieter Soyez (1996, p. 35) puts it: if neither ecological impact nor economic systems respect the frontiers of nation-states, why should the Northern populations that are most affected, like the Crees, do so? And yet, as the new agreement suggests, the Crees have made a renewed commitment to these boundaries by welcoming co-management of local resources, as long as it is not based on superseding their own territorial practices. Reflecting on the issue of Eeyou governance, Losty Manianskum has made the observation that 'ownership of the land implies sovereignty': 'Seen from this perspective, the James Bay Agreement is a structured framework for an ongoing dialogue between the governments of the Cree Nation, Canada and Québec, where competing and overlapping economic, legal, political and social interests can be discussed, negotiated and settled in a mutually respectful, peaceful and orderly manner' (Manianskum 2002, p. 31). This mutual respect can hardly be achieved without an understanding of how political boundaries are themselves 'organic', growing out of nature, while nature, for its part, grows increasingly social in James Bay through resource exploitation and development.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council during this research as well as that of the Izaac Killam foundation. I am grateful to Scott Prudham and to another anonymous reviewer for their extensive comments, which were an invaluable help in reworking the manuscript. Mistakes and shortcomings remain, of course, my sole responsibility.

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