

Ayaawx (Ts'msyen ancestral law): The power of
Transformation

By

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Abstract

The Ayaawx is the ancient law of Ts'msyen people situated on the northwest coast of British Columbia. With principles for spiritual, social, political and economic relations, the Ayaawx has been taught both directly and indirectly in daily and ceremonial living for centuries. The Ayaawx holds transformational change as a natural event in human relationships with each other, the land, and the supernatural world. Yet the Ayaawx is not studied in depth in post secondary institutions in British Columbia or defined as a resource for program development by governments or a reliable resource by us as Ts'msyen people.

Statistical data on Indigenous Canadians is prolific indicating the severity of suffering caused by social and legalized oppression. Indigenous peoples of Canada have received health, social, psychological, psychiatric and educational services from the federal and provincial governments for over one hundred years and yet the suffering remains inordinately high. For example, less than sixty years ago Sm'algyax was spoken by children,

adolescents, adults and elders in Ts'msyen communities and individuals and House Groups knew the protocol for resolving conflicts in families and the community.

The organization and interpretation of this dissertation has been structured here in the format of a contemporary *Adaawx*, (sacred story), with *Sm'algyax*, (Ts'msyen language) as the main reference for meaning when discussing the impact of cultural oppression and in identifying the main principles of the *Ayaawx* that will assist individuals, families and communities in transforming suffering.

Transformation is a common act in *Adaawx*, art objects, dramatizations and song. Woven throughout *Adaawx*, the principles of the *Ayaawx* are a vital resource not only to transform suffering, but it is also a guide to direct all human beings into a progressive future.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of contents	v
List of figures	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Pronunciation guide	viii
Frontispiece	ix
Introduction	1
Sm'algyax: Research Methodology	31
Suwilay'amsk: Our grandparents' teachings	60
The whistle sounds: Adaawx as guide	79
The offense: cultural oppression	101
The journey: Internalized colonization	120
The feat: Respect is the fat	135
Suwilsgüütik: Uniting teachings	159
Sag_ayt k'uluum goot: All together of one heart	177
Conclusion	202
Appendix	217
Bibliography	219

List of Figures

1.	Gwaas Hlaam pole section	[pg ix]
2.	Gwaas Hlaam pole detail	[pg 27]
3.	"Fasting Blanket"	[pg 30]
4.	Ts'msyen social structure	[pg 48]
5.	Delgamuukw pole section	[pg 62]
6.	Halaayt headdress	[pg 78]
7.	Delgamuukw pole section	[pg 109]
8.	Sm'oogyit Tsiibasa pole section, Kispiox BC	[pg 119]
9.	The Cycle of Dependency	[pg 129]
10.	Chilkat woven robe	[pg 132]
11.	Ts'msyen Halaayt mask	[pg 172]
12.	"The Heart"	[pg 182]
13.	"Cedar Bough"	[pg 198]
14.	Gitanyow pole detail	[pg 216]

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Sm'algyax Pronunciation Guide

'	glottal stop
a	as in hat
aa	long a, as in laugh
<u>a</u>	as in father
ay	same as y in sky
b	same as in English
d	same as in English
dz	as in adze (replaces j)
e	as in net
ee	long e sound, similar to "say" (drag out "ay" sound)
g	same as in English
<u>g</u>	"back g" made by closing the top of the throat:uvular
h	same as in English
i	short i sound, as in win
ii	long i sound, as in seed
k	same as in English
k'	"hardk" with glottal closure
kw	k and w at the same time
kw'	"hard kw" with stopped breath
ky	k and y at the same time
<u>k</u>	"back" made by closing the top of the throat
<u>k</u> '	"hard back k"
l	same as in English
±	tip of tongue touches roof of mouth—voiceless
m	same as in English
'm	glottal closure
n	same as in English
o	as in hope
oo	long o sound
p	same as in English
p'	"hard p" with glottal closure
s	as in sand or sh in shape
t	same as in English
ts	as in hats
ts'	"hard ts" with glottal closure
ü	as in rule
üü	long u sound, as in tool
u	with lips unrounded
uu	lengthen unrounded lips sound
w	same as in English
'w	unrounded lips
w	dotted w
x	an h-like sound produced with exhaled breath with tongue in the position to pronounce k
<u>x</u>	pronounced as above but emphasized in the word
y	as in English



Figure 1. Gwaas Hlaam pole section. This is one of many poles in Gitanyow, B.C. and belongs to Sm'ooogyit Gwaas Hlaam of the Lax Gyibuu Clan. This image represents the power of the Ayaawx belonging to the people in relationship with each other (collective), the land and the supernatural world.

Chapter 1: Introduction

A crisis initiated my search to find out why there was so much violence, abuse and addiction in my family. My childhood was the life of diaspora. My parents moved to Victoria from the northern British Columbia coast when I was seven with the intention of providing my four older siblings, my younger brother and me with the opportunity for a "good education." My father's parents traveled from the north to live with us for one to three months during the winter seasons until my fifteenth year. Sm'algyax (Ts'msyen language) was spoken in our home during that time. My mother understood the language and sang duets with my father from the hymnal, but claimed her "tongue was too thick" to converse. My grandmother, Kathleen Collinson, would tell stories about her father, a Raven Chief, Amos Collinson, from Haida Gwaii. She never spoke of her childhood at St. Michael's Anglican Residential School. My grandfather, Henry Vickers, from the Heiltsuk village of Waglisla (Bella Bella), spoke the trading language, Chinook, in addition to Heiltsuk, Ts'msyen and English. He was a trapper and a fisherman. My grandparents met as teenagers at St. Michael's Residential School in Alert Bay, British Columbia. My English-born mother, the first "white"

person and the first woman to be elected as Chief Councilor in Gitx̱aał̱a, was the person who taught me the most about the strength of the Gitx̱aał̱a people. My childhood years of learning about my heritage were brief. The majority of my childhood was consumed by the agony of being the dung on the doorstep. From the outside, our family life appeared progressive with my mother being a schoolteacher and my father securing employment as a longshoreman, B.C. Ferries worker, a journeyman carpenter and a commercial fisherman. From the inside, however, my father's alcoholism throughout my childhood eventually saw my parents lose their fishing boat and their house. Destruction marked our family life. Although of great assistance, psychological intervention was not sufficient for my family or me.

Early in my quest I faced the deep-seated belief that the roots of our problems lay in the fact we were "Indians," which supposedly explained my father's alcoholism and abusive behaviour. This assumption about the inherently defective nature of "Indians" was reinforced by my schools, the Anglican Church, and the larger society around me. I internalized that belief, and for years it clouded my ability to see and think critically about being

a Ts'msyen¹ woman. It took me a long time to understand that even a widely and deeply held belief could be wrong; historically, intellectually, and morally wrong. The suffering throughout my childhood and adolescent years was similar to the anguish my cousins experienced along with many others from my generation who lived in the villages.

Over time, a growing sense of irritation at the uncontested conclusion that our problems were rooted in ethnicity drove me to understand my father's self-destructive behaviour that had damaged so many others. The need to know became a force of its own with no option to refuse the quest. From a Ts'msyen perspective it became clear that the spirit world had placed me on a path, and the support necessary to travel that path would be there when needed.

It may appear that the path went from point A to point D but my journey of quest has been one of transforming thoughts and beliefs; the power of ancestors speaking through an exquisite collection of carved masks and implements; the perfect eloquent closing speech of a Sm'oogyit (chief) who is a chronic alcoholic and a regular

¹. Gitxaala elders teach that we are not Ts'msyen. Ts'msyen refers to people of the Skeena River. The use of Ts'msyen" throughout this dissertation refers to the language territories rather than to geographic location.

at the soup kitchen; the death of my father and the respectful and intimate support received through my wil ksi`waatk (the father's side); two vision quest fasts that brought me to a deeper relationship with God through the environment; learning to use plant medicines; elders who walked beside me briefly to encourage and support the message; and, underneath everything, the desire to be respectful of my ancestors and my home community. The writing of this dissertation is a spiritual journey first-- oppression is a spiritual condition that can only be transformed by a spiritual act.

The Ayaawx (Ts'msyen ancestral law) is rooted in spiritual principles connected to our ancestors and provides guidelines for the future in everyday relationships. The Ayaawx is as old as human relationships with the environment. Nisga'a educator, Bert McKay, along with many other public speakers, emphasized that the Ayaawx was a gift from God.² The social structure, authority, responsibility, and rites are all a part of the Ayaawx. The Adaawx (Ts'msyen sacred stories) give account of the origins of relationships with the supernatural world and the articulation of the principles of the Ayaawx. The

². Nisga'a Tribal Council, *Nisga'a: People of the Nass River* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993) 125.

principles of the Ayaawx are the backbone of feasts (potlatch) and conflict resolution. The principles of the Ayaawx are practical, a spiritual force awaiting a relationship with human beings.

As a spiritual document, the Ayaawx is to be practiced and taught through action and by example first, but more recently, the Ts'msyen, Nisga'a, and Gitx̱san are writing the Ayaawx. Other than what anthropologists have written,³ Ts'msyen scholars have yet to publish a significant body of work on the Ayaawx.

The first challenge in any post-secondary institution became apparent to me as a Master's student, and confronted me again as a doctoral student: the Ayaawx does not fit neatly into a department in any post-secondary institution. After over one hundred years of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in Canada, we have yet to see a post-secondary institution recognize Indigenous ancestral law as an equal frame of reference to European disciplines. We are challenged with the need to understand the principles of discrimination against Indigenous ancestral disciplines and work in partnership to develop courses and programs that

³. Margaret Anderson (née Sequin) and Marjorie M. Halpin are the contemporary anthropologists who have developed the work of their predecessors.

offer Indigenous philosophy, spirituality, education principles and conflict resolution principles. Although I had read articles by Rollo May in the Psychological Foundations M.Ed. program at the University of Victoria, Saybrook faculty encouraged a deeper contemplation of Mays writings. May's books, My Quest for beauty,⁴ and The Discovery of Being: Writings in existential psychology,⁵ provided a window between the Indigenous world and the "western" world. May begins by describing the initiation into the quest with:

I write rather of a new quality of life which had begun with the poppies and spread out to an awareness of the colorful and adventurous aspect of life—the aspect of beauty—which had been there all the time but which I had never noticed. I seemed released from my old compulsions: I felt empowered, freed from all kinds of activities.⁶

May's encounter with the power of relating to beauty resonated with my experience with my chosen quest toward understanding and experiencing the world as a Ts'msyen.

⁴. Rollo May, *My Quest for Beauty* (New York: Saybrook, 1985).

⁵. Rollo May, *The Discovery of Being: Writings in Existential Psychology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983).

⁶. Ibid., 19.

Discussions from 1994 to 1995 with faculty at Saybrook Graduate Institute⁷ in San Francisco, Charles Webel,⁸ Anthony Stigliano⁹ and supervisor, Donald Rothberg,¹⁰ were helpful in identifying the obstacles to merging ancestral disciplines with the academy. These three faculty members from Saybrook introduced me to critical thinking, the philosophy of language, and socially engaged spirituality. They consistently demonstrated attentive critical listening skills by giving feedback that provided a respectful environment to reflect on the recurring themes of Indigenous history as viewed through the lens of a North American in the political, social and historical society.

Listening to Webel lecture about Ludwig Wittgenstein, I came to understand my difficulty with language. Until then, I'd thought being alienated from Sm'algyax had caused my struggle with the English language. Wittgenstein argued

⁷. See Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, <http://www.saybrook.edu> (accessed August 4, 2008).

⁸. For further information on Dr. Webel, see Sage, <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/authorDetails.nav?contribId=522637> (accessed August 4, 2008).

⁹. For further information on Dr. Stigliano, see Teachers College Record, <http://www.tcrecord.org/AuthorDisplay.asp?aid=5086> (accessed August 4, 2008).

¹⁰. For further information on Dr. Rothberg, see Saybrook Graduate School and Research Center, http://www.saybrook.edu/contact/con_fac.asp?bio=13&letter=R (accessed August 8, 2008).

that both the written and spoken word are problematic, as summarized in the motto quote he chose for the opening of his book, "What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent."¹¹ As a scholar, I have wrestled with the language used to examine our history.

In my search for published scholars who could lead me to an understanding of the suffering in Indigenous communities, it was suggested that I read both Foucault and Chomsky's writings on human nature and power. The transcribed debate between Noam Chomsky and Michel Foucault on, "human nature: justice versus power,"¹² can be found on Chomsky's web site. The topic of knowledge, justice and power in their debate was limited to human beings. In their discussion of validity through attribution and evolution toward higher states of intelligence, it became apparent that such limitations in thought would not provide the necessary space for the fluid relationships between humans, animals, the environment, and the supernatural world that grounds Indigenous worldviews. The state of the land in the

¹¹. Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (New York: Vintage, 1991) 155-56.

¹². For a full transcript of the International Philosopher's Project, see Chomsky, <http://www.chomsky.info/debates/1971xxxx.htm> (accessed August 4, 2008).

northwest alone is evidence that we are not evolving to higher states of intelligence.

The space for Indigenous language and philosophy is miniscule. Discrimination in favour of European perspectives continues to discourage or reject Indigenous knowledge. With more determination to find truth than discouragement, I continued to search for the words in the English language that would assist me in naming the social terrain that surrounds us as Indigenous Canadians. The Ts'msyen language would prove to give me the perspective I needed to describe our suffering. Sm'algyax also assists in finding the solutions in transforming suffering. Sm'algyax connects us as Ts'msyen to our ancestors, to Adaawx, and to the Ayaawx and the wealth of our heritage.

Family loss altered my quest-path to the University of Victoria and choosing, due to the nature of the Ayaawx and the inability to confine it to one department, an Interdisciplinary program. The responsibility of merging Ts'msyen perspectives with academic perspectives became my challenge: a personal challenge throughout my life was the merging of my English mother's culture with my Ts'msyen father's culture.

When I first attempted to write this dissertation, there was a gnawing sensation that seemed to be in my gut.

As I consciously sat with "it" (resistance, repulsion, anger, fear, cynicism), there was no particular place of abiding. The "it" was under my skin, in my head, a feeling in my bones and most of all, a darkness in the depths of my soul. Throughout the past five years as I've attended Gitxsan, Nisga'a, Haisla, Ts'msyen and Haida memorial feasts with the writing of my dissertation never very far from my consciousness, the "it" has taken an identifiable shape and form. A form, like Txamsem,¹³ the half human half supernatural being who brought light to the world, has the ability to shift shape, yet unlike Txamsem, the form does not have a heart. The form is not human yet inhabits the human heart. Whether in the stories of our ancients from the Northwest coast or the ancients of other human beings, the outcome of destruction is the same: the destructive force works to vanquish joy, faith and hope. The formless shape-shifting force is named "evil." Evil is a force without goodness, mercy, truth, compassion or love, a concept that can easily be dismissed unless you have experienced the great dark void of this force in your own soul.

¹³. Txamsem Adaawx are about the creation of the world and are not owned by a chief, clan, tribe, or village.

I have since discovered, through Jean Vanier's writings and a keynote lecture he gave in Ottawa at the Canadian Counsellors Association Conference, that I have been seeking a language to describe the anguish common to so many Indigenous peoples in North America. I have been seeking "...the liberation of the human heart from the tentacles of chaos and loneliness, and from those fears that provoke us to exclude and reject others."¹⁴ Yet the words "chaos" and "loneliness" are too soft and cannot capture the horrors in our history.

How does one find freedom from such a past? Where does one search for deliverance? How will we know the key to the door when it is offered to our hand? Where does one find the courage and strength to move toward using the key to unlock the cell door? As I sat in the feast halls, I saw the courage, the wisdom, and the beauty; heard it in the songs and smelt it in the burning cedar being used to cleanse the soul in need. It has been there all along and somehow, I was unable to see the teachings of liberation within my own culture. How did this blindness come upon me?

In 1969 Macmillan published Lakota scholar, Vine Deloria Jr.'s, Custer died for your sins: An Indian

¹⁴. Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (Toronto: Anansi, 1998) 5.

manifesto,¹⁵ giving an account of Indigenous history from an Indigenous perspective. Less than ten years after Deloria published his book, judge and lawyer, Thomas R. Berger's The report of the Alaska Native Review Commission¹⁶ gave voice to the Indigenous people of the northern most regions of North America. With growing public awareness through Nisga'a media strategies, the account of history through Indigenous voice increased with the publication of edited books such as In celebration of our survival¹⁷ and University of British Columbia professor, Paul Tennant's, Aboriginal peoples and politics: the Indian land question in British Columbia, 1849-1989.¹⁸ These books along with the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples¹⁹ (RCAP) published in 1996 with its four volumes of Indigenous history in Canada, provided me with the support to write from a Ts'msyen perspective.

¹⁵. Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

¹⁶. Thomas R. Berger, *Village Journey: The Report of the Alaska Native Review Commission* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1995).

¹⁷. Doreen Jensen & Cheryl Brooks, eds., *In Celebration of Our Survival: The First Nations of British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991).

¹⁸. Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991).

¹⁹. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996).

For me, understanding the process and consequences of the colonization of Indigenous peoples offered a way forward. Opening my eyes to the breadth and depth of the penetration of colonization in my heart and soul has been agonizing.

Words have been my challenge. Scholars have selected words such as colonization to encompass the conditioning imposed on our collective psyche: an imposition that penetrates our depths and shape-shifts from one generation to the next. "Colonized" will never be an adequate word to define our experience of encountering another people. To the colonized here in Canada it has come to such meanings as: the burden of Canadian society; the dung at the doorstep; the quaint; the undesirable; the drunk; the noble savage, a relic of the past. The dark and unspeakable in an Indigenous family, community, or nation's past holds many more descriptions of what it means to be colonized. How could "colonized" be used to describe the death of children who lost their lives to the elements of nature in an attempt to return home from the residential schools? In what situation could "colonized" be used to define the suffering and anguish experienced by the families of the children lost to death, never to raise children of their own? Children, the innocent, the carriers of our future,

were beaten and shamed for being "Indian," silenced and raped, forbidden to see family or attend the celebrations and ceremonies that provide a tightly woven line to the past, assist in living the present and give direction to the future. When would it be sufficient to use the word colonization to describe the injustice of the Indian Act that relegates a people to be "wards" of another people? The word is insufficient and inadequate. "Colonized" is a word used to conceal rather than reveal the atrocities against Indigenous peoples of North America. To use such a word to define the injustices is a dishonour to the souls of those who died under the weight of those injustices in our history.

In my continuing quest I wondered if a Christian spiritual perspective could aid me in my search. I chose to investigate Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton (1915-1968), because he is known for his "popularity and appeal among such a broad spectrum of readers."²⁰ In his Alaskan Conferences, Journals and Letters, he writes about his trip from Gethsemane Monastery in Kentucky to explore the possibilities of founding a hermitage in Alaska. It was

²⁰. David D. Cooper, preface to *Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences, Journals, and Letters*, by Thomas Merton, (New York: New Directions, 1989) Xi.

with despair that I discovered his only entries concerning Indigenous peoples were a few paragraphs about the local Indigenous, the Yakutat and the Tlingit in his letters.²¹ Later on in his Alaskan Conference notes, he mentions studying "some of our own Indians spiritual training."²² There is no specific nation mentioned in his reference, only the words "some of our own." What is meant by these words? Does this mean that he viewed Indians as a possession of the United States? This way of thinking would not be unusual for the average American or Canadian citizen. After all, were we not by law wards of the state?

Prejudice toward Indigenous peoples seeps into all groups in North American society, even into the educated, well-read society of monks. Where, if not by a deeply contemplative monk would I find assistance in finding the truth about our social terrain? In my despair, I thought perhaps it would be necessary to close this door to the Christian church and search elsewhere. Yet Merton's writings on the contemplative life using the Indigenous vision quest fast as an example for "accessing a deeper

²¹. Merton, Thomas, *Thomas Merton in Alaska: The Alaskan Conferences, Journals, and Letters* (New York: New Directions, 1989) 47-49.

²². *Ibid.*, 121.

level of being"²³ offered an understanding of traditional Indigenous ceremony and could not be ignored despite his lack of examination of the history of oppression of Indigenous peoples in the United States. I soon discovered that I had traveled in a circle in my quest for language to discuss where our history of suffering had brought us as Indigenous people and the challenges we face as individuals, families and communities in a world that has changed in drastic measures over the period of only five generations. In my great grandfather's time, the people traveled the Northwest coast by large hand-hewn cedar canoes, marriages were arranged, and Chiefs strategically built their wealth. Has the present made us relics of the past, a conquered and defeated people with a history irrelevant to today's society? Is assimilation into the society of the "civilized" the only rational decision? No, this conclusion cannot and must not be accepted, for if we--we being both the colonizer and the colonized--succumb to such a strategy, we lose principles and perspectives that have the ability to transform the *emptiness* of nothingness to balance. The war we find ourselves thrust into blindfolded is not against human beings, although human

²³. Ibid., 122.

beings and human systems must be held accountable for the wrongdoings of the past and present. Our struggle is against the human weavings of injustice, discrimination and violence creating a robe signifying supremacy of the colonizer over the colonized. The self-proclamation of superiority founded on the notion of progress is the robe that conceals a known and unknown (unknown because the deceased cannot voice their experience), vast number of crimes against Indigenous peoples of North America.

When I first read Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, as recommended by my supervisor at the time, Frances Ricks, I recognized his writing to possess transformative power:

But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity.²⁴

Accepting the culturally oppressive act of colonization to be a human condition rather than the singularity of a racial matter placed me in the same vessel with the colonizer/oppressor. If you have pulled in a

²⁴. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 25-26.

thirty-foot fiberglass canoe or an eight-man scull, you know it is imperative to work together in synchronicity with your companions, focused on physical balance and the course ahead; otherwise, you run the danger of capsizing, going in circles, or veering off the course. Varying degrees of difficulty are encountered when pulling companions do not agree to work toward optimal performance to complete the course. To understand oppression as a human condition is not to negate wrongdoings. On the contrary, it then becomes imperative to resolve conflict through initiated action that has focused attention founded on respect and restoring balance—to pull the canoe in unison.

Recognizing that the penetration of colonization into the depths of my psyche created dehumanization demanded a response from me. Rather than folding into submission to an overall conscious/unconscious conditioned belief of inferiority, or reacting with blindness to the injustice, Freire named the principal mask to be dehumanization. The mask of dehumanization worn by human beings in the dance of oppression represents the destructive energy enacted in colonization. Freire goes on to write:

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power

the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves.²⁵

For the first time, I read a scholarly work that defined my struggle, and simultaneously, pointed me toward the teachings I'd been raised with: a power through dialogue that has provided me with the key to unlock the prison in which I had kept myself. With gratitude for Frances Ricks and Carole Stuart and their willingness to dialogue, and for Freire as the helmsman, I found in my depths not inadequacy but courage, strength, compassion and joy. My quest to find the language had delivered the sacred gift of liberation. The task of writing my findings in a language that honoured my heritage became the next challenge.

In the quest to find the words to begin to describe our struggle as the colonized, I went to the fluent Sm'algyax speakers from my home community of Gitx̱aał̱a on Dolphin Island, south of Prince Rupert British Columbia. As I sat with Doug Brown, Marjorie Brown, and Sampson Collinson to discuss Sm'algyax expressions of oppression, thought, mind, heart, power, freedom and transformation, an old familiar voice arose and loomed over me threatening to dismiss me as unqualified. The rebuke was not from the

²⁵. Ibid., 26.

colonizer now, it was the fellow colonized. I was not raised speaking Sm'algyax, I was not raised in the village and I was not raised in the feast hall. There was no aunt or grandmother to teach me the use of medicines and suwilsgütk (personal cleansing). The voice of judgment declared any attempt would be unqualified without the childhood of growing up in the village: an inauthentic voice if you didn't suffer on the reserve with your relations. Again I recognized Freire who identifies this behaviour when he writes:

But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or 'sub-oppressors.' The very structure of their thought has been conditioned by the contradictions of the concrete, existential situation by which they were shaped. Their ideal is to be men; but for them, to be men is to be oppressors.²⁶

I was ashamed to admit that I looked at other Indigenous professionals as inferior to the non-Indigenous professionals, yet when I experienced the discrimination projected onto me I cried unjust! Recognizing the voice that dismissed me as "unqualified" to be a dynamic of oppression eased my anxiety.

²⁶. Ibid., 27.

Growing up away from my Ts'msyen, Heiltsuk, and Haida roots has proven to be a loss. However, the suffering throughout my childhood and adolescent years assists me in relating to the suffering experienced by many other Indigenous people, fluent or non-fluent speakers who live in the villages or urban environments.

With the voice that claims I was not trained in our cultural ways as a child, I am quick to agree. Yet, it would be a dishonour to the many teachers over the past seventeen years if I were to remain silent regarding the gifts they readily gave when I asked for assistance. Not all of my teachers are Ts'msyen, for in my hunger for knowledge to resurrect loomsk (respect), and transform my suffering, and direct not only myself but my four children towards peace, there have been many generous teachers both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

This dissertation is dedicated to my children and my grandchildren. These pages hold all that I wanted to know when I was a child and adolescent attempting to make sense of the non-sense in my home and in the environment that surrounded me. Through the anguish that residential school brought to my father and his mother's lives I learned to be ashamed of being "an Indian." Through schooling I was told at ten years old that I had to be an example for other

Indians. Why? Was it because I was fortunate and they, who lived on the reserve were not? Through the church, my ethnicity was ignored or denied; in that environment, it was best not to acknowledge that my father was an alcoholic. Why? Perhaps then church members would have to face their racial prejudice, a contradiction to the teachings of Christ. At the time, it was simply best to avoid such realities. The turmoil within the walls of our house was not so easily examined as the exterior world.

My father struggled with personal beliefs of his inadequacy. His childhood experiences had deeply marred his psyche. His spirit was unable to transform the reality that residential school had inflicted on him as a child and polluted his ability to respect other human beings. Residential school is not simply an event that haunts the generations of the past one hundred years. Indigenous children witnessed and experienced crimes no child should ever experience. Residential schools throughout North America spawned self-hatred and unfortunately, the Indigenous self-hatred has reached the children of today with its wretched beak. Like in the *Adaawx of Glass-nose*,²⁷

²⁷. National Museums of Canada, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987) 107. The *adaawx* comes from

my father was split in half and he was never transformed back again. I write this document to confront such a mindset, such a monster that has pillaged the sacred innocent, leaving in our homes despair and confusion.

It was not enough to take children from their parents to assimilate them into an unjust society, conditioning them to the belief that power over another is the supreme power to espouse. Laws were made to prohibit any attempt to free us from such a curse. The banning of the potlatch in 1884 enforced by police was an attempt to force us to submit to the federal government's assumed authority. In 1927 we were not permitted to raise money to retain a lawyer to fight for our ancestral lands, lands that spoke to us from the supernatural world and of the adventures of our ancestors. The struggle for freedom has been a long arduous war, a war that is fought primarily in the mind.

Transforming our thoughts of self-hatred to respect means that we must look to our ancestral teachings, to our Adaawx and the Ayaawx. We need to turn toward our fluent speakers as the rich resource that they are to enlighten us in the meaning of words and phrases that hold the mindset

the village of Gispaxloats and tells of a monster with a glass beak that splits disobedient girls in half and hangs them to dry in the smokehouse. Later, a young healing shaman princess brings them back to life.

we need to find freedom. We need to learn the history of Indigenous people in our country, to have the timeline burned in our minds. We need to hold ceremonies to honour those who dedicated their lives to help us find freedom. We need to encourage the young people who are now learning ancestral songs, young men like William Wasden in Alert Bay and Chris and Lance Nelson in Bella Coola. We need to be holding gatherings that encourage the medicine people, affirming them in their work to strengthen the power of love.

This dissertation is intended to be a tool in the spiritual war that must be fought by not only Indigenous people, but by all people. We must fight it to be connected to the spirit in the land that nurtures wisdom and a compassionate heart. We are now living in a world that is more concerned with having than being. We live in a country that is not telling the whole truth about our history. Part of our history is a dark, depressing history that has caused so many to drown in alcoholism and drug addiction.

As the Indigenous, we must not accept the rationale that we are suffering because we have lost our culture become our truth. The notion that we have lost our culture is a colonial fabrication. We are suffering because we are oppressed and our suffering maintains the power of the

oppressor. For without our suffering, they cannot maintain their power over us. The oppressor is not limited to the federal government with the Indian Act and the legal procedure of Treaty negotiations; the oppressor is pervasive and not easily identified. Oppression is the absence of Indigenous perspectives in the educational system at every level. Oppression can be found in the Christian churches where our traditional ceremonial ways remain defined as quaint and marginalized. Oppression can be found in journalism that focuses on the despair without documenting the history. Oppression can be found where non-Indigenous people are considered better qualified to present our history. We must no longer blame our suffering on what the federal and provincial governments and Canadian society have and have not done to cause or alleviate our suffering. Our strength to transform such suffering must come from our ancestral teachings, not from the power definition of the oppressor. We are slowly taking on their power definition and are oppressing ourselves. The result is violence in the family. To transform this reality we must, as many spiritual leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and Thich Nhat Hanh, have taught--choose the disciplined pathway of love. Our

journey begins only when we reclaim this wisdom of our ancestors.

The subsequent chapters are in the format of a contemporary Adaawx that discusses our history and the need to transform our current state of imprisonment in internalized oppression. Following the overview of the methodology used, the next chapter is intended to orient the reader to our ancestral teachings and social structure. The remaining chapters are ordered from discussion of the importance of the Adaawx as a carrier of the principles of the Ayaawx, cultural oppression as the offense; to internalizing the power definition of the oppressor; identifying łoomsk (respect) as the fat from Mountain Goat offered by Mouse Woman to transform our collective and individual suffering; merging spiritual teachings that will assist in transforming suffering to peace and the need to unite with one heart; concluding with suggestions for acknowledging, understanding, practicing and teaching ancestral law.



Figure 2. Gwaas Hlaam pole detail. Detail of pole belonging to Sm'ooogyit Gwaas Hlaam, Lax Gyibuu from Gitanyow, BC (author photo adjusted). Our ancestral teachings emphasize the need to look with openness and intention, to look from the heart and the mind.

Peradventure

I was born from the Sodom & Gomorra
 Of my country's greed
 The burning accumulation
 Of my country's greed
 The consummated degradation
 Of my country's greed

I was nursed on the salt breast of Lot's wife
 Of my people's suffering
 Suckled on the nipple of agony
 Of my people's suffering
 Gazed into the salty hollow eyes
 Of my people's suffering

I was raised in the fire of destruction
 With my ancestor's blood on my hands and my feet
 Breathed the smoke of corruption, devastation and deception
 With my ancestor's blood on my hands and my feet
 Cried in the corners of the nation's darkness
 With my ancestor's blood on my hands and my feet

I was raped then married to colonial oppression
 Split in two by the principles of hatred
 Bore the offspring of victim-hood
 Split in two by the principles of hatred
 Fed the household of internalized injustice
 Split in two by the principles of my country's hatred

In my broken, raging, twisted, damned emptiness
 My exile to the margins of your unconsciousness
 My imprisonment to your broad ignorance
 My enslavement to your single-eyed bigotry
 My alienation to your kindness
 I fell down to the bottom

Abraham's angels found me

I was born from the northwest coast
 Where gale force winds whipped tree-long canoes on crests
 of thunder
 Where mariners wore cedar-bark hats
 Where mile high waves searched sea-traveller's souls
 Where sun-scorched brown-skins met reflections of courage

Journeying to distances unknown

I was nursed on the breast of tenderness
On sweet milk from berries picked
Caressed with the soft worn hands of root-diggers, bark
peelers, medicine makers
Rocked to the songs of stillness, quietness, gentleness
Carried near the beating, pounding heart of courage
Lovingly wrapped on the back of the women

I was raised by the heart of the hunter
Whose eyes could bring down a seal, sea lion, deer, goose
Near the shovel of a clam digger, canoe carver, masked
dancer
By the hand of the halibut hook, fishnet, fish-trap maker
To the drumbeat of the nox-nox dancer
In safety led by the steps of the warrior men

I am married to the principles of the Ayaawx
I bore the children from lineage that stretches to the
morning star
I feed the household of warriors of peace, wisdom weavers,
soul retrievers, creation speakers
I keep the fire in the house of the ancients
Eat at the table with the family born from raven's light
Rest in the village on the northwest coast²⁸

²⁸. © Patricia June Vickers, October 20, 2005.



Figure 3. "Fasting Blanket." The blanket is the combined art of R.H. Vickers and the author. The blanket represents respect for the fundamental relationship of humans with the land and supernatural world through fasting and prayer.

Chapter 2: Sm'algyax: Research Methodology

My course requirements provided an opportunity to study the contemporary writings of anthropologists Margaret Anderson (néé Seguin), Marjorie Halpin, John A. Dunn, and Marie-François Guédon, as well as Adaawx recorded by William Beynon and Maurius Barbeau in the Tsimshian Narratives²⁹ and the Columbia microfilms. However, the most important research was not found in textbooks, anthropological writings, or even conversations with anthropologists. The crucial key to articulating my understanding of the significance of the Ts'msyen way of being came from analyzing ancestral teachings within the context of personal relationships with my Gitxaała grandmother, Heiltsuk grandfather, and English mother. My mother's admiration for the strength and hospitality of the Gitxaała people pointed the way to the necessary community-based research for this articulation. Dialogue with the fluent speakers from my home community of Gitxaała, and the Nisga'a leaders Frank Calder, Rod Robinson, and Bert McKay, and matriarchs Millicent Wright, Adele Gosnell, Gitxsan chief, Vi Smith and Gitxsan scholar and teacher, Dr. Jane

²⁹. National Museums of Canada, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987).

Smith also assisted in my understanding of the Ayaawx and Adaawx and the Sm'algyax language. These terms will be explained more fully below.

I resisted the method of designing the research founded on "the question." There was no question concerning the connection between oppression and suffering of Indigenous Canadians; this is a current and historical fact. Not understanding my resistance to framing "the question," I continued to read and to converse with elders and fluent speakers about Ts'msyen words and phrases for suffering, obstacles, freedom, thought, emotion, spiritual balance, soul loss and transformation. The inability to articulate my relationship to Sm'algyax as a non-speaker was and continues to be beyond words, therefore, poetry and painting became the discipline that enabled me to communicate such a loss and the radical discovery that in spite of the losses, ancestral teachings are the roots of my way of being. I discussed the protocol we have as Ts'msyens for gathering, interpreting, and integrating information with the speakers who were employed by the Prince Rupert School District and the University of Northern British Columbia. Gitx̱aał̱a speakers, Marjorie Brown, Douglas Brown, and Sampson Collinson had all completed linguistic courses that trained them to read and

write Sm'algyax and were practiced and skilled in translating English to Sm'algyax. It was also necessary for me to explain to them that my intention was to reference our ancestral teachings as the main source for transforming our suffering, and that I believed our language was the key to understanding the Ayaawx and Adaawx. Although I was unable to articulate my belief clearly during the early stages of my doctoral studies, I believed the answers were in the community – with the people who had been taught by their grandparents.

In the first year of my doctoral program at the University of Victoria, through the guidance of my supervisor, Frances Ricks, I came to understand my resistance through reading Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the oppressed.³⁰ The writings of Freire that are central to transforming my personal beliefs of inferiority as an Indigenous Canadian are strategically referenced throughout this dissertation. It is difficult to write now without my encounter with Freire's writings for I have integrated his teachings and they are woven throughout my thoughts and perceptions. Any word or phrase – spoken or written – that clearly and simply teaches that suffering is a result of

³⁰. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

unjust power exerted over others and must be changed, is aligned with the teachings of the Ayaawx. Through Freire's writings, I came to understand that my experience as an Indigenous Canadian is a dynamic of oppression, and as such, emerge repeatedly in human relationships around the world. My task and challenge was to find the essence of our ancestors' teachings of respect to unite them with common strands from other teachings such as Freire, Christianity, and Buddhism. These teachings of non-violence align with the principles of the Ayaawx.

Rather than viewing non-Ts'msyen references as strands that weaken the connection to our ancestors, as our Ayaawx teaches us, respect strengthens our connection to the power of life in and around us. Rather than rejecting Freire's writings and excluding his vital teachings because he was "white" and therefore irrelevant, I wove Freire's principles into my life and they transformed my belief of personal inferiority. Like the Adaawx from the Gitsees Tribe, about the bears and the princess,³¹ the supernatural

³¹. Marius Barbeau, ed., *Totem Poles According to Crests and Topics, Vol. 1*, Bulletin 119, Anthropological Series No. 30 (1950; repr., Hull, QC: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1990) 193-202.

This Adaawx is about a princess who is disrespectful toward bears, is abducted by them, and is married off to the Bear Prince.

power in Freire's teachings transformed my reality: his teachings were key to assisting me in moving from the confining, dark world of the oppressed to the open, optimistic world of a human being. Freire's teachings enabled me to write to all human beings rather than to Ts'msyen people alone: transformative teachings *include* rather than *exclude*, which perpetuates the divisive dynamics in oppression.

The violence and trauma from my childhood in the setting of cultural oppression escalated with tragic consequences, culminating in self-initiated psychological intervention at The Meadows Treatment Center³² in Wickenburg, Arizona. Through required readings in the treatment program, I absorbed publications by family therapist authors John Bradshaw³³ and Virginia Satir.³⁴ I was one of only two Indigenous clients in a community of eighty, and it was a revelation to observe that the violence and trauma in my family of origin was not limited to the Indigenous, as I had been conditioned to believe.

³². See The Meadows, <http://www.themeadows.org> (accessed August 5, 2008).

³³. John Bradshaw, *Bradshaw on the Family: A Revolutionary Way of Self-Discovery* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 1988).

³⁴. Virginia Satir, *The New Peoplemaking* (Mountain View, CA: Science & Behaviour Books, 1988).

Through addictions-based counseling, Gestalt and cognitive/behavioural group therapy, community meetings, 12-Step group meetings, Spiritual guidance through their chaplaincy services, reading assignments, and family therapy, I came to understand that my personal experience with violence and trauma in childhood was shared with other human beings as well, regardless of ethnicity. This personal therapeutic work tilled the fertile ground to be ready for Freire's seeds of wisdom to take root seven years later.

The successful treatment program made me eager as a teacher to introduce basic communication skills to my elementary school students. The suffering the Gitxan children experienced was similar to my childhood suffering. A foundational belief of inferiority was still being passed from one generation to the next: parents were reluctant to participate in school events due to their history of trauma in residential and federal day schools. As I came to understand the impact of our history on the children, it became personally necessary for me to return to university to complete a Master of Education in Psychological Foundations in order to target the imposed colonial belief system of inferiority in the schooling of Canadian children, adolescents and adults.

The Psychological Foundations Program at the University of Victoria introduced me to Erik H. Erikson's work with Indigenous peoples in the United States. As the Erikson Institute reminds us, the German-born Erikson was "first to develop the idea that children are not simply biological organisms that endure, nor products of the psyche in isolation. Rather, they develop in the context of society's expectations, prohibitions, and prejudices."³⁵ Generations of Indigenous children have grown up under society's expectations of failure, prejudices that discriminate in favour of European ancestral teachings, and required readings of prohibitions such as school textbooks that covertly thwart escape from oppression to freedom. It was heartening to read in Erikson's posthumously published lectures, Insight and responsibility: lectures on the ethical implications of psychoanalytic insight, a reference to "an old Shaman woman" as a colleague.³⁶ He identified depression amongst the confined American Plains Indigenous nations as being related to identity loss and uprootedness³⁷

³⁵. See Erikson Institute, <http://www.erikson.edu/erikson.asp?file=eriksonbio> (accessed August 5, 2008).

³⁶. Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility: Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytic Insight* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964) 55.

³⁷. *Ibid.*, 87.

thus challenging and negating the belief that we are inherently a lazy and aimless people.

For my second Master of Education practicum, in Arizona, where I could acquire practical knowledge through personal experience of the Navajo and Apache traditional ceremonies and rituals, I was referred to the writings of Jewish physician/psychiatrist, Carl Hammerschlag. Hammerschlag's The dancing healers, a doctor's journey of healing with Native Americans³⁸ refutes the drunken Indian paradigm by presenting powerful case examples of the Indigenous as a valuable resource of wisdom and knowledge of ancestral methods that are of importance to physicians. In his discussion about the mind with Hopi holy man, Herbert, Hammerschlag writes,

Herbert explained it this way: "We are like long, thin stalks of corn capped with a single gigantic ear. If the head gets too big, the stalk cannot support it. Universities pay attention only to the heads and no attention to the stalks." It is the stalk that carries the spirit to the head. According to Herbert, we have to learn from the ground up. We must be firmly rooted in the earth, because it is the real teacher. All 'heads' need to be solidly connected to their 'roots.' To learn effectively, both the stalk and the roots must be nurtured.³⁹

³⁸. Carl A. Hammerschlag, *The Dancing Healers: A Doctor's Journey of Healing with Native Americans* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988).

³⁹. Ibid., 29-30.

My goal in writing this dissertation was to strengthen my stalk so that the fruit of my studies would be nurturing for all who would read it.

These personal and academic studies made clear that the colonial designation of Indigenous peoples as inferior was not true, and, furthermore, that the suffering in our communities was in large part due to an unjust system creating an environment that discriminates against Indigenous peoples. The suggestion from a professor to write a concise description of Ts'msyen pedagogy for a directed studies course, as a beginning to correct this imbalance in the system, proved to be difficult and challenging. It was at this point in doctoral studies that I was first introduced to Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire's teachings became the soil to nourish the Fireweed plant I came across on campus as a Master's student at the University of Victoria. The plant, found in June and July in Gitx̱san, Nisga'a and Ts'msyen territory, a vibrant hue against its stark surroundings, had pushed its way through pavement in the Sedgewick parking lot. I began to understand that the oppression I was experiencing as an Indigenous student was not due to intention, but to conditioned ignorance. I understood that my difficulty came from the assumption that Ts'msyen pedagogy could be defined

in a twenty-five-page paper. Believing that my Ts'msyen ancestors had something to offer not only for myself, but for society as well, was a vital and necessary step for me to begin the journey of transforming oppression to freedom. Applying Freire's teachings in dialogue with professors Ricks and Stuart was the catalyst for seeking answers for transformation through believing in the teachings of my ancestors. Words then became the sharp-bladed tools used to carve the shape and form of the world that defines a Ts'msyen way of seeing and being.

Words are similarly the tools of linguist, John Asher Dunn, who has studied and recorded Sm'algyax speakers, Ts'msyen Adaawx and Ts'msyen history for over thirty years. He is responsible for the first Sm'algyax dictionary,⁴⁰ and continues to research and consult in the development of the Ts'msyen language programs in the Prince Rupert area. My first formal research field trip was to Oklahoma City to meet with Dunn to discuss Sm'algyax words and phrases that would assist in understanding the way in which we, as Ts'msyens, would define our state of oppression. Dunn has recorded his own voice speaking Sm'algyax phrases and

⁴⁰. J.A. Dunn, ed., *Sm'algyax: A Reference Dictionary and Grammar for the Coast Tsimshian Language* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

reading Adaawx. Fluent Ts'msyen speakers have commented on the inability to differentiate between Dunn and a fluent Ts'msyen Sm'algyax speaker.

In my still-colonized way of thinking, I had believed that Dunn, as a professor, researcher and scholar would have the ability to guide me into the Ts'msyen mind through his knowledge of the language. Instead, I discovered on the first day of research that Dunn went to the dictionaries in the same manner in which I had. Although Dunn spoke the language perfectly, had studied our Adaawx, interviewed many elders, and studied the Beynon manuscript, he was a linguist: he was not raised to *think* as a Ts'msyen.

During my week of study with Dunn, he taught me to read Sm'algyax, amazed at how easily I formed the sounds. But as I read Adaawx in Sm'algyax, I could hear my grandmother's voice in my ear pronouncing words and phrases as she told stories and spoke with my grandfather, uncles, and father. I remained unable to cogently articulate my reality as a Ts'msyen, a problem shared by many who have experienced alienation from ancestral language and teachings caused by colonialism.

In my search for a Ts'msyen perspective through the use of Sm'algyax, Dunn directed me to The Beynon

Manuscript⁴¹ on microfilm, Prince Rupert School District's language series,⁴² Sm'algyax: a reference dictionary and grammar for the Coast Tsimshian language,⁴³ and the Nisga'a Dictionary.⁴⁴ The central research focus in Oklahoma with Dunn was to discern the meaning for words referring to the emotion of fear, relationship words such as, obey, mistake, suffering, power, shame, and taboo, and words that relate to thought and transformation. During research with Dunn, it became clear to me that if a linguist can speak a language flawlessly, it does not automatically follow that a linguist will *think* like an Indigenous speaker. Research in Oklahoma proved to be fruitful not only because Dunn taught me to read Sm'algyax, but also the discovery that I had believed that a non-Ts'msyen scholar would be more reliable in assisting me to understand a Ts'msyen perspective than fluent Ts'msyen speakers. Although Dunn

⁴¹. William Beynon, transcriber, *The Beynon Manuscript*, Microfilm E99.T8 B49 1980 (New York: Columbia University, 1980). The collection was abstracted and arranged by Franz Boas, and consists of Tsimshian history, ethnography, and literature. See also University of Oregon Libraries, <http://libweb.uoregon.edu/govdocs/micro/native.htm> (accessed August 5, 2008).

⁴². Published for the Ts'msyen language programs and approved by The First Nations Advisory Council of School District #52.

⁴³. Dunn, *Sm'algyax*.

⁴⁴. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, *Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Haniimagoonisgum Algaxhl Nisga'a: Nisga'a Dictionary* (New Aiyansh, BC: Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 2001).

himself did not claim himself to be “the” expert on a Ts’msyen worldview, I had been conditioned to believe that, as a scholar with a post-secondary degree in linguistics, he would be superior to Ts’msyens without a post-secondary degree.

As I read in Sm’algyax the Adaawx of the sea otter hunters, I came to understand that words clearly indicated a relationship among humans, animals and the supernatural world. The words themselves, words and phrases such as,

Ada ‘nii wil ga waalsga naaga t’in süwiliin ploon
ligi k’oon a ga laxst at hoysga na aksa wooms
adat k’awn na maasa wooms. [Translation] This
they would first do the ones who went to hunt sea
otter or fur seal they first bathed they used the
juice of the devil’s club and they chewed the
bark of the devil’s club.⁴⁵

The word “wooms” is more than merely a word for the devil’s club plant. It is a symbol that reminds Ts’msyens of the need to respect animals, plants, the land, and other human beings through purification. The symbols and spoken words are not only a reminder, but also a doorway for Ts’msyens to enter into a place of power where our ancestors have journeyed. Through Dunn’s generosity, I had a profound experience in learning to read Sm’algyax.

⁴⁵. Tsimshian Chiefs, *Adawga gant wilaaytga gyetga suwildoock (Rituals of Respect and the Sea Otter Hunt)* (Prince Rupert, BC: First Nations Advisory Council, School District #52, 1992) 1.

Perhaps it could best be described as an orphan returning home to a welcoming and compassionate family. I experienced a memorable sense of belonging.

To expand and clarify the research in Oklahoma, I traveled to Prince Rupert to meet with fluent speakers from my home village of Gitx̱aał̱a. Three months following my meeting with Dunn, I requested the assistance of Gitx̱aał̱a speakers, Marjorie Brown, Douglas Brown and Sampson Collinson to review the work completed with Dunn. They instructed me to deliver the work to them prior to our meeting and insisted that they work together to help me. I began my research with the three speakers by outlining Freire's description of oppression and my intention of writing a dissertation founded on a Ts'msyen perspective, using Sm'algyax as the pathway for the journey of a contemporary Adaawx. The focus with the speakers was expanded through discussion, to include how as Ts'msyens, we believe change occurs. The following words were discussed and used in context: T'ilgoot= mind, t'ilgoolsk=thoughts, thinking, dilgoolsk=centre of your thought, stays in your mind, ha t'agm t'ilgoolsk=bad thoughts, lułootk=to represent and when referring to the will, the three concluded that the will is an individual's strength that comes from the heart, the ability to exercise

one's power: 'Nii int dax'yaagwa gatgyet dmt wila sihayaga go wilaayda 'wah aamt a na diduulst: He/she is the one who holds the power to correct things he/she knows that are wrong in his/her life.

There isn't one particular word for reality, instead, the speaker or writer describes a process through a story. Doug Brown gave the example, Ha'hangoogida 'tguwoomik adat 'han'wilaagwa na diduulstk, adat lumaga ha'tagm goot, gal ksiyaakida gaw'a, adat da'axga silm sihayaga na diduulst: He destroyed the child and destroyed the child's life, and put in him/her anger, he/she went through this and was able to correct his/her life. Gatgyet is the Ts'msyen word equivalent to the English word, power. Gatgyet is a strength that comes from the heart.⁴⁶

Research with the fluent speakers, reading Adaawx written in Beynon's manuscript,⁴⁷ and Delgamuukw's address to the Crown,⁴⁸ all clearly indicate the connections among humans, the land, animals, plants and the supernatural world. Thoughts and the condition of the heart are not restricted to existing between human beings as living

⁴⁶. Fluent speakers, meeting with author, Prince Rupert, BC, January 8, 2004.

⁴⁷. Beynon, *Manuscript*.

⁴⁸. Gisday Wa & Delgamuukw, *The Spirit in the Land* (Gabriola, BC: Reflections, 1992).

organisms; rather, the human being is one part of the surrounding environment; it is a living environment. The condition of my heart is intimately connected to and relates to my thoughts and my physical well-being, but not only within myself; my well-being is also connected to and in relationship with the environment around me. The Nisga'a would define this as spiritual balance. This definition is summarized in their School District reader text, From time before Memory,⁴⁹ under the heading, Basic Spiritual Beliefs of Nisga'a:

[E]very person has a soul. They also believe that every plant and animal has a spirit similar to those that people have. Nisga'a also believe in other spirits called Naxnok. Naxnok do not live in plants or animals; they exist simply as themselves...Nisga'a believe that they share their valley with these spirits. [T]o be successful, a person has to obey the law and be hard-working and clean. It is important for each person to have courage and strength. The most important goal for the Nisga'a is to live in "balance" with people and spirits they share the world with.⁵⁰

Ten years ago, access to the teachings of the Ayaawx was more difficult than today. The Nisga'a and Gitxsan, through the land question process, and the Ts'msyen Language Authority under the assistance of

⁴⁹. School District #92 (Nisga'a), *From Time Before Memory* (New Aiyansh, BC: School District #92, 1996).

⁵⁰. *Ibid.*, 145.

writer, Kenneth Campbell, have been leaders in making the Ayaawx accessible. Scholars such as myself, who were not raised to speak Sm'algyax or to attend the feasts, can now find information in books and school texts in Ts'msyen, Nisga'a and Gitx̱san territories. Initially, my search for "cultural identity," was inspired by the need for a sense of belonging following the disorienting impact of extreme trauma. Jane Smith⁵¹ and Vi Smith⁵² encouraged me to attend Gitx̱san feasts and participate in Jane's Gitx̱san language classes from 1990 to 1994. The teachings of the Ayaawx, now written in published books, are accessible to anyone interested in learning the ancient principles.

Learning and practicing the principles of the Ayaawx does not necessarily mean that an individual is a functioning participant in the Feast Hall. In order to be a recognized participant in the Feast Hall, it would be necessary for the individual to either be born into a Waap (House), or be adopted into a Waap by a Chief or high

⁵¹. Jane is from the Lax Gyibuu Clan and lives in Old Hazelton, BC where she teaches elementary school and offers evening Gitx̱san language classes to anyone interested.

⁵². The late Vi Smith was a member of the Gisgaast Clan and spent ten years with Gitx̱san elder Marie Wilson researching Gitx̱san history for the *Delgamuukw* court case.

ranking member who is able to afford to feast. The social structure of Ts'msyen society is hierarchical in theory but the Chief is responsible to his House, territory, and Tribe. Responsibility to the House encourages acts of respect. Our relationship can be diagrammed as follows:

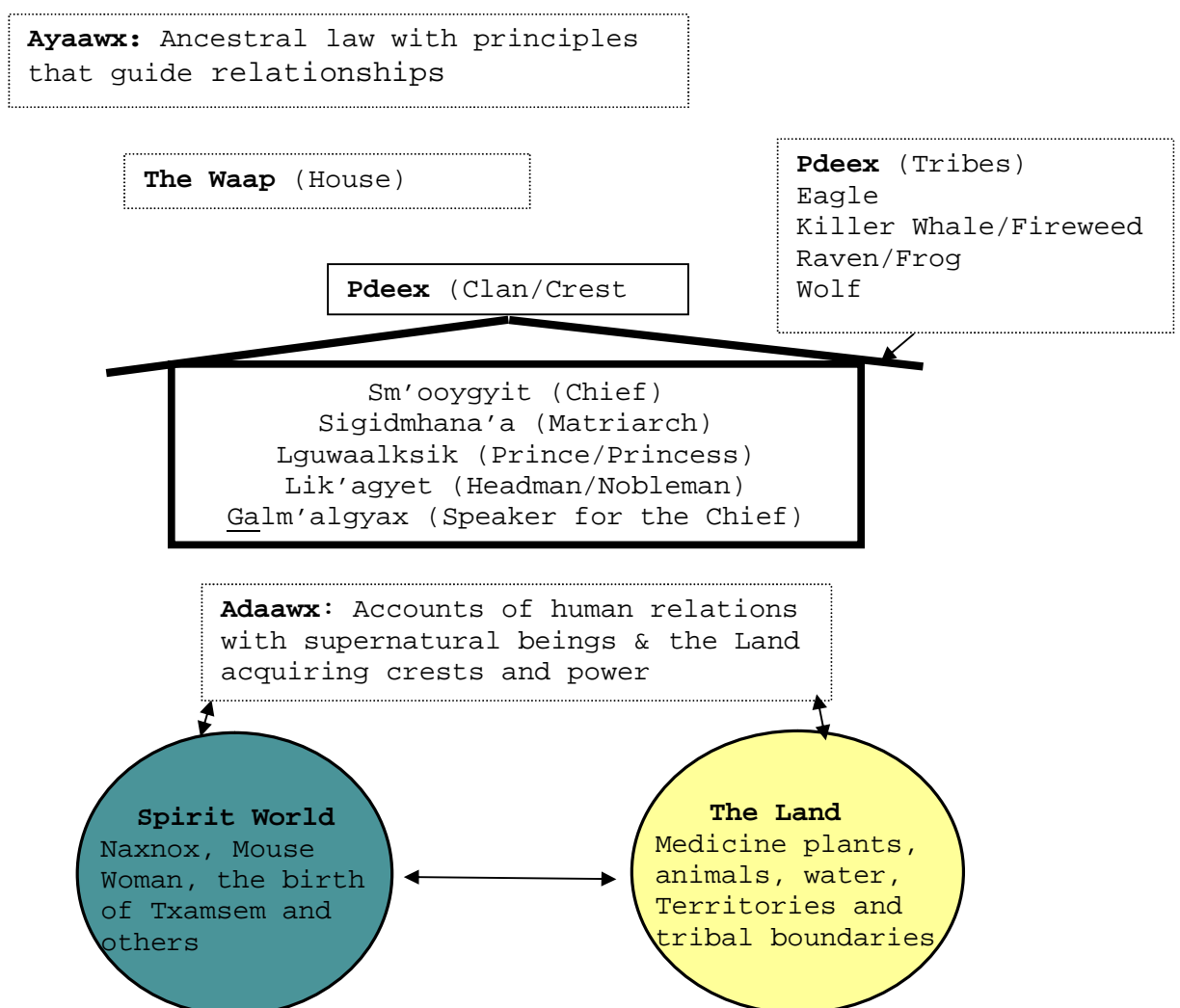


Figure 4. Ts'msyen social structure

Although the Ayaawx has two definite components, spiritual and socially political, they are not separate but inter-connected. All -- humans, plants, the land, supernatural beings, are alive and intimately related to each other -- impacting each other. The continued use of carved and painted crest designs in Northwest coast art in the form of totem poles, chief screens, ceremonial pieces such as masks and button robes that give account of supernatural encounters or an individual's origins, practical implements such as soapberry spoons, ladles, feast bowls, vests, capes, jackets and shawls remind us of the continued connection between humans, the land and the supernatural world.

The use of images and poetry in this dissertation is intended not only to invite the reader to the spiritual dimension of the Ayaawx but also as a guide to assist me in articulating my reality of an Indigenous scholar wrestling to transform suffering to peace and compassion. For example, the use of the image of the figures on the Gitanyow pole on page four represents the fact that this body of work belongs to the collective rather than to the author: I am one of many united by the Ayaawx. The second image in the dissertation on page thirty-one represents the ability to see with one's heart, or with the inner vision.

And the first poem on page thirty-seven emerged in Prince Rupert when I was struggling with the format for delivering my findings from the Ayaawx and finally deciding upon a format and writing style that is congruent with our feast hall speeches.

Spiritual balance is the centre of the House, the fire and light that enables individuals, families, and community to respect self, others, and the environment. Discussion of the teachings of Christ and the teachings of Buddha throughout this dissertation do not contaminate, diminish, or negate the teachings of our ancestors. Spiritual truths from other cultures, religions and spiritual practises serve to enhance or add to the power of the Ayaawx rather than distort or negate the teachings of our ancestors. Similarly, the power of the Ayaawx remains in the land and the supernatural world regardless of the state of disbelief of Ts'msyen people. The concepts, and presentation of my understanding of the teachings of the Ayaawx, come from Adaawx – the histories of encounters with the supernatural world that teach respect. The Beynon Manuscript,⁵³ and the Tsimshian Narratives⁵⁴ were invaluable resources for understanding the concepts of the Ayaawx in

⁵³. Beynon, *Manuscript*.

⁵⁴. National Museums, *Tsimshian Narratives*, vol. 1.

Adaawx. I chose Adaawx that had easy access to their contemporary owners in obtaining permission for use. Delgamuukw's address to the Crown⁵⁵ is also a concise contemporary summary of the relationship of humans with the land and the supernatural world.

Research protocol was founded on the principles of the Ayaawx. In approaching original references or fluent speakers, it was and is important to travel to where the source lives and to ask permission in person followed by giving the sources a copy of the dissertation. All images and stories from the Tsimshian Narratives⁵⁶ have the permission of the Houses that the Adaawx and Poles belong to. The interpretation of Sm'algyax in this dissertation was first obtained through linguist John Asher Dunn and then reviewed and expanded on by speakers, Brown, Brown and Collinson, from my home community of Gitx̱aał̱a. All interpretations were reviewed and approved by the fluent speakers in person as required by Ts'msyen protocol. After completion of the first draft of this dissertation, I requested readers who were also fluent speakers from Gitx̱aał̱a to review the draft for corrections, revisions, and/or to affirm the work. I traveled to Dolphin Island on

⁵⁵. Gisday Wa & Delgamuukw, *The Spirit in the Land*.

⁵⁶. National Museums, *Tsimshian Narratives*, vol. 1

October 14,th 2007 and met with volunteers who were fluent speakers: Joseph Douglas, Eugene Gordon, Matthew Hill, Timothy Innes, and Russell Lewis. The five men chose to take turns reading the document orally chapter by chapter, with dialogue after each chapter. Matthew Hill and Russell Lewis added to the document providing contemporary accounts that strengthen the section on the continued belief of the human connection between the spirit world and animals. The Gitxaała speakers affirmed the dissertation and requested permission to use the manuscript for future community program development.

I met with Delgamuuxw, Earl Muldoe, an internationally renowned Gitxsan artist, in his home in Old Hazelton, B.C., located next to the entrance to 'Ksan Historical Village and School of Northwest Coast Indian Art.⁵⁷ I gave him the background to the evolution of the dissertation, founded on the Ayaawx and Sm'algyax. Having outlined the importance of his address to the Crown, I asked him to review what I had written about my understanding of his presentation found in chapter three. Muldoe reviewed the segment of text referring to his teaching of the Ayaawx and approved what I had written. He

⁵⁷. Earl Muldoe, interview by author, Old Hazelton, BC, November 23, 2007.

also reminded me that every person has something of value to say, from the Chief to the one considered of least significance.

The evolution of this dissertation emerged from my personal experience with oppression, as a child experiencing the trauma from the far-reaching tentacles of residential school and Indian day school to experience as a professional working in Gitxsan, Ts'msyen, Nisga'a, Coast Salish, Nuu-cha-nulth, Kwakwakwaxw, and Nuxalk communities. As an elementary school teacher, I witnessed children arriving at school hungry, tired and without confidence yet there was an undeniable resilience. As a clinical counselor, I have been a witness to the roots of oppression and how we as the oppressed have passed on the suffering to the loved ones around us and to community members, and as an ethno-consultant I have been searching for the resources within our ancestral teachings to transform the suffering that, without intervention, we continue to recycle. The recognition of shame and a foundational belief of inferiority amongst other Indigenous peoples in both the United States and Canada pressed me to understand the historical events that brought us to a place of despair and anguish and to identify the ancestral teachings that will transform our state of suffering.

Initially, the sequence of chapters were ordered as a contemporary Adaawx, progressing from the importance of our Adaawx, to the offense, the journey, the feat, uniting teachings, to journeying together as one heart in peace. The fluent Ts'msyen speakers from Gitx̱aał̱a read the first draft in this progression and, because they are all active in the feast system, were comfortable with the progression of information. However, the progression proved to be confusing for readers who were not familiar with our social structure and cultural protocol. The re-structuring of the sequence of chapters to accommodate the less-informed, or uninformed reader is the result. As customary when presenting a message, the introductory chapter identifies my place in Ts'msyen society, ancestral lineage, House, and Crest and outlines my motives, the state of my heart and thoughts, and the intention of my message. The second chapter, for Ts'msyen readers, verifies that I have adhered to our protocol of asking permission to use information and having the information affirmed by the source. The third chapter identifies our grandparents' teachings presented by influential contemporary leaders such as Gitx̱san Chief, Delgamuuxw, Nisga'a leaders and Chiefs, Bert McKay, Frank Calder, James Gosnell, Rod Robinson and Nelson Leeson. The importance of key phrases that pull us together as Ts'msyen

people and images and poetry that invite the spiritual dimension is the basis of the chapter. Chapter four identifies our Adaawx as our vital link that upholds the spiritual dimension of our ancestral teachings. Referring to the general -- not owned by any particular House -- Adaawx of the origins of Txamsem, the resource of the Adaawx is identified as a reliable resource for learning the principles of the Ayaawx. As disrespect is always the nature of an offense, Chapter five identifies cultural oppression of Canada's Indigenous peoples as the offense. The RCAP⁵⁸ and the Law Commission of Canada,⁵⁹ are the main sources for research on social statistics that indicate the nature of suffering in our communities. The impact of the offense is the journey. Chapter six, identifies our current state of internalized oppression. The result of over three generations of conditioning to inferiority, we now behave as though we have no ancestors. The feat to be accomplished is transforming our now, self-induced suffering through the power of ɫoomsk. As the fire and heat source of the home, Chapter seven identifies ɫoomsk as the centre of our

⁵⁸. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996).

⁵⁹. Law Commission of Canada, *Restoring Dignity: Responding to Child Abuse in Canadian Institutions* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2000).

ancestral teachings. With the introduction of the teachings of Christ, many of our villages converted to Christianity. Chapter eight presents key relevant teachings of Christ, through the lens of land-based Ts'msyen teaching, to aid in transforming our collective and individual suffering. In our feast halls, we have often heard chiefs call those in attendance to focus together by uniting as one heart to accomplish a goal. Chapter nine, discusses the teachings from the maalsk (historical narrative) of a conflict at Gits'ilaasü⁶⁰ to demonstrate the importance of uniting with one intention. Buddhist teachings are introduced not only because of the increased practise in North American society, also, as a neighboring vessel traveling to the hunting ground. The teachings of other religions are referenced as a "brother" teaching rather than as "other" teaching. The conclusion of the dissertation introduces initiatives that will assist in transforming the suffering in our communities and the ignorance of public services in North American society. Through employment as a clinical counselor, post-secondary instructor and Co-ordinator positions with the University of Northern British Columbia,

⁶⁰. Tsimshian Chiefs, *Conflict at Gits'ilaasü* (Prince Rupert, BC: Tsimshian Chiefs & School District #52, 1992).

suggestions for change are summarized from unpublished reports.

From the Attic

Two hearts beating in the attic of time
Rain's descent whispers from our past
City lights bleed a pale glow through open curtained
windows
Sirens press sound waves through glass pane
Heartbeat drums into an altered state of sleeplessness
Beady-eyed Mouse Woman offers fat of mountain goat
Crimson rawness is the richness of truth

The universe of the captive walled within slanted ceilings
Absence creates unquenchable yearning
Ceaseless, relentless, merciless torrents blown by the
north wind of neglect
Forced through the tissue of perforated veins
Seeping, spurting, pulsing from two hearts beating in the
attic of time

Summoned by sleeplessness, whiskered liberation
lays her plan
Cauterizing child veins with transformation's flame
As North wind rattles the closed door
A gull cries loneliness out into early morning's grayness
Angled walls echo a silent scream for freedom

And you my love, sleeping in stillness beside me
May your slumbering breath summon ancestral accompaniment

Your dream carry you with definitive flight to the
retrieval of innocence

Your heart's rhythm open to Naxnox dancer's expansive space
Perhaps your inner mind senses my stirring now

Feel my lips caressing your throat as a departing prayer
No.

As an invitation

To jump with me from the attic of captivity

Plunging past the contortions, distortions, deformation of
our sacred innocent

Beyond the incessant scream of the wretched witch of self
fullness

Pulled to unfathomable depths of the supernatural

To be robed in feathered fibres of the winged

Where fat rendered from suffering of babes induces the
fledgling flight

To

Freedom⁶¹

Narration

Mouse Woman in our Adaawx (historical accounts in story
format) appears to the captive with conditions for freedom
from death. If the captive follows her instructions,
freedom is the conclusion. The Naxnox are the supernatural
beings that reside in specific geographic areas of the
Ts'msyen, Nisga'a and Gitxsan people.

⁶¹ . © Patricia June Vickers, January 14, 2007.

Chapter 3: Suwilay'amsk: Our grandparents' teachings

In his address to the Supreme Court of British Columbia on May 11, 1987, Gitxsan hereditary Chief, Delgamuuxw began by outlining the Ayaawx:

For us, the ownership of territory is a marriage of the Chief and the land. Each Chief has an ancestor who encountered and acknowledged the life of the land. From such encounters come power. The land, the plants, the animals and the people all have spirit—they all must be shown respect. That is the basis of our law.⁶²

The sense and definition of marriage in the context of Delgamuukw's address, where the majority of Gitxsan converted to Christianity, can be related to the teachings of Christ. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ addresses the queries of the Pharisees by summarizing the nature of marriage saying:

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?⁶³

A marriage, according to this text, involves two people shifting their primary loyalty from their family to the union and asking the blessing of God on the union. The

⁶². Gisday Wa & Delgamuukw, *The Spirit in the Land* (Gabriola, BC: Reflections, 1992) 7.

⁶³. "Matthew 19:4-6," in *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, ed. Spiros Zodhiates (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1991).

dedication of the union to God is a request for a response to consummate the marriage. With the blessing of God, the union is perfected in the spiritual realm. The blessing from God makes the two as one, where the knowledge of each other is not only in the mind but in the spirit and soul as well, and a "deep relationship."⁶⁴ The Chief's responsibility, when he assumes his authority, shifts from his family to the name-territory that he inherits with the name. As in a Christian marriage, it is the Chief's responsibility to uphold his relationship with the land by learning the nature of the land and becoming one with the spirit in the land.

Although Delgamuukw is not stating that his ancestral predecessors who had a relationship with the land passed the knowledge on to him, this is what is inferred in his opening address. To "encounter" in this portion of his address means to meet face-to-face, the human face to the spiritual face of the land. To "acknowledge", in this context means to agree with, and to believe in the power of the land.

⁶⁴. R.E. Nixon, "Matthew," in *The New Bible Commentary*, Rev. ed., eds. D. Guthrie & J.A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970) 840.



Figure 5. Delgamuukw pole section. This pole is in Kispiox, BC and is from the house of Delgamuukw. The figures are sun bear children.

The encounters that give power come from Adaawx that told of relations with naxnox,⁶⁵ supernatural beings that inhabit specific geographic locations. An example of a naxnox Adaawx can be found in the Tsimshian Narratives I, tricksters, shamans and heroes (1987), The origin of the supernatural being at Kwanwac.⁶⁶ This is an Adaawx about the increase of wealth in a Waap (House) through the marriage of a Princess with a land otter Prince. The second way in which human beings increase their power in relationship with the land is through cleansing rituals. Both wooms (Devil's Club), and huulens (Indian hellebore root) were used for cleansing.⁶⁷

Everything that exists in our environment is alive and as such may inspire guidance, a reminder of ancestral teachings such as the mountain goat who saved many with the fat from its kidneys, the mouse who saved many with magic and guidance.⁶⁸ The rock at Kwanwac is a reminder for all Ts'msyen of the Adaawx of the land otter Prince who married

⁶⁵. Kenneth Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation* (Prince Rupert, BC: School District #52 & Tsimshian Nation, 2005) 56.

⁶⁶. National Museums, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987) 61.

⁶⁷. Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 57.

⁶⁸. The fat from mountain goat kidney is the gift that Mouse Woman asks for in many of the Ts'msyen adaawx.

the human Princess and together they had children who to this day are available to help in time of need.⁶⁹

Through our Adaawx, our ancestors continue to teach us that because everything is alive we must learn to respect our environment. The Sm'algyax word for respect is *łoomsk* and means honour, or to hold sacred.⁷⁰ In all of the Adaawx, the absence of *łoomsk* is the cause of death unless interventions from supernatural powers spare the offender. Adaawx teach us that there is a way to restore balance when a human being has acted disrespectfully. In the case of Mouse Woman, the fat from mountain goat kidneys was always one of the necessary items for peace with the supernatural world in the process of restoring balance.

Rod Robinson in the video production, *Time Immemorial*⁷¹ demonstrates the spiritual aspect of respect by pausing to sing a song that reminds him of the sacrifice Nisga'a leaders made for him and the Nisga'a nation. He says:

I have meditated regarding the land. The Nisga'a land. It's sort of a ritual before we begin to talk about the land. Because the Nisga'a land lies devastated at this point in time because of

⁶⁹. National Museums, *Tsimshian Narratives*, vol. 1, 61.

⁷⁰. See University of Northern British Columbia (Lingual Links), <http://smalgyax.unbc.ca> (accessed August 5, 2008).

⁷¹. James Cullingham & Peter Raymont, prods., *As Long as the Rivers Flow: Time Immemorial*, VHS No. 113C 9191058, directed by Hugh Brody (Montreal: NFB & Tamarack Productions, 1991).

the encroachment of industry that my ancestors had tried to regulate through negotiations as the European landed on our shores. So before we get into this discussion regarding our land and my people that, that I can well remember that are now long gone to the happy hunting ground, the great beyond. Those people who donated their lives, their time to the struggle. To try and achieve a settlement. A just and honorable settlement with the Whiteman.⁷²

Now deceased, Rod Robinson held the eagle Chieftainship of Minee'eskw when he spoke these words. As a leader, he was demonstrating the need to take time to meditate on and honour, the life of humans, the supernatural world, and the spirit in the land. The ritual of meditating brings to consciousness the union of the land, the chief, the supernatural world and the ancestors.

Bert McKay, Nisga'a elder, teacher, and leader from the village of Laxgalts'ap in the book, Nisga'a, people of the Nass River⁷³ outlines ten principles in the Ayuukhl Nisga'a (ancestral law). He introduces them by stating:

And again, K'amligihahlhaahl [Creator of all life] realized that in order for his people to live in harmony with his creation they must have some guiding principles, they must have a messenger who would show them. So he sent a messenger in the name of Txeemsim and this is how we have evolved today. The Ayuukhl Nisga'a, our code of laws, with the accounts of our history, we have gleaned them from the legends, from the

⁷². Ibid.

⁷³. Nisga'a Tribal Council, *Nisga'a: People of the Nass River* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993) 125.

stories, from the examples that Txeemsim gave us.⁷⁴

In this opening introduction to the Ayuukhl Nisga'a, Bert McKay is stating that the principles he is about to present have been taken from the maalsk (historical narrative), and Adaawx of Txamsem (part human-part supernatural). He goes on to identify ten specific principles in the Ayuukhl Nisga'a:

The first is respect. Respect, according to our philosophy, is spelled out this way: when you understand the meaning of respect you have a power that emanates from you and the people around you will respond likewise, they will treat you respectfully. And so, when it comes to the laws of the Nisga'a, if you can't understand the meaning of respect then it means you are going to be running afoul of every area of the Nisga'a law.⁷⁵

Identified here, as the central principal, the foundation that holds up all the other principles is ~~hoomsk~~--honour, to hold sacred. He goes further to say that a person who has been taught the meaning of respect, implying that respect is something that is taught by your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles and tribe. To understand ~~hoomsk~~, is to understand and live the other principles of the Ayaawx, resulting in a power that others

⁷⁴. Ibid.

⁷⁵. Ibid.

will recognize and respect in turn. He goes on to identify the second law as the passing on of laws or education:

Second is education. Our own form of education was already in place and functioning before the first Westerner arrived in our midst. Everyone, according to the Nisga'a law, has some potential to give to the Nisga'a nation...So, in other words, the type of education that was offered was very practical... Number one, all of our people received the edict of preserving life, knowing how to sustain life.⁷⁶

Here McKay identifies the same principle that Delgamuukw presents in his opening address to the Supreme Court of British Columbia.⁷⁷ Łoomsk is a state of being that is to be practiced toward all things, humans, animals, the land and water. Every human and all of life are to be valued. Passing on this teaching is a responsibility. The next law addresses human relationships:

Third was the most important sphere of our laws; that was the law governing the chieftainship and the matriarch. You see, in our culture, the male isn't the dominant figure; rather the female and the male are equally in power. And, more importantly, the matriarch in many ways is far superior to the chieftain for the very simple reason that it is through her that the line of inheritance is passed on.⁷⁸

⁷⁶. Ibid.

⁷⁷. Gisday Wa & Delgamuukw, *The Spirit in the Land*.

⁷⁸. Nisga'a Tribal Council, *Nisga'a: People of the Nass River*, 127.

In this principle, McKay confronts the violence against women in our society today; for example, Health Canada's fact sheet identifies women as the target of spousal assault nine to one.⁷⁹ At the same time, McKay reminds both men and women that the woman holds authority and responsibility in the home and the community in our society. The next two laws address rank and material goods:

The fourth and fifth laws deal with the settlement of the estate. This happens when a person dies. And it's the only time a name of a chieftain can be transferred to a person. You can't buy a chieftain title, you have to be reared for it; you have to be disciplined and you have to have the approval of your people before you can take that rank. Under the chieftainship too is our property rights. There were very strict laws regarding property rights so that there was no need for our people to be going beyond their boundaries to take someone else's property because it was never allowed under our laws.⁸⁰

Protocol concerning the giving and receiving of a name and in particular a chief's name, is identified here as a procedure that has specific factors that must be agreed upon by recognized leaders. These leaders would be individuals within the same Waap (House Group) as the

⁷⁹. Health Canada, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/alt_formats/hpb-dgps/pdf/facts_violence.pdf (accessed August 6, 2008).

⁸⁰. Nisga'a Tribal Council, *Nisga'a: People of the Nass River*, 127.

deceased or the one in line for the chieftainship. Chiefs are generally born into a high-ranking family and are chosen while young and groomed into the position. Unlike contemporary society where status can be earned through financially profitable business ventures, the status of a chief is passed from one generation to the next. The sixth law addresses marriage and adoption:

It's through the home that the lifelines are kept, and it's through the home that family values are kept. Under marriage, there are laws which govern adoptions because there are people who cannot have children and according to our laws, a mother has a right to raise children...Another way where adoption was used was when there was no successor. Chosen from the same bloodline if possible or someone who is suitable and capable from within the Tribe.⁸¹

As a matriarchal society, Ts'msyen society is sectioned into four distinct Pdeex (clans), Laxsgyiik (Eagle), Gisbutwada (Killer Whale), Ganhada (Raven) and, Laxgyibuu (Wolf) and marriage within the same Pdeex is considered k'aats (forbidden, taboo).⁸² The passing on of information is done through the immediate family and through the Waap (House group) that consists of extended relations on the mother's side of the family.⁸³

⁸¹. Ibid., 128.

⁸². Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 58.

⁸³. Ibid., 66.

The next and seventh law is identified as "...a very strict law. Rather than see a life lost, the marriage was annulled by the ruling chieftain, in consultation with the four ruling chieftains from each of the villages."⁸⁴ This law is a reminder that our choices as an individual impact individual families and the community: our responsibility is not only to ourselves, but to the community as well.

The eighth law concerns war and peace:

Through the chieftains, peace was maintained. In other words, K'amligihahlhaahl gave us enough land, he gave us enough resources so we should be able to use them according to his edicts and we don't have to go outside of our own territory, to take someone else's.⁸⁵

The ninth law identified concerns trade. McKay writes,

"We were not only hunters and gatherers, but we were also seafarers; we lived according to the sea. We harvest from the sea as we did on land and from the forests. Trading was very important in our lives."⁸⁶

Through economic trade, Indigenous people on the Northwest coast were acknowledging the wealth not only of their own resources but also in the resources of their neighbors.

The tenth law identified by McKay concerns the gateway to accountability and responsibility in the community. This

⁸⁴. Nisga'a Tribal Council, *Nisga'a: People of the Nass River*, 128.

⁸⁵. *Ibid.*, 129.

⁸⁶. *Ibid.*

law acknowledges fallibility as a predictable character in being human. The tenth law stipulates that there are ceremonies necessary to make things right:

When a life is lost over carelessness or over greed the law states very plainly, that before the sun sets if the offending family does not settle the issue with the grieved family, then those people have a right to take double the lives that they lost. The only way that was resolved was by restitution--payment. And then the other part, where certain of the ten laws were broken, not restitution but to make amends, to make a complete break from the shame that you imposed on your family, and that was called public cleansing.⁸⁷

A recent example is when Nisga'a president, Sm'ooygyit Axlawhaals (Nelson Leeson) in October of 2002 hosted a feast⁸⁸ where he accepted responsibility and accountability for harming and neglecting his children through violence and absence and for violence against their mother. He also gave a personal history of the loss of his father at age eight and his mother at age eleven. Following the death of his parents, his uncle who had attended St. Michael's Residential School in Alert Bay, B.C, raised Leeson.

Outlining his personal history, a history familiar to many Ts'msyen people, the parental absence and domestic

⁸⁷. Ibid.

⁸⁸. The feast was hosted in his home community of Laxgalst'ap in the Nass Valley. This entry was approved by Leeson in the Winter of 2008.

violence are natural consequences of the violence and alienation Leeson experienced as a child. Cleansing feasts, not only to restore balance, as with all feasts, provide an opportunity to create an environment for a deeper awareness and understanding for all in attendance.

McKay concludes his overview of Ayuukhl Nisga'a by stating, "Embedded in these ten laws is that almighty force we call compassion. That's one of the gifts that each Nisga'a still carries—compassion."⁸⁹ All the laws outlined by Nisga'a elder Bert McKay apply to human beings within the society of Nisga'a, Git^uxsan and Ts'msyen peoples who belong to a specific family, Waap (House), Pdeek (crest) and hold a name identifying who does what, how they do it, when they do it, where they do it and who needs to be present to witness the event. In the book, Persistence and change a history of the Ts'msyen Nation,⁹⁰ written by Ken Campbell in consultation and collaboration with the Ts'msyen chiefs and matriarchs and their communities, the "rights and privileges of a Waap are all interconnected (and include); territories and resources, trading

⁸⁹. Nisga'a Tribal Council, *Nisga'a: People of the Nass River*, 129.

⁹⁰. Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 36.

privileges, Adaawx, names, dances, songs and dzepk (Crests)."

The art found in museums, art galleries and private studios such as those of Stan Bevan, Earl Muldoe or Philip Janzé include carvings that are connected to the Adaawx and crests of Txamsem-Adaawx that can be used without permission because they belong to all people. Otherwise, the house fronts, totem poles, and large canvas screens that are sometimes the backdrop at a feast are used by chiefs only and relate to the history of the name the chief carries.

Łoomsk, identified by McKay as the central characteristic of the Ayaawx, is living a life honouring the land, protocol, and other human beings: it is the only law that is not limited to class or rank.

The social structure of the Nisga'a, Gitxsan and Ts'msyen is matrilineal, in which names, and territories are passed down to the next brother or sister's son within a Waap (House). A Waap is a member of a Pdeex (Clan); in the Nisga'a nation the four Pdeex are Gisbutwada (Killer Whale), Ganhada (Raven), Laxsgyiik (Eagle) and Laxgyibuu (Wolf). Within a class system, the Sm'oogyit (chief) is the highest ranking along with the Sigidmhana'a (matriarch) and Łguwaalksik (prince or princess), followed by the noble

class Lik'agyet, (headman, noble), Galm'algyax (chief's spokesperson), the common people 'Wah'a'ayin, and finally the slaves.⁹¹ The only change in the social structure after colonization is the omission of slaves.

One of the greatest achievements of the Nisga'a nation in achieving a treaty was sayt k'ilhl wo'osihl Nisga'a (Common Bowl of the Nisga'a). To choose to eat from a common bowl as a Chief is significant as we observe rank at the feast hall. The Chief has the obligation to host feasts for events such as marriages, deaths and passing on of names, pole raising, house raising, and cleansing feasts.⁹² All of the feasts are to increase power through maintaining spiritual balance. In discussion with Northwest Coast artist Roy Henry Vickers,⁹³ Roy stated that the Chief commissioned an artist to carve a special feast bowl that

⁹¹. Ibid., 38.

⁹². See Marjorie M. Halpin & Margaret Seguin, "Tsimshian Peoples: Southern Tsimshian, Nisga'a, and Gitksan," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7*, eds. W.C. Sturtevant & W. Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990) 280.

⁹³. Roy Henry Vickers, interview by author, Old Hazelton, BC, October 2004. See Roy Henry Vickers, www.royhenryvickers.com.

he used at the feast.⁹⁴ The Chief's wares were significant and limited to personal use.

The significance of sayt k'ilhl wo'osihl Nisga'a's call to unity is twofold. The first major accomplishment in striving for unity was the agreement of high-ranking chiefs from four different tribes to place their territories in common holding with chiefs from other tribes. The second accomplishment is the agreement of high-ranking chiefs to share the land as though their hereditary chieftainships were of equal status and rank with the remaining collective. This assertion of the agreement between the Nisga'a chiefs and the four communities in the early stages of the land question strategies was assertion of the power of the Ayaawx in respect for their ancestors and the power of the land. The ability to respect another - especially in heated conflict - is a demonstration of strength of character desired by all who intend to fulfill ancestral law.

The agreement to "share the common bowl" meant that the Nisga'a chiefs agreed to place their laxyuup (land inherited with the Chief's name) in common holding rather

⁹⁴. Bill Holm, *Spirit and Ancestor: A Century of Northwest Coast Indian Art at the Burke Museum* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989) 31.

than maintaining territorial rights as had been done for thousands of years. The metaphor of the common bowl is the willingness of the chief to share his personal hand carved bowl with those of lesser rank and status, the choice of equality as taught in Christian teachings, was the act that would enable them to uphold the Ayaawx. The Chiefs at the turn of the century recognized the enormous change that had come upon them and their authority over the laxyuup. With this understanding of the future, they placed their lands in one bowl, the common bowl to be owned by all people.

The vision for the common bowl to attain a Treaty is necessary also for the restoration of the Ayaawx, for it is believed amongst ourselves that when a people agree to direct their intentions on one path for the betterment of the whole, nothing can block that power of goodness. We now need to agree to share the common bowl vision for the restoration and reconciliation needed in our Ts'msyen homes, families, Houses, Clans and communities.

The term sagyt k'ulum goot means to be of one heart. With the same purpose of uniting a people as in the term, sagyt k'ilim wo'os (common bowl), the land shared by the Chiefs and the people, is the phrase sagyt k'ulum goot. To be of one heart means that you agree as a collective to proceed in a specific manner of respect toward each other

and a common vision. It means that through the power of ~~toomsk~~, a people are able to focus or live consciously, awakened to the needs of the collective and the generations to come. Humility replaces greed and the will to dominate another. For the Nisga'a people this was to be acknowledged as human beings connected to ancestral lands rather than 'wards of the government' through the Indian Act. This phrase is used to remind people that respect is of the utmost importance in all tasks to be carried out. Respect involves observance of the Ayaawx and compassion toward your neighbor.

Our social statistics indicate that our suffering is not limited to where we live: both on and off reserve, we are suffering as one heart. As Metis, Ts'msyen, Nisga'a, Gitxsan, Inuit, Tlingit, Miwok, Lakota, we are suffering as one heart. Our task now is to re-member who we are and to call our souls that are attached to the pain of the past back to the present so that we can change the suffering to peace for our children, our grandchildren, and ourselves. There are many rituals, methods and ceremonies within Indigenous ancestral teachings that one can enter into the task of retrieving one's soul and healing our collective heart.

It is only through intentional, meditated action that we as Indigenous people will change the reality of internalized oppression to the reality of peace for ourselves. Transformation will come through our connection with the pain of our past, no longer attempting to block or drown out the anguish, instead, restoring spiritual balance through sm'ooygitm laxaga and our ancestors. We have vital teachings to offer the humans who are suffering, not only in our families and communities but also in the larger world.



Figure 6. Halaayt headdress. Prince Rupert Museum.

Chapter 4: The Whistle Sounds: Adaawx as guide

The Ts'msyen Adaawx⁹⁵ is the whistle that announces the supernatural power of the Ayaawx.⁹⁶ The whistle is the instrument that signals the entrance or exit of the individual to or from the longhouse on a human quest experience with the power of the supernatural. The whistle summons all to attend carefully to the ceremonial event that is about to transpire. It is the signal that marks an important transformational event where the initiate is either leaving for his or her quest into the supernatural world or is returning with gained power from his or her quest.⁹⁷ With either exit or re-entrance, the whistle signifies the relationship of human beings with the supernatural world.

On the significance of whistles on the northwest coast of British Columbia, Ruth Kirk writes,

⁹⁵. Kenneth Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation* (Prince Rupert, BC: School District #52 & Tsimshian Nation, 2005) 8. See also Marjorie M. Halpin & Margaret Seguin, "Tsimshian Peoples: Southern Tsimshian, Nisga'a, and Gitksan," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7*, eds. W.C. Sturtevant and W. Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990) 280.

⁹⁶. Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 31-54.

⁹⁷. M-F. Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984) 141.

Whistles carry high ceremonial value. Chief Mungo Martin told anthropologist Wilson Duff about the theft of one, which led the Kwakiutl to attack the Nuxalk, and also of how his grandmother saved another from destruction by carrying it into the forest when she fled a Royal Navy bombardment of her village.⁹⁸

The act of valuing the whistle by the Kwakwaka'wakw is more than honour for a sacred instrument it is also ferocious respect and passion for an instrument that plays a significant role in connecting humans with the supernatural world. Philip Drucker observed that:

Wind instruments were used for sound effects in the Dancing Society performances, but not for musical accompaniment. Whistles of great variety, from small ones that could be concealed in the mouth to great trumpet like wooden "horns," were used to represent the voices of various supernatural beings. Some were simple and reedless; others had reeds in the mouthpieces. Most were single, but some were double, to give two tones. Apparently the mechanics of their operation was well enough understood so that they were not used to carry melodies nor to accompany songs.⁹⁹

The specific use of whistles in ceremony and the variation in the composite substance of whistles and the sounds produced are a small portal into the relationship our grandparents and great grandparents had with the

⁹⁸. Ruth Kirk, *Wisdom of the Elders: Native Traditions on the Northwest Coast, the Nuuchahnulth, Southern Kwakiutl and Nuxalk* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1986) 73.

⁹⁹. Philip Drucker, *Cultures of the North Pacific Coast* (New York: Chandler, 1965) 45.

supernatural world. Just as the whistle is used for the singular use of announcing the human relationship with the supernatural world, the Adaawx is the connection for us as contemporary Ts'msyen to our Ayaawx, where we find the principles to assist us in our personal and collective lives.

According to anthropologist Jay Miller, concerning our Adaawx, "The crux of the culture remains the adaox sacred myths describing the adventures of the names that laid claim to the places, songs, dances, and artifacts that compose the crests"¹⁰⁰ The importance of our Adaawx are also noted by anthropologist Marjorie Halpin where she quotes Barbeau and Beynon who concluded that grandfather, tradition, and Adaawx are "practically the same thing."¹⁰¹ Linguist Margaret Seguin Anderson and anthropologist Marjorie Halpin summarize the significance of the Adaawx in Ts'msyen society by stating that, "Many tell of the original home of the lineage ancestors, their migration to and possession of their present territories, and their acquisition of power and crests from supernatural

¹⁰⁰. Jay Miller, "Feasting with the Southern Tsimshian," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984) 39.

¹⁰¹. Ibid., 60.

ancestors."¹⁰² In the collection of information gathered from contemporary Ts'msyen and recorded by those now deceased Campbell writes about Ts'msyen Adaawx that:

Ts'msyen culture is grounded in the *adaawx*, the narratives that tell its history. *Adaawx* tell about the origins of the world from a Ts'msyen perspective, one that has been passed on from generation to generation. They are generally defined as "true tellings" or "sacred history."¹⁰³

Anthropologists, linguists, archeologists and ethnographers have all worked to gather information on the relationships and structure of Ts'msyen society. The findings of scholars and researchers who have contributed to the body of information available in numerous articles and books are an important source for those of us who are working to regain our identity. Each one of these researchers, none—with the exception of William Beynon—who were born Ts'msyen, recognize the significance of *Adaawx* in our society for not only the last century, but for this century as well. If non-Ts'msyen people recognize the importance of the *Adaawx* through research, so much more we as Ts'msyen must accept the *Adaawx* as true tellings, sacred history, a connection to a house and its territory, encounters with supernatural beings, a living account of

¹⁰². Halpin & Margaret, "Tsimshian Peoples," 280.

¹⁰³. Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 8.

who we are, where we come from and our relationship with the supernatural world all of which are relevant to our circumstances today. What was significant to our grandparents in the past is significant for us today.

As Ts'msyen, we are living in a world where we are the colonized, gaining an understanding of the historical facts that define what it means to be colonized, and communicating the reality of being the colonized. We now need to create space for the Naxnox¹⁰⁴ (supernatural being) to emerge to empower us to transform our spiritual poverty and return us to the principles of ancestral teachings that are capable of assisting us to regain spiritual balance and direction for our future. In a world fragmented by greed where human beings are no longer acknowledging their connection to the environment, we need to be brought back to our ancestral teachings regarding the connectedness of the natural and supernatural worlds.¹⁰⁵ There is no separation between the heart and the mind or the spiritual and physical worlds. They are connected and influence each other.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰⁵ B. Bastien *et al.*, "Healing the Impact of Colonization, Genocide, and Racism on Indigenous Populations," in *The Psychological Impact of War Trauma on Civilians, an International Perspective*, eds. Stanley Krippner & Teresa M. McIntyre (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003) 32-33.

We are responsible for maintaining spiritual balance by ensuring that the spiritual and physical worlds are in communication with each other in us as individuals and as the collective. Spiritual balance is demonstrated by respecting the self, the land, and others. Spiritual poverty on the other hand, is induced by greed. In the case of our history as Indigenous people, greed has been exercised through land loss in colonization. We have been colonized to oppression and oppression has been defined by educator, Freire as a human condition.¹⁰⁶ Oppression defined as a human condition unites the colonizer and colonized confronting indifference with ownership of a problem that belongs to all of society rather than one fraction of society. Both the oppressor/colonizer and the oppressed/colonized are oppressed. Causing and experiencing suffering is a natural or normal aspect of being human with the result being oppression or dehumanization. In our Adaawx we find many varied accounts of disrespectful human behaviour and the resulting consequences.

In our Adaawx, suffering is the result of disrespectful human behaviour. The supernatural world will always respond to disrespect with the purpose of restoring

¹⁰⁶. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 25-26.

spiritual balance.

The birth of trickster Txamsem¹⁰⁷ the part human, part supernatural being, who unashamedly acts out our human nature, told by Henry Price of the Gispaxloats to William Beynon is one version of the Adaawx that gives account of human behaviour that include the behaviours in a marriage of a chief with his wife: betrayal, deception, lust, and greed all of which are a part of light coming to this world. The Adaawx of the Birth of Txamsem is about human shortcomings, human offences, disrespect of one human toward another, grace and disrespect from a supernatural being toward a chief, with an account of the resulting consequences of such behaviour.

Adaawx have four general phases that include: the offense, the journey, the feat and, the teaching. These four parts are not necessarily in this sequence, rather, the four phases are often intertwined and/or repeated in the Adaawx. Imbedded in this Adaawx of Txamsem and the light are teachings that apply to our suffering today. The following summary of the Ts'msyen Adaawx is an example of the four phases in an Adaawx. In this story Txamsem will

¹⁰⁷. National Museums of Canada, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987) 1-5.

transform himself several times before he steals the light from the supernatural chief to bring it back to our world. This particular account of the origins of Txamsem begins with betrayal. This is not a romantic story that portrays the "Indian" as the noble savage. Like any other sacred story in our human world, this story is from a particular people in a specific geographical location. The accounts of Txamsem are general Adaawx that belong to all Ts'msyens. The Txamsem Adaawx tell of the coming of light to the human world and the imperfect part human, part supernatural being that brought the light to our world.

Russell Mather Senior, the current chief of the Gispaxloats now located in Lax Kwa'laams, has given his permission for the Txamsem Adaawx to be reproduced in this dissertation. Mather reminds me that, as the elders who are now gone have discussed in the past, the interpretation of the Adaawx are not entirely accurate. Discussion of the following Adaawx will therefore adhere to the main themes created by the author.

(1) Illicit love affair

Txamsem and his brother Lagabula were of Gispaxloats origin. There was a Gispaxloats chief who was married to a very beautiful princess and he was very much in love with her. At this time the world had no daylight as we have now but there was always a darkness over the world. The dusk made it very difficult for the people to do

their work or go hunting. The lover of the beautiful princess came to her sleeping place and laid with her, much to the grief of the chief's sisters who saw all this. The lovers enjoyed themselves in their illicit love affair and then they went to sleep. When all in the house were asleep, the chief entered his house very quietly and went directly to his wife's sleeping place. Behold! His wife was asleep with his nephew, he who was to be his successor. He was very grieved and embarrassed. He went out of the house feeling very sorry for himself.

(2) *The princess-wife feigns death*

In the morning he came in and went directly to where his wife was sleeping, but the lover had already gone. He said to his wife, "I know of your unfaithfulness, nobody told me, I saw you and my nephew asleep together last night." The princess was so surprised that she suddenly became very ill and she was so ashamed that she pretended to be dying. Finally she apparently died. The chief who loved his wife very much was very grieved at her death. After keeping her body in his house he had her prepared and placed in a box which he put on a burial pole. He had been certain that the one sleeping with his wife had been his nephew, but that man was very much unconcerned and did not appear to grieve the princess' death. The chief was determined to find out, however, so when the box was placed on the burial pole, he selected men from his tribe who were to watch and guard the burial pose so that no witch would be able to touch the body of his beautiful dead wife.

Every night those that were guarding the burial box would see a very beautiful woodpecker come just before darkness. In the early morning when day broke, the watchers saw the woodpecker flying into the forest. This happened every night and those watching the burial box would hear sounds of laughter and happiness, and it seemed as if there were live people in the burial box. Now the woman was not really dead, she had only pretended death in order that she could still meet with her lover. She felt he must be very

handsome and she wanted to continue to meet him, so she had pretended to die so that they would put her on the burial pole and thus she could continue to meet her lover. When she had done this, the lover came every night bringing food and they continued their love affair.

(3) *A son is born*

The chief became suspicious and he set out to look into the box. As he was about to do so, some maggots fell upon him and he said, "How can she be alive? Look, maggots are falling from her decayed body." He never looked any further and his watchers were very much ashamed of their suspicions when they saw the maggots falling from the death box. So every night, although the tribesmen heard the sounds of laughter coming from the death box of the beautiful princess, they were afraid to tell the chief, as they feared his anger. This went on for a long while. Finally the woman became pregnant and one bright morning those watching the burial box saw the lid raise up and a child climb down the pole and fall to the ground. Soon the people saw the very beautiful woodpecker come from the box and fly away in the direction of the north wind. The people now realized that this was a supernatural being who had been cohabitating with the chief's wife.

The fair child was taken straight to the house of the chief who said, "This I will raise as my own child. We will go and look into the burial box. She must be still alive." When the people investigated the death box, they saw that she was really dead. The chief was sure that it was not his nephew who was the lover of his dead wife. He took the child and gave it to one of his sisters to raise and care for.

The woman who was looking after this chief's new found child had a son of her own the same age and thus these two grew up to be as brothers. As they grew they thought they were brothers. They would go to the beach there they would practice at stone throwing and they became very accurate. One day the chief's son saw some beautiful ducks, a male and a female mallard, so he took his

stones and threw them and killed the ducks. He swam out to the dead birds and brought them in and skinned them and hung the skins to dry. They then wore these and flew about for short distances and returned, until they were very good at flying. One day the two boys saw a group of wild ducks swimming on the water so the chief's son, who was the leader said, "Come let us put on our mallard garments and swim out to them and see if these ducks will notice any difference in us." They put on their duck cloaks and flew out and landed among the wild ducks who took no notice of them. The boys flew back to where they came from. "We can now go long distances and see many strange countries."

They had heard of a very distant land which was very bright where there was a great chief who had a light ball, which contained daylight. It was told that this country was a very difficult country to get to, as they would have to go through a very narrow opening in the mountain which opened and shut. If one could not get through the opening before it closed, one would be crushed. These stories the young boys heard from the old people who were always speaking of this bright land where there was much daylight possessed by the bright shining chief. Hearing this constantly, the young son of the chief was determined to go to this place and endeavour to get possession of the light ball and to bring daylight to the still darkened world. This country they were told was at the head of the Nass River.

(4) *Supernatural powers to supernatural realm*

One young boy said to the other, "We must try and get through to this country and whoever gets through will marry the chief's two beautiful daughters." So the young boys put on their wild duck cloaks and made preparations for flight. Once they were ready they flew to this distant country they had heard so much of. They flew out the Nass River and after many days of flying they came to a huge mountain which was too high to fly over and which blocked their further progress. They realized they had found the closing and

opening mountain. They rested a while and then began to look for the opening and closing passage which they soon found. Looking through the opening, they saw in the distance a very bright and beautiful country so they began scheming how to get through.

Finally the young man said, "We will watch and count the length of time this mountain opens and closes and see if it is the same each time." They did this and found that it opened and closed for exactly the same length of time. The young man who was the leader said, "Just as soon as the mountain opens we will fly through and we can get through safely." As soon as the mountain opened its secret passage again, the two young boys and their duck disguise flew through with all their speed. They just got through the passage, when it closed again. The two brothers landed on the lake and behold! It was a beautiful country. There were many houses at the edge of the lake and a very large one had a sun as a house front painting which was very bright and shining. The young boys were swimming about on the lake still in their duck form and were almost blinded from the light which seemed to come from the painting on the large house. The young boys, who had become grown young men were swimming about on the lake, waiting to see the two beautiful daughters of the chief of whom they had heard.

When it was nearly dark, two beautiful young women came down to draw water from the lake. They came to the water's edge and when they saw the wild ducks swimming about both girls called out, "Oh! See the beautiful birds, can we get them to be our pets?" The oldest called out, "Come you beautiful birds, come and I will care for you." The youngest sister called out to the other, "Come we will care for you, we will not injure you." So the two mallard ducks swam about and the leader went to where the eldest sister was sitting and swam to her. She took the mallard to her breast. The other swam to the younger sister and she fondled him and took them both to the great house of their father. The girls took their pets to their sleeping places and when these ducks slept with their mistresses they took human forms. When it was daylight, they became birds

again.

(5) *Txamsem & Lugabula*

Every night when they slept with their mistresses they assumed human forms. Thus they lived for a long while until both young women became pregnant and each gave birth to a son. The great chief was very pleased and took his grandsons and stretched them every day in height so that in a short while they were fully grown. He then said to them, "I will return you to the land of your grandfathers, in the country of your father and I will train you in all manner of things in order that you may help your people." Now the son of the elder daughter was a very bright and clever young boy, while the son of the younger daughter was lazy and made no effort to learn, but always endeavoured to imitate his elder brother. The great chief named the son of the eldest daughter Txamsem, The Clever One, and the son of the youngest daughter, he named Lugabula, Lazy One.

Now when the two boys disappeared from the village at Metlakatla, the Gitspaxloats mourned for them every day. The chief and his wife were now aged and it had been some time since the two boys disappeared, yet they mourned them continually and everyday they wept. One day, the chief and his wife went along with his slaves to hunt seals in what is presently known as Tuck Inlet. When they approached a large kelp patch on the water they saw what appeared to be seals, in the semi darkness. They went there and behold! Two small infants were playing on the kelp patch. The chief directed his slaves, "Bring these two infants to me, these are my two boys who disappeared and now are returned to us." They took the infants to the Gispaxloats chief's house, and then realized that these infants were supernatural beings and must be cared for very carefully.

(6) *Txamsem takes form of raven to steal daylight*

As they had been fully grown once and had been returned to the country of their fathers as

children, they grew very rapidly and were very soon full grown again. They made themselves known to the old chief who had taken them as his own children. As they grew, the elder of the two boys saw the difficulty the people were under in a constant semi-darkness; there was no sun and never did they have a bright day. So he made up his mind to get the ball of light from another great chief of the skies who had it in his possession. As his father had before him, he was able to change to any form he wished. Sometimes he was an animal and sometimes a bird. So he now planned, "I will take the form of a raven and this shall always be my bird form." So when he was ready he took his raven garment and put it on and then he flew away to the head waters of the Nass River. Here he was going to try and get into the house of the great chief of the skies who controlled the light ball.

He flew many days and finally came to a very bright country and he knew he was at the water hole. While he was sitting there he saw a young woman coming to draw water and he at once recognized her as being the daughter of the great chief of the skies. He then planned to change his form into a pine needle when the young woman drew water from the water hole. She took her drinking basket and being very thirsty started to drink, but seeing the pine needle she blew it away, but it always came to her mouth. She tried many times to blow it away, but always the pine needle came to her mouth. She was very thirsty and in anger she drank down the water, pine needle and all.

She was now a different woman as it was Txamsem she had swallowed. She became pregnant. When the child was born the great chief was happy and everyday the grandfather took the child and stretched it, hastening its growth. Then when it was able to crawl about on the floor of the chief's house, the boy began to cry. It would not be pacified and kept calling only one word, "Ma, ma." The chief called in his wisemen and asked, "What does the child want? Nothing can pacify him." He must want the ball in which you have stored the daylight. Perhaps he wants to play with it. Take it down and let him play with it and see whether it will pacify him." So the great

Chief-of-the-Skies took down the box in which the daylight was stored. It was a skin bladder in the shape of a ball. This he gave to his grandson, who immediately became pacified while he was playing with it, the chief's slaves guarded him and would not let the ball out of their sight.

Everyday whenever the child began to cry the chief took down the light ball and gave it to him to pacify him. Soon the chief began to relax his watch and whenever the boy had satisfied his wishes, he would roll the ball away and leave it. So finally all in the house relaxed their watch over the movements of the boy when he was playing with the light ball. One day while he was playing with this ball, he rolled it to the entrance of the house and rolled it out. Immediately he jumped after it and changed to a large human form, and ran with the ball to where he had hid his raven garment. He put on his raven cloak and he flew away with the light ball.

(7) *Txamsem causes the sun to appear*

He had been flying a long while and looking down into the Nass River when he saw the ghost people were gathering eulachons by torch lights, and he called down to them. "Give me some eulachons my friends. I am hungry." The ghost people laughed at him saying, "Come catch your own eulachons." This angered Txamsem who again called to the ghost people, who relished the darkness and hated daylight. They could not get about in the day or bright light, and as the world was always in darkness, only the ghost people could move about with ease. Other people kept very close to their villages. So Txamsem called out, "Give me some eulachons or I will burst the daylight ball and you will all have to escape to your burial holes." "oh! Who does not know you, you great deceiver," the ghost people replied. Txamsem became very angry and took the daylight ball and burst it. Immediately it became daylight and very bright on the Nass River and it spread to all the world and there was daylight and the sun appeared. The people no longer had any fear of the ghost people, who disappeared. Txamsem went about all the world accompanied by

his lazy brother, Lagabula, who always tried to belittle Txamsem.¹⁰⁸

(1) Illicit love affair

The princess and wife of the chief is found in this section of the Adaawx to be lustful, deceptive, disrespectful and untruthful (the offense). All of these behaviours are unacceptable and punishable human behaviours in Ts'msyen society. Often death or banishment was the consequence of such behaviour as in the Adaawx recorded by William Beynon told to him by Mrs. Ethel Musgrave in 1947¹⁰⁹ adopted into the Ts'msyen Gispaxlo'ots Tribe.

(2) The princess wife feigns death

Concerning the connection between supernatural beings and human beings Marie-François Guédon writes,

Indeed, neither the term 'supernatural' nor the term 'spirit' seems completely adequate to translate *naxnoq*. Both terms are still linked with the old dichotomy 'supernatural' versus 'natural' and do not fit with the Tsimshian cosmology where the natural is 'supernatural' by definition. The dichotomy here is between the human and the non-human rather than between the natural and the supernatural. For the traditional Tsimshian Indian, animals and spirits are part of a continuum; man is the one who has to bridge the gap.¹¹⁰

As an extension of the human world or the human world

¹⁰⁸. Ibid.

¹⁰⁹. Ibid., 1-5.

¹¹⁰. Guédon, "Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview," 139-40.

as an extension of the supernatural world, this Adaawx affirms the flow between the two worlds. The supernatural in this Adaawx lusts after a chief's wife, betraying the chief by using his transformative powers to deceive humans and from this behaviour (the offense) the life of Txamsem begins.

(3) *A son is born*

When they went to see if the chief's wife was still alive they found "that she was really dead." The boy was raised with his aunt's son and "as they grew up they thought they were brothers."¹¹¹

Regardless of how a human being chooses to live their life, death will eventually overtake them as in this Adaawx, nothing further is mentioned of the Princess who births the part human-part supernatural child (the journey) and dies soon after they discover her son is part supernatural-part human. The character of the chief is not outlined in this Adaawx other than it records that he loved his wife and when he confronted her regarding her affair, he did it in private rather than in front of all the members of his house. This would not be for his benefit to save face as all in his house knew that the affair was

¹¹¹. Ibid.

going on. This account of the Chief's response to his wife's behaviour is an example of how a Chief is to behave in conflict. The Adaawx also mentions that he was grieved by her betrayal.

(4) Supernatural powers to supernatural realm

This version of the birth of Txamsem does not mention how they learned that there was a distant land where daylight was kept in a great chief's possession. The human knowledge of the supernatural world in this Adaawx confirms Guédon's writing of a continuum between the natural and supernatural worlds. As young men they discover and refine their supernatural abilities (the feat).

(5) Txamsem & Lugabula

The entire world was still in twilight at that time. Back in their human grandfather's village, the two babies were recognized as supernatural beings therefore needing to be "cared for very carefully."¹¹²

The two brothers returned to their home village having gained teachings from the supernatural world. The intertwining of humans with the supernatural world was like a rope, this Adaawx strengthens the rope that is the connection between humans, the land, animals and

¹¹². Ibid.

supernatural beings. The connection between human beings and supernatural beings is demonstrated in the great chief's compassion for the human and part human babies that he sent back to the natural world. The great chief knew the babies were part human yet he chose to pass on supernatural knowledge to his grandsons knowing that he would eventually send them back to the human world.

(6) Txamsem takes form of raven to steal daylight

The many transformations that are performed by Txamsem are with a specific purpose (teaching from the supernatural world and the journey). In this section of the Adaawx, he is determined to steal the light that is hidden away in a box in the supernatural world. His purpose is to ease the suffering of human beings who were living without sunlight and warmth. In particular, he wanted to ease the suffering of the people from his grandfather's village (the journey and the feat).

(7) Txamsem causes the sun to appear

Txamsem's final act in this Adaawx is the release of daylight to the world through an act of retaliation toward the ghost people (the feat). His retaliation benefited humans, animals and all living things on earth with the exception of the ghost people.

This Adaawx teaches us that we are intimately

connected to the land (the hole in the sky, the mountain, the duck cloaks and the sun), the supernatural world where we find power to change our physical condition impacting our spiritual well being. This particular Adaawx teaches us that our actions can cause suffering to cease and that respect as a human state can lead us to the supernatural world to receive power.

As Ts'msyen and Indigenous people of North America, our history and current state is a contemporary Adaawx. The offense is found in our history of colonization recorded in the RCAP,¹¹³ and the Law Commission of Canada.¹¹⁴ The journey is the internalized belief of inferiority that perpetuates our suffering. The feat now begging to be performed is the intentional action of transforming suffering through spiritual principles. The fourth phase of the Adaawx, teachings from the supernatural, invites us as the transformed to bring the teachings back to those around us.

Clearly identifying the offense and the nature of the

¹¹³.Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Gathering Strength*, vol. 3 (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996).

¹¹⁴. Law Commission of Canada, *Restoring Dignity: Responding to Child Abuse in Canadian Institutions* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2000).

result of the offense is examining oppression or "confronting reality critically." The very act of confronting the suffering reality is the act of moving with purpose as Txamsem did when he flew back up to the supernatural being who possessed the light to bring it back to this world to ease the suffering of his grandfather's people. The act of critically examining oppression confronts the reality of the oppressed and the very act of awareness through confrontation shifts the reality of the oppressed by increasing power through truth-speaking.

Swanaskxw

The cedar trees have burned to the ground
There are no grave boxes to hold the corpse
Only the stench of smoldering charcoal
Blow westerly wind
Lift this weighted sorrow
wipe tear rimmed downcast eyes
Breathe into what remains naxnox of Sacred Heart
Ascend from vapor and ash
Oh Thunderbird
Spread your wings to the corners
scream out with ember eyes
sing skyward
liimk of
halaaytm swanaskxw¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵. © Patricia June Vickers, May 27, 2007.

Chapter 5: The Offense: Cultural oppression

Colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada was an act of cultural oppression and in the case of Newfoundland, genocide. Oppression is the act of one individual or group exerting "unjust or cruel authority or power" over another individual or group.¹¹⁶ Freire defines oppression as a dehumanizing act that is a human condition¹¹⁷. As a human condition, this does not imply that the acts of oppression in Canadian history need not be rectified. On the contrary, the rectification of an unjust past is not only an ethical and moral requirement but through the misdeeds of the Christian churches, it is also a religious obligation. Through documents such as the RCAP¹¹⁸ and the Law Commission of Canada,¹¹⁹ there is no argument regarding a history of unjust and violent acts toward Indigenous peoples. Both documents have documented the history of oppression, which has caused multi-generational suffering for Indigenous Canadians.

¹¹⁶. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10th ed., s.v. "Oppression."

¹¹⁷. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 26.

¹¹⁸. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Gathering Strength*, vol. 3. (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996).

¹¹⁹. Law Commission of Canada, *Restoring Dignity: Responding to Child Abuse in Canadian Institutions* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2000).

Freire goes on to describe oppression as an act of distorting humanity when he states that:

Dehumanization (oppression), which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.¹²⁰

This statement from Freire's treatise on oppression is more difficult for the oppressed to accept for in the dynamics of oppression in colonization, the oppressor is idealized.¹²¹ The truth that both parties, the oppressed and oppressor suffer must not be ignored or denied on the transformational journey to freedom.

In both Canada and the United States, the oppression of Indigenous peoples was exercised through but not limited to, government legislation, residential schools, Christian missions and, forced relocations and confinement to reserves and reservations governed and monitored by the federal government.

Initially under the guise of protection, the federal government, through the British North America Act of 1867 assumed the responsibility of overseeing the management of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Less than ten years later, "the first consolidated Indian Act reflected the

¹²⁰. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 26.

¹²¹. *Ibid.*, 27.

government's preoccupation with land management, Indigenous membership and local government, and the ultimate goal of assimilation of Canada's Aboriginal population."¹²²

Creating the authority of define who is an Indian, the Indian Act divides the Indigenous people of Canada into two distinct groups. Status Indians are registered with the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and may or may not belong through "blood" to one of the Indigenous nations within the Canadian national boundary. This means that until the amendment of Bill C-31 in 1985, any non-Indian woman who married a status Indian became a status Indian, as did each of her children.¹²³ However, until 1985, when a registered Indian woman, (Indian through heritage) married a non-Indian or a non-status Indian she lost her Indian status, as did each of her children. If you were a white woman in the 1950's and you married an Indian, you received segregated services in Prince Rupert B.C. with the rest of

¹²². Mary C. Hurley, *The Indian Act*, PRB 99-23E, Government of Canada, Depository Services Program (prepared October 1999), <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection-R/LoPBdP/EB/prb9923-e.htm> (accessed August 5, 2008).

¹²³. For more information, see Shirley Joseph, "Assimilation Tools: Then and Now," in *In Celebration of Our Survival: The First Nations of British Columbia*, eds. Doreen Jensen & Cheryl Brooks (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1991) 67.

the Indigenous Canadians.¹²⁴ The federal government acquired the power to categorize Indigenous peoples according to blood quantum and we have maintained the division that focuses on physical characteristics rather than the Ayaawx's teaching of unconditional respect.

The Indian Act gave the Governor-in-Council or Minister of Indian Affairs the ultimate authority over definition of an Indian, registration, Band lists, and any appeals or protests (sections 5-14.3), reserve lands and possession of lands in reserves (sections 18-33), roads and bridges (section 34), taking lands for public purposes (section 35), surrenders and designations (sections 37-41), declaring a will void (section 46), administering property and guardianship of Indian children (section 52), regulations, election of Chief and Council and powers of Council (sections 73-86) and, schooling of Indian children with the sole authority to enter into agreements with the Provinces and Territories (sections 114-122).¹²⁵ The Indian

¹²⁴. Kenneth Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation* (Prince Rupert, BC: School District #52 & Tsimshian Nation, 2005) 199. Also, conversations with my English-born mother from her personal experience given in accounts of her experience dispersed throughout my adolescent and adult years.

¹²⁵. *Indian Act*, Canadian Legal Information Institute, <http://www.canlii.org/ca/sta/i-5/> (accessed August 5, 2008).

Act is dehumanizing, binding Indigenous people cognitively, physically and, spiritually to the authority of the federal government and the anguish of dependency. The Indian Act separated the Indigenous people from the rest of Canadian society, socializing all to the colonial belief in Indigenous inferiority. Paul Tennant observed that, in the case of British Columbia:

By the late 1880s there was unanimity among provincial politicians concerning the Indian question. Regardless of their faction or federal party loyalties, they believed the white myth that Indians had been primitive peoples without land ownership, and they accepted the white doctrine that extension of British sovereignty had transformed an empty land into unencumbered crown land. In the provincial view, the surviving Indians were mere remnants of an irrelevant past with neither the right nor the means to influence their own unhappy future.¹²⁶

The purpose of the Indian Act was and is to annihilate Indigenous distinction and dignity by usurping authority over ancestral land, schooling, political leadership, health and general business. The only battle of magnitude currently on the Northwest coast of British Columbia against this unjust reality is the treaty process. This battle aims to regain control of, and authority over, ancestral land.

¹²⁶. Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990) 52.

In the late 1800's "education" in residential schools was a weapon used by the federal government, in the words of then Minister of Indian Affairs, was to "elevate the Indian from his condition of savagery" and "make him a self-supporting member of the state, and eventually a citizen in good standing."¹²⁷ The government's determination to use residential schools as a tool for assimilation was enforced by an amendment to the Indian Act "to make attendance compulsory for every child between the ages of seven and fifteen. Twenty industrial and fifty-four boarding schools were operating across Canada by 1911, except in the Maritimes and Quebec; 5,347 Aboriginal children resided in these schools."¹²⁸ The repercussion of such an impingement on the Indigenous family continues to this day.

Colonial Christian goals of converting the Indigenous heathen savages to Christianity by removing children from their parents, demonstrates the submission of religious institutions to colonial oppressive values and beliefs of the 1800's. The mission of the Christian churches in Canada to Indigenous peoples was not an introduction to the

¹²⁷.Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Looking Forward, Looking Back*, vol. 1. (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996) 333.

¹²⁸. Law Commission, *Restoring Dignity*, 54.

teachings of Christ of love, grace, peace, kindness, gentleness and forgiveness. To the contrary dehumanization in the acts of oppression is apparent in the words of Archbishop of St. Boniface concerning the schooling of Indigenous children that they should be "caught young to be saved from what is on the whole the degenerating influence of their home environment."¹²⁹

With the united force of government, legislation, law enforcement, schooling and the Christian church against children, their parents and their communities, Indigenous children were sentenced to the world of inhumane institutionalized parenting that imbedded the internalized belief of inferiority and generations of neglectful parenting. The impact of such an onslaught can be summarized in the words of interpreter Charles Barton for Ts'msyen and Nisga'a leaders on February 3, 1887 when they said, "You can keep a bird in a cage, but even if that cage is beautiful, the bird will never be free..."¹³⁰

Accounts of rapes, beatings including broken and bruised skin tissue and broken bones, solitary confinement,

¹²⁹. Royal Commission, *Looking Forward*, 338.

¹³⁰. James Cullingham & Peter Raymont, prods., *As Long as the Rivers Flow: Time Immemorial*, VHS No. 113C 9191058, directed by Hugh Brody (Montreal: NFB & Tamarack Productions, 1991).

eating spoiled food or their own feces, forbidden to speak their language as well as acts of public humiliation conditioned Indigenous children to believe they were less than human.¹³¹ Far from the guidance of compassionate parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles to prepare them for the responsibility of adult life, children were exiled to a black abyss of execration. Reconciling the past, bringing to rest through restitution and acceptance, varies from direct refusal to on-going anguish and a conscious or unconscious life's quest for restoring individual and collective balance.

¹³¹. For details on abuse in residential schools, see Royal Commission, *Looking Forward*, 365-76.



Figure 7. Delgamuukw pole section, Kispiox, BC. This pole is based on a story of a Gitksan princess who had been abducted and married off to a Haida Chief who was later rescued along with her baby and returned to her home.

The value of children in the Adaawx of Txamsem stealing the light is demonstrated by the supernatural chief raising the half human children as his own grandchildren (Txamsem and Lugabula) and then returning them safely to their human grandfather's village. Children continue to be recognized as the future leaders and carriers of ancestral teachings. In Ts'msyen culture for centuries, the young pregnant mothers are taught that every thought and emotion affects the unborn child. Grandparents

have played an active role in teaching young parents how to care for their child. Residential schools interrupted the ability to respond with human compassion in every day events that has impacted individuals and families resulting in the family violence and addictions we see in our communities today.

The residential schools were the missionary vocation of colonial Christians and failed to impart the message of love to the Indigenous peoples of the new world. In the New Testament, the Gospel of Luke 10:25, "a certain lawyer" is interacting with Jesus concerning inheritance of eternal life.¹³² Jesus refers him to the scriptures and the lawyer responds by answering that one must, "...love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."¹³³ The lawyer challenges Christ's authority by asking who is his neighbour, the passage then goes on to account Christ's parable of a good Samaritan. Theologian, I. Howard Marshall¹³⁴ writes, "Jews and Samaritans deeply

¹³². "Luke 10:25," in *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, King James Version*, ed. Spiros Zodhiates (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1991).

¹³³. Ibid.

¹³⁴. For more information on I.H. Marshall, see University of Aberdeen, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/staff/howard-marshall.shtml> (accessed August 5, 2008).

hated each other..."¹³⁵ making the act of love by the Samaritan toward the Jew significant. Marshall goes on to write concerning Christ's response to loving one's neighbour:

For although the lawyer asked 'Who is my neighbour (passively understood)?' Jesus suggests that the real question is rather 'Do I behave as a neighbour (active sense)?' In other words, Jesus does not supply information as to whom one should help, for failure to keep the commandment does not spring from lack of information but from lack of love. It was not fresh knowledge that the lawyer needed, but a new heart—in plain English, conversion.¹³⁶

The missionaries who brought the teachings of Christ to children in residential schools and to Indigenous communities failed to fulfill this law, a law affirmed by Christ as the law opening the door to eternal life—to the presence of God.

Defining the Indigenous as savages, heathens and inferior to Europeans lacked understanding, compassion and respect—the colonial Christian failed to love their neighbour. The parable of The Good Samaritan teaches how the Christian is to love the neighbor as oneself. Rather than viewing the land-based spirituality of Indigenous

¹³⁵. I. Howard Marshall, "Luke," in *New Bible Commentary*, Rev. ed., eds. D. Guthrie & J.A. Motyer (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970) 904.

¹³⁶. *Ibid.*, 905.

peoples as an opportunity to relate the teachings of Christ when He was fasting in the desert, walking on water and in the garden of Gethsemane, Christian colonialists worked to eradicate Indigenous rituals and beliefs.¹³⁷

The Ayaawx has trained generations of Ts'msyen to respect all life. Overcoming missionary prejudices, and practicing respect in the rapidly changing world of the colonial era would have meant detaching Christians from the disrespectful colonial mindset that misunderstood, and rejected the spiritual principles of the Ayaawx. Łoomsk partnered with the teachings of Christ meant transforming oppression through the discipline of studying and applying the new message of spiritual power and by integrating it to every aspect of daily life. The Ayaawx taught our grandparents to overlook the shortcomings of the colonialists in order to grasp the central meaning in the teachings of Christ. Respect for the message of Christ along with a changing world that promulgated colonial beliefs of superiority and the notion of progress permeated the Christianizing of Indigenous people. Today, the majority of Ts'msyen and Indigenous people along the North West coast of British Columbia are practicing Christians

¹³⁷. Royal Commission, *Looking Forward*, 340-41.

with some continuing to believe the ancestral cleansing rituals are "of the devil." With conversion to Christianity, the importance of respect for the land remains a relationship that strengthens spiritual principles of respect.

All of the *Adaawx* are intimately connected to the land. The relationship with the land is the link to spiritual practise, economy, and survival of the community. The RCAP designated one entire chapter to the relocation of Indigenous communities.¹³⁸ For example, the *Gwa'Sala-Nakwaxda'xw* were relocated in the early 1960's by the federal government.

When the *Gwa'Sala* and *'Nakwaxda'xw* amalgamated at *Tsulquate*, they found that the promised moorage facilities for their boats had not been provided. Within five years of the move, only three boats in the band's gillnet fleet were still fishing, and only two of them regularly. When boats were used for homes because the promised houses were not built, fishing licences were revoked because the boats were no longer defined as fishing vessels. Most of these boats, as well as others used for fishing, had to be moored in the river or on the beach, where they were eventually destroyed by high winds, waves and rain. This deprived the bands of access to marine resources, formerly a mainstay of their economy.¹³⁹

This is an example of the impact of oppression. No one in the community of Port Hardy assisted the *Gwa'Sala-*

¹³⁸. Ibid., 411-543.

¹³⁹. Ibid., 495.

'Nakwaxda'xw people: the Catholic church, Anglican church, United church, community support services, and social services disregarded the desperate situation by failing to give compassionate assistance and on-going support. The lack of compassion of social service organizations in Port Hardy supports Freire's exposition on oppression when he states:

Once a situation of violence and oppression has been established, it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those caught up in it—oppressors and oppressed alike. Both are submerged in this situation, and both bear the marks of oppression.¹⁴⁰

The community of Port Hardy and the Indian Affairs bureaucrats in the early 1960's were submerged in sixty years of oppression toward Indigenous peoples of Canada. The extent of the suffering of the Gwa'Sala-'Naxwaxda'xw people is in direct proportion to the extent of violence against Indigenous people in Canada at the time. Concerning the relocation the RCAP goes on to note about the Gwa'Sala-Naxwaxda'xw community:

Several studies found an increase in mortality rates among relocated populations. For example, Culhane's demographic study of the Gwa'Sala and 'Nakwaxda'xw points to an increase in deaths in the community immediately following the move. The factors contributing to higher mortality rates following relocation include environmental change,

¹⁴⁰. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 40.

overcrowded housing, poor sanitation and contact with infectious diseases. Overcrowding and poor sanitation also contribute to a rise in morbidity. This was the problem at Tsulquate, where two years following relocation only eight houses had been made available for 200 people. As many as 24 people were crowded into one-room shacks with no sewage facilities or running water, and access to medical facilities was limited.¹⁴¹

The Gwa'Sala-'Naxwaxda'xw people of Tsulquate survived acts of cruelty and hatred where some lost family members as a result of inhumane living conditions they were forced into by the federal government who had exercised its authority over their wards. Once two separate communities located in Blunden Harbour and Smith Inlet, the Gwa'Sala and 'Naxwaxda'xw people were forced to relocate geographically and merge as two separate people into one community located in Port Hardy physically separated from the rest of the town by a creek. Their presence is slightly concealed by a park and a non-residential treed strip of land. The physical barrier is a symbol of the conscious denial of the history of atrocities. The people of Tsulquate prior to their forced relocation had sixty years of conditioning to the confines of non-human existence through schooling, enforced legislation and socialization. Freire writes, "One of the gravest obstacles to the

¹⁴¹. Royal Commission, *Looking Forward*, 498.

achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and hereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating."¹⁴²

The history of relocation related deaths and sickness of the Gwasala–Naxwaxda'axw in the town of Port Hardy is an example of absorption into inhumane treatment submerging and domesticating any belief of the power of ancestral teachings into insignificance in a colonized world. The colonial belief that Indigenous people are sub-human created indifference in non-Indigenous Canadians evidenced by the lack of a compassionate response by the service providers of the town. For the Indigenous people, the gross indifference demonstrated by the Port Hardy towns-people and the unjust, inhumane treatment from the federal government has become normalized.

The inside world of the oppressed has a pervasive blackness that lies beneath consciousness. We have been sensitized to violence – cultural, structural and direct violence.¹⁴³ Cultural violence emerged primarily through the

¹⁴². Freire, *Pedagogy*, 33.

¹⁴³. For more information on violence and culture see Johan Galtung, <http://www.crosscurrents.org/galtung.htm> (accessed September 20, 2008); M. Pilisuk & J. Tennant, "The Hidden

Christian churches and the erroneous belief of ethnic-religious superiority. Structural violence developed through legislation and education institutions. Direct violence has the strongest roots in residential schools and in recent years, in the over-representation of Indigenous inmates in Canadian penitentiaries. In particular, Canadian Heritage Department's Human Rights Program has reported that "two Saskatoon City Police officers were convicted of unlawful confinement in October 2001," over Darrel Night's allegation that he was dropped off outside the city in sub-zero weather and left to walk back to the City.¹⁴⁴ Both the behaviour of the Saskatoon City Police and the City of Saskatoon and the recent history of Tsulquate are excellent examples of the trance of indifference by community services and citizens and the trauma-trance of the Indigenous people of both geographic locations.

We as Indigenous people are now demonstrating awareness about our oppression through our writings; however, we are not fully examining the region of consequence in its entirety. We are not working toward

Structure of Violence," *ReVision: A Journal of Consciousness and Transformation* 20, no, 2 (1997): 25-31. 144. For the report, see Canadian Heritage (Human Rights Program), http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca/progs/pdp-hrp/docs/cat/2002/sk_e.cfm (accessed August 5, 2008).

transforming the suffering that exists in our communities today. Instead, we have internalized the oppressor, believing the oppressor to be superior and idealizing oppressor power as the power to attain rather than seeing both oppressor/oppressed relations as being in a state of disrespect.



Figure 8. Sm'ooygit Tsiibasa pole. Kispiox, BC.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵. The image, in the collection of the author, is used here with Sm'ooygit Tsiibasa's permission.

Chapter 6: The journey: Internalized oppression

Our historical and contemporary journey as Indigenous people in Canada has been, and continues to be, one of oppression and living with the need to transform that oppression. Conditioning through legislation, school, religion and social relations, has brought us to believe that our ancestral teachings are inferior or irrelevant in contemporary society. The consequence of over one hundred years of violence against Indigenous people is the internalized belief that we are sub-human. Our collective mind is no longer connected to the land and the teachings of our ancestors in a way that can assist us in transforming our suffering. Instead, our collective mind has come to believe that we are inferior or inadequate. In Sm'algyax, we have a saying that prompts the collective mind to submit to the heart so that all present and absent might be united as one heart, "Sagayt k'ulum goot." When this phrase is used in the feast hall, or any public gathering, both fluent and non-fluent speakers understand that our personal conflicts must be forsaken for the purpose of individual hearts becoming as one in the power of respect.

Ts'msyen people traditionally believe that when a traumatic event happens, a part of the person's soul

remains at the place of trauma. A contemporary example of such a belief is given by Matthew Hill's account of his brother's death:

Wesley was in Terrace, B.C. at the Kitsumkalum gas bar when he had a massive heart attack and collapsed at the gas pump. His body was transported to the district hospital where he was revived and placed on life support. The family believed that his spirit left his body at the place where he collapsed. A short time after the incident, an eagle, Wesley's crest, swooped down at a gas attendant who was walking past the place where Wesley's spirit left him. The family believed when they heard of the incident, that the eagle was returning to get Wesley's spirit.¹⁴⁶

The task of the medicine practitioner is to use the appropriate implements, songs, prayers, and medicines to retrieve the individual's soul. Our collective soul is stuck in the violence of oppression of our past and the evidence can be found in the RCAP statistics throughout the third volume, and they include: education, family violence, and unemployment.¹⁴⁷

Statistics concerning Indigenous education in Canada in the RCAP, Chapter 5 of Gathering Strength in 1991 indicated "76% of Aboriginal people over 15 had completed primary school, and 43% had completed high school." Over

¹⁴⁶. Matthew Hill, interview by author, Gitxaała, BC, October 15, 2007.

¹⁴⁷. Canada, *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Gathering Strength*, vol. 3. (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996).

50% of the students enrolled in secondary school were not graduating.¹⁴⁸ The RCAP goes on to state, "We must ask why schooling has continued to be such an alienating experience for Aboriginal children and youth."¹⁴⁹ Eleven years have passed since the publication of the RCAP.

Public and post-secondary schools assimilate all students to Euro-centered values and beliefs through prevailing education methods and theories. For the Indigenous students of Canada, educational institutions residing on Indigenous lands, have yet to give space in curriculum and courses to present Indigenous philosophy. Ignoring Indigenous ancestral principles is the narrow, closed, exclusive world of an oppressive society. Of the continuation and maintenance of oppression by the oppressed Freire writes:

Any attempt to "soften" the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their "generosity," the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this "generosity," which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. That is why the dispensers of false generosity become

¹⁴⁸. Ibid., 438.

¹⁴⁹. Ibid., 440.

desperate at the slightest threat to its source.¹⁵⁰

Secondary and post-secondary Aboriginal/Indigenous programs and courses that are not founded on Indigenous ancestral law are examples of such false generosity. For example, the University of Northern British Columbia's Ts'msyen language teacher certification program is not a true Indigenous program because it is not founded on the Ayaawx. The perpetuation of injustice in this particular language program is the lack of acknowledgement and implementation of Ts'msyen methodologies as the foundation of the program. The Ts'msyen language teacher certification program and the Aboriginal Teacher Education Bridging Initiative Program are two examples of the many programs in North American institutions that offer Indigenous/Aboriginal/Native American/First Nations post-secondary programs developed by scholars without consultation with the local elders, matriarchs, chiefs and fluent speakers. Ts'msyen teaching methodology would consult with the community through the hereditary system, gaining knowledge of the Chiefs and Houses in the local area where the campus is situated. On-going relations with the community would

¹⁵⁰. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 1995) 26.

involve public meetings that provide an opportunity for the community to give critical feedback to guide the courses and programs.

Recovering from generations of residential school is an arduous task. Unraveling generations of conditioning to inferiority requires conscious, ongoing intentional action in a supportive, safe environment that challenges self-defeating conditioning.

The history and perpetuation of the oppression of Indigenous people in Canada is in direct relation to the extent to which we are now oppressing ourselves through violence.

The RCAP, has presented in the chapter on the family a section on family violence¹⁵¹ quoting a 1991 Statistics Canada survey of on-reserve members,

[T]he proportion of Aboriginal people identifying certain social issues as a problem in their communities: 44% saw family violence as a problem...29% saw sexual abuse as a problem...34% saw suicide as a problem and 16% saw rape as a problem in their community.¹⁵²

In Gitx̱san territory there were 59 suicide attempts in just under six months and 70% of the attempts were women under

¹⁵¹. Royal Commission, *Gathering Strength*, 54-56.

¹⁵². *Ibid.*, 59.

21 years of age.¹⁵³ In Chapter 2: The Family, of the RCAP, a survey conducted in Toronto reiterates the conditioned choice of Indigenous women toward violence when they write that:

[I]n the general population 54 per cent of women had experienced some form of unwanted intrusive sexual experience before reaching the age of 16; 51 per cent of women had experienced rape or attempted rape; and 27 per cent of women had experienced physical assault in an intimate relationship.¹⁵⁴

The Report noted that "published work focusing on family violence, as well as in our hearings, Aboriginal people have consistently linked violence with situations in which individuals feel trapped in disadvantage and frustration."¹⁵⁵ Disadvantage is a mild description for the result of oppression that includes despair and anguish resulting in suicide. Freire, is more direct as he describes our condition as the oppressed:

The oppressed, who have been shaped by the death-affirming climate of the oppression, must find through their struggle the way of life-affirming humanization, which does not lie simply in having more to eat (although it does involve having more

¹⁵³. David Wylie, "Hazelton cries for help amid suicide 'epidemic,'" *Vancouver Sun*, November 23, 2007. On December 5, 2007, I attended the public meeting that was held in Gitanmaax Hall as a follow up. Unfortunately, the service providers emphasized the need for more facilities. The Kitwanga youth requested cultural education.

¹⁵⁴. Ibid., 58.

¹⁵⁵. Ibid.

to eat and cannot fail to include this aspect). The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women. This is a radical requirement. They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings.¹⁵⁶

The violence that we are now doing to ourselves in our communities is in direct proportion with the magnitude of oppression toward us as the Indigenous peoples. Our behaviour now is as though we are objects without value.

Dehumanization through colonization and the maintenance of oppression of the Indigenous in North American society is in balance with the violence that we as the Indigenous are now acting out on our own family members. As stated in the RCAP:

Family violence in Aboriginal communities is distinct, however, in that the unbalanced power relationships that structure the lives of Aboriginal people are not found primarily in the relationships between men and women. The imbalance lies in the powerlessness of Aboriginal people relative to society as a whole, including the social institutions that dominate every aspect of their lives, from the way they are educated and the way they can earn a living to the way they are governed.¹⁵⁷

The violence that we are now inflicting on ourselves is not only in direct relationship to the magnitude of

¹⁵⁶. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 50.

¹⁵⁷. Royal Commission, *Gathering Strength*, 73.

oppression, it is also a reflection of our "yearning for freedom." The suicide rates of our youth at five to seven times higher than the Canadian rate¹⁵⁸ of non-Indigenous youth are a clear indication that we are yearning for freedom.

The most accurate indicator in the RCAP, for unemployment on reserves is Figure 3.9, a 1991 Statistics Canada survey recording social assistance, On-reserve at 41.5%, Non-reserve at 24.8%, Métis at 22.1%, Inuit at 23.5% and total population at 8.1%.¹⁵⁹ Dependency has become the social norm in Indigenous communities. In Ts'msyen villages on the northwest coast of British Columbia where in the early 1900's communities built their own homes and churches working together as a cohesive community,¹⁶⁰ unemployment rates of 50% and higher have now replaced community funded and initiated activities. Dependency is now one of the greatest challenges in Indigenous communities.¹⁶¹ In the process of losing our

¹⁵⁸. For these statistics, see Health Canada, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/promotion/suicide/index_e.html (accessed August 5, 2008).

¹⁵⁹. Royal Commission, *Gathering Strength*, 168.

¹⁶⁰. Elders, conversations with author, Gitx̱aał̱a, BC, 1978, and Nass Valley, BC, 1998.

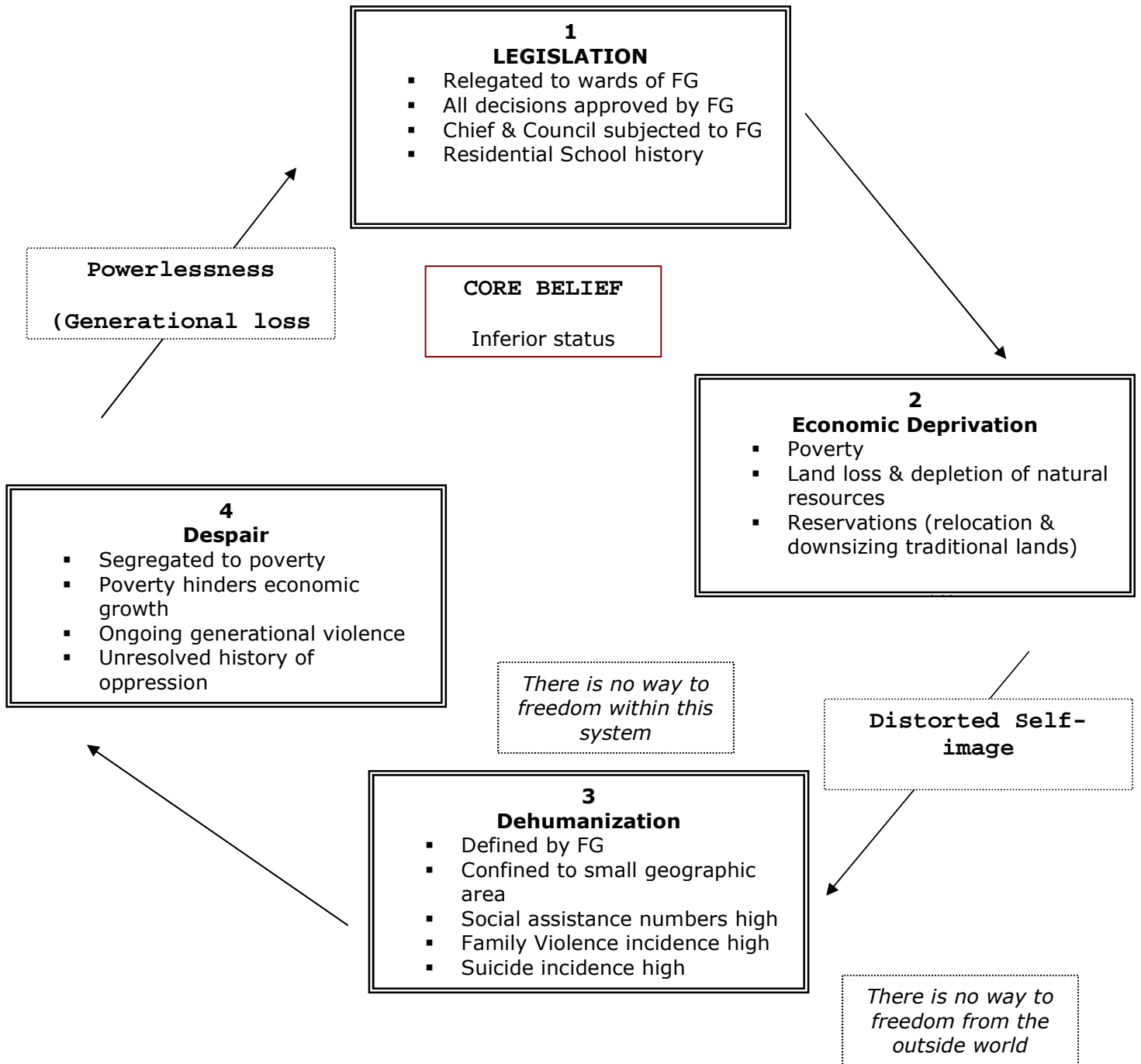
¹⁶¹. See the Northern Health Authority Unemployment Profile at BC Stats, www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/cen01/abor/HA5.pdf (accessed August 5, 2008).

humanity, we have lost the integrity and dignity of our grandparents who built their own homes, community buildings, formed orchestras, marching bands and choirs. Our communities once traveled to encourage each other with musical skills at a time of loss or celebration. We now have small remnants of a time that is being replaced by indifference and complacency.

Considering social problems in Dene communities, Thomas Berger observed that, "Unfortunately, these causes are not treatable by a short stay in a detoxification centre, by counseling, or by any conventional means. They stem from individual demoralization and the demoralization of whole communities."¹⁶² Here Berger writes about oppression of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Dependency in the context of Canadian history is connected to a chain of events as outlined in the following diagram:

¹⁶². Thomas R. Berger, *A Long and Terrible Shadow: White Values, Native Rights in the Americas, 1492-1992* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991) 36.

The Cycle of Dependency



FG: Federal Government
 Class: social rank
 Status: position or rank in relation to others

Figure 9. The Cycle of Dependency

Unemployment/dependency, low graduation numbers and family violence cannot be separated from the history of oppression that continues today. Dehumanization of the Indigenous people of Canada has become a conditioned behaviour for the total population. We as the oppressed have internalized the belief of inferiority and have become lulled into subsistence living set in an environment of violence that we are perpetuating in our homes.

The journey in our contemporary *Adaawx* as the Indigenous people on the Northwest coast of British Columbia is one of suffering. Suffering imposed by the outside world through legislation and socialization. Indigenous children were the only children for several generations in Canadian history who were taken from family and community to be placed in boarding institutions because of ethnicity.¹⁶³ Enforced by law, children were relentlessly removed and relocated into an environment that treated them as unacceptable and inferior to Europeans and that rejected their ancestral teachings as valueless in the new and changing world. The Law Commission of Canada writes of the

¹⁶³. Law Commission of Canada, *Restoring Dignity: Responding to Child Abuse in Canadian Institutions* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2000) 51.

residential schools and their impact on the Indigenous peoples:

What distinguished residential schools for Aboriginal children is that they were part of a policy of assimilation that was sustained for many decades: the residential school experience influenced the lives of several generations of people. To focus only on the harm done to individual survivors is, therefore, to ignore the damage done to families, communities and Aboriginal peoples generally—all of whom are also, in this context, survivors.¹⁶⁴

The oppressor from the outside world in this contemporary Adaawx is without heart. When speaking Sm'algyax, the well-being of an individual is determined by the condition of their heart. For example, the heart may be sick, sad, bleeding or crying. To behave as one who is not human is to be without a heart. The actions of the colonizer through education, socialization, religion and legislation were all oppressive acts of dehumanization stretching over a span of many generations. Children were targeted in an attempt to assimilate to European culture or, perhaps more accurately, eradicate Indigenous cultures.¹⁶⁵

The internal world, or the collective mind views self as inferior and is also without heart. We have been

¹⁶⁴. Ibid.

¹⁶⁵. Ibid., 66.

conditioned to sub-humanity, to be less than slaves. In this contemporary Aadaawx where we have internalized the oppressor as the ideal, we behave as though we have no ancestors. We behave as though the land has nothing to offer us. In this journey, our need for help from Mouse Woman, the one who aids the captive with appropriate protocol, is desperate. The guidance required to gain favour from the captor is the fat of the Ayaawx. The guidance to freedom rests in the teachings of our ancestors.



Figure 10. Chilkat woven blanket. Prince Rupert Museum.

The violence that was done to our relatives in residential schools is now that violence reshaped and repeated in our homes. The conditioning through a violent and shaming environment has created a self-hatred that has been passed on from one generation to the next with the result of the greater oppression being that which we are now doing to ourselves.

We cannot obtain freedom by doing to the oppressors what they have done to us. Concerning the struggle for freedom Freire writes:

At all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as women and men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human. Reflection and action become imperative when one does not erroneously attempt to dichotomize the content of humanity from its historical forms.¹⁶⁶

As Freire states, we must see ourselves as humans, as men and women and not as objects without heart or soul.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 47-48.

¹⁶⁷. *Ibid.*

He's Waiting

Life like grandmother's breath
carries me as a leaf on the wind
propels me
past your scarlet barrier of seduction
feeling the heat
fragile and vulnerable her breath carries me
moves me as a shape shifter
through your rough hewn door of fear
lifts me above the raging whirlpool of salaciousness
merciless
my edges brush your flesh touching the pulse
feeling the heat
fragile and vulnerable her breath carries me
dropped beside the boy crumpled beneath the kitchen sink
alone and waiting for the table to be spread
alone and waiting for gentle arms
that will reach into the darkness
and lift him
hold him
embrace him soothe him
sing him
to the candle-lit table
of abundance¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸. © Patricia June Vickers, December 21, 2006.

Chapter 7: The feat: Respect is the fat

The heart of the Ayaawx is respect. All relationships, humans with humans, humans with animals, humans with the land, and humans with the supernatural world, all revolve around the act of respect. The following reproduced Adaawx comes from the Tsimshian Narratives I, and is reproduced with the permission of the chief of the Gispaxloats, Russell Mather, Senior.

(1) Adversity unites sisters

Waux, a great supernatural being, was the son of Asdiwal who had married the Kitselas princess, who during a great famine set out to go to her sister and started off to go there where she lived knowing she had plenty. It was the same with the sister at the head of the Skeena; she thought of her sister at Kitselas and she set out to go down the river, knowing that her sister had plenty of food. The sisters set out to go to the other's village, each thinking that the other was better off. After many days of traveling the two sisters met on the ice in the Skeena River. When both knew that each were suffering from the famine, they wept. They made camp; and near by were many old wild rose bushes and there were some seed bulbs on these bushes and these the women ate. They wept all through the night and were very sad at their condition and while they were so weeping, comforted each other and they went to sleep. Next day when they woke, they again began to weep and lament their position. They had nothing to eat except the last rose seed bulb which they divided between them, then being so weary and tired both sisters went to sleep.

(2) The supernatural responds to suffering

The Kitselas sister was very beautiful and had been much sought after before she became the

wife of the Kitselas chief, but now she was here alone with her sister. She slept very soundly and while she slept a being came and laid with her. She awoke in the darkness and she felt a man with her. She touched his body and the man spoke to her. "My father the Chief-of-the-Skies could not rest properly, being so annoyed at your continual weeping, so he sent me to pacify you and to marry you. Tomorrow we shall have all the food you and your sister want." Soon a house was built by the man and filled with food. Not long after a son was born and he was taken by his supernatural father and trained in all things. The father and son were always together and flew about the country very swiftly and were almost invisible. The boy especially was light as a feather and was called by the father Waux. He flew in and out through the smoke hole. Now that the young son of Asdiwal was grown and was able to provide for his people it was now time for him to return to where he came from and he told his son, "I shall go back to my father, your grandfather, who is the Chief of the Heavens. I have taught you all that you must know and how to provide for your people. You will be their leader and you will travel between the Nass and the Skeena Rivers and you will be more wealthy than any other chief among your people." Not long after this Asdiwal disappeared from the people.

(3) Consequences to disrespect and greed

For a time Waux was very sad as he had been with his father so much and for a time he felt lost. He went to the hunting grounds on the Skeena and he there gathered much food. He was now a full grown man and he returned to his mother's village and took his uncle's daughter to be his wife. She was a very beautiful woman and a clever woman. Waux went to new territories and he knew that his father always forbade him to go to a certain valley. "That is the valley of all the supernatural beings and should you go there they will surely destroy you. That is the valley in which they gather from all parts of the world where they make their plans for their activities, so you must never go near this valley." But

Waux's curiosity was aroused. He knew that should he go there he would be destroyed and even his wife. His father had given him a pair of magic snowshoes, a magic cane, a magic packbasket into which he could pack many animals, a hunting pole and a hunting spear, which he directed by simply telling it what to kill. He and his wife came near this valley and he had never gone into it before and was somewhat afraid. Yet, he knew the valley to be rich in animals as he saw many tracks leading to it. He had finished filling his houses with food and rich furs and there was enough food for everybody. The young man would go into the high hills and with his magic spear he would kill many mountain goats and fill up his little magic packbasket and then carry these down. When he unloaded it, it again became a huge amount of meat. So in this way he had much supplies and his people were well off; but he was very curious about this valley which his father warned him of, to keep away from. One day he made up his mind, "I am going up to the valley of the supernatural beings and I will get more furs there." So he took his mountain pole and snowshoes and his magic basket. In his eagerness to go to the valley he forgot his magic spear. He came to the high mountain and there he saw many large mountain goats and mountain sheep. When he came to where these were he began to chase them. The mountain trail became steeper and finally the goats came to the end of the trail and then went into a cavern. The last mountain goat to go in was a huge animal and it turned about gazing at the approaching Waux, who was determined to get some of these huge mountain goats. As he drew near, then he discovered he had not brought his magic spear and had only his snowpole. The huge mountain goat seeing that Waux was now close by began to dance; as it danced, it would kick against the sides of the steep mountain.

(4) *Signs to remind us*

Waux, finding himself helpless against the animal, began to call down to his wife who stayed at the foot of the mountain, "Throw some fat on the fire as an offering to the supernatural

beings." At first the woman could not hear him, then when she did she misunderstood him. She called back, "Do you want me to eat some mountain goat kidney fat?" The man called again to his wife to throw fat on the fire as an offering to the supernatural beings of the valley for his safety. But the woman could not hear and kept on replying, "You want me to eat more fat?" Finally in anger Waux cried out, "Yes eat plenty of warm fat, then drink a great quantity of cold water." As he said this the mountain goat, who had been dancing all the while, gave a huge kick and the sides of the mountain came together crushing Waux. He escaped being completely crushed by wedging his magic pole in between the two sides. Here he may be seen to this day having become a solid rock beside his pole. His wife at the foot of the mountain had done as her husband told her and ate a huge quantity of mountain goat fat and then drank a huge quantity of very cold water after which she sat down to rest. She fell backwards and solidified into a white mass of fat, which became a huge piece of quartz. She can be seen at the foot of the mountain to this day.¹⁶⁹

The sisters' encounter with the supernatural world resulted in the birth of a supernatural being that increased the power of the Gispaxloats, but more importantly, this Adaawx teaches us the consequences of disrespect toward nature and the supernatural world.

(1) Adversity unites sisters

We are reminded of the connection between individuals in the same waap and that even in times of famine and

¹⁶⁹. National Museums of Canada, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987) 173-74.

adversity, our closest support is in our waap and not from another waap. Villages and Nations do not separate our connection through the waap in the Ayaawx.

(2) The supernatural responds to suffering

In need and truly suffering from the famine, the sisters' sadness and fear persists. They were not sad because their husband's, father's or brother's wealth was dwindling, they were expressing their sadness because they were truly hungry and in need. The supernatural responds to need by giving one of the sisters Asdiwal, the supernatural being from the skies as a husband. In this section of the Adaawx, humans prosper because of their connection to the supernatural world. The prosperity is not only increased wealth; it is also increased skill and knowledge of supernatural ways through marriage and the male child, Waux.

(3) Consequences of disrespect and greed

There are restrictions for human beings; Asdiwal teaches his son Waux that he is not to venture into the valley where the supernatural beings meet to discuss their "activities" in the world.

Waux, "had finished filling his houses with food and rich furs and there was enough food for everybody," yet he tracked the mountain goat up into their secret

valley regardless. Having forgotten his magic spear, he tracked the goats toward the valley but was prevented from traveling further into the valley by the largest goat, which used his supernatural powers through dance to cause a rockslide.

(4) Signs to remind us

Waux crossed the border into the forbidden ground of the supernatural and his disrespectful act could not be corrected. Intentions to reverse his disrespect by offering fat in the fire through his wife failed. The result of disrespect in this Adaawx of Waux is a stone memorial for all to remember the importance of respect.

Although this Adaawx is not about oppression specifically, it holds many relevant teachings. These include: that there are consequences to disrespectful behaviour; there is a supernatural world that hears our suffering and responds to restore balance; that the teachings we gain from the supernatural world can assist our family and community, and that encounters with the supernatural world increase personal and collective knowledge.

We face numerous obstacles in accomplishing the feat of transforming our suffering. The Adaawx of Waux teaches

that our suffering does not go unnoticed and that we have skills that have been given to us by the supernatural world through our ancestors. We do not know what would have happened if Waux's wife had heard him correctly and she offered the fat to the supernatural beings. We do know that the fat from the highest four legged animal, and the one requiring the greatest thought from the hunter before shooting, the mountain goat's kidney fat, represents respect in our Adaawx.

Respect for our ancestral teachings must confront fear of change. Fear that the colonial delusion is true, that we are inferior intellectually, socially and spiritually. The fear is about the blind journey of traveling out of dependency by believing that we are capable of creative solutions to end endemic poverty in our communities. The fear is about believing that the restrictive, inadequate, limited services we now receive from the federal government are better than our ability to heal ourselves.

The federal government has gradually been cutting back medical services, non-insured health benefits (crisis intervention), education allowance and social services. Yet we continue to believe that the subsistence living we receive from the federal government is better than what we were accomplishing ourselves only sixty years ago in our

villages. Dependency legislated through the Indian Act and the meager benefits it provides does not and will never compensate for the injustices of the past.

In the Adaawx of Waux, as he struggles to survive against defeat and death by the largest of the mountain goats, he makes one last attempt to save himself through his wife. When he realizes that she cannot decipher his instructions correctly, he gives in to his mistake and tells her to do as she hears. In the last section of the Adaawx, Waux submits to the consequences of his actions. The stone shapes in Ts'msyen territory are reminders that we must remember to be respectful and that as human beings, there are limitations in our access to the supernatural world.

In the Adaawx Waux becomes obsessed with his power, thinking he could overthrow the supernatural beings by desiring more power. His houses were full and there was enough food for everybody. At the centre of Waux's heart was greed, and rather than using his powers to continue to feed his Waap, he sought to be in the council chambers (the valley) of the supernatural – he wanted more. This Adaawx is important because it teaches us not only the progression of greed but also the consequences of greed and disrespect. As Ts'msyen, our cleansing ways teach us to meditate on

the principle of ɬoomsk, not only with the mind, but with the heart as well.

In Sm'algyax, Beynon identifies gotsga as meaning "heart of=goot=heart. Got may sometimes and very often so means "thoughts." "Such as hali-goodn."¹⁷⁰ The heart, where intention comes from, is a part of words that refer to thought. Words such as sigootk translates into "to start thinking about"; txa got translates to "unfinished business"; hawgoot, translates to "to consider or decide"; ha'ligoot, translates into "to guess, to have an opinion, to think; wilga goosk, translates into "council, advisors to the chief; wilgoosk, translates to "wise"; dax gotin, translates to "be patient"; gotin'wahgoot, translates to "without heart, thoughtless, heartless, careless."¹⁷¹ The smallest meaningful unit, morpheme, in these words is heart. In a Ts'msyen perspective on thought, when one thinks consciously with respect, our mind is then in direct relationship with our heart. As in the teachings of Christ,

¹⁷⁰. Mark Luther, "The Prince Who Became an Eagle," in William Beynon, recorder, translator, transcriber, *The Beynon Manuscript*, Microfilm E99.T8 B49 1980 (New York: Columbia University, 1980). See reel 1, text 78, page 23, note 5 from page 6 of the text.

¹⁷¹. Ts'msyen fluent speakers Doug Brown, Marjorie Brown, and Sampson Collinson, and linguist John A. Dunn in conversations with author, September–November 2003. In Prince Rupert, BC and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma USA.

our actions would then be a reflection of the state of our heart¹⁷².

The violence in our communities is the indication that our collective heart is sick, or worse yet, we are living as though we do not have a heart. The previous chapter points out the statistics that validate the violence we are passing on to our family and community members. To live as though one does not have a heart is to live without respect and compassion. In this contemporary *Adaawx* in our collective journey, we are now in the darkness of oppression. This is the time to understand the nature of the offense, the dynamics of oppression and its impact on the human soul, and, through observing the situation without judgment, working toward freeing not only us but our oppressors as well. As a human condition, we must study and articulate the impact of unjust dominance and control of one people over another. If we as the oppressed find within ourselves the escape route to freedom, then we know as traditional or Christian *Ts'msyen*, or a combination of both, that our power comes from the supernatural world through connection with the land. The escape route is

¹⁷². See "Matthew 15:19," in *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, King James Version, ed. Spiros Zodhiates (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1991).

transforming the way we think as the oppressed, the way in which we see ourselves – no longer as the “unfit, incapable, sick, lazy and unproductive”¹⁷³ rather, as legitimate children of a people with honour and dignity and a name and place of origin on this earth.

The mountain goat fat that must be offered for our freedom is the will to see the truth of the nature and impact of oppression. To examine oppression, so as not to remain under its curse, we cannot reverse the act, we cannot de-colonize or de-construct, rather, we must transform our reality. Transforming oppression as the oppressed Freire writes, “If the goal of the oppressed is to become fully human, they will not achieve their goal by merely reversing the terms of the contradiction, by simply changing poles.¹⁷⁴” Oppression is primarily a spiritual act engendering shame that is the root of all false beliefs of inadequacy. As a spiritual act, oppression must be transformed; to attempt to reverse oppression is simply to perpetuate the dynamics reversing roles, maintaining the dichotomy and the disrespect.

¹⁷³. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 45.

¹⁷⁴. *Ibid.*, 38.

As Ts'msyens, when referring to the condition of the heart, one also refers to the condition of the soul and spirit of the human being. Living without the heart then, is to live without the soul. Collective soul loss has happened through the traumatic events in colonization, through government legislation, removing generations of children to attend residential school, forbidding them to speak their ancestral language and teaching them to be ashamed of their ancestral heritage. Ignorant Christian missionaries were themselves trained and socialized to believe Indigenous ways were to be eradicated and therefore supported forced relocations, land loss, and confinement to reservations governed and monitored by the federal government as serving a good. Under a succession of tragic, inhumane, unjust events from contact to this day, oppression through violent means has become normal. We have come to accept the curse as a deserved event rather than a destructive spiritual act that we must transform. Our hearts have been hidden from us. Yet we fear looking for them because this transformation has become familiar: moving toward the unfamiliar – freedom without certainty – appears foolish without a dulled sense of conscious connection to the power of the land and our ancestral

teachings. Freire writes that we cannot see the freedom we so desire because of our conditioning:

In this situation the oppressed do not see the "new man" as the person to be born from the resolution of this contradiction, as oppression gives way to liberation. For them, the new man or woman themselves become oppressors. Their vision of the new man or woman is individualistic; because of their identification with the oppressor, they have no consciousness of themselves as persons or as members of an oppressed class. It is not to become free that they want agrarian reform, but in order to acquire land and thus become landowners—or, more precisely, bosses over other workers.¹⁷⁵

The ability to discern the perpetuation of oppression in our minds and hearts comes from the knowledge of the impact of oppression through personal integration. Making conscious the nature of suffering is taking into account the impact the history oppression has brought to your family, extended family, tribe, community and nations. As one observes the impact of oppression on one's personal life, mind-eyes will become open to seeing the nature of suffering oppression has brought to the oppressor, to them as individuals, to their families, the organizations to which they belonged and to our nation.

The first of many delegations of Nisga'a and Ts'msyens who traveled in 1887 to Victoria to meet with the premier,

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 28.

voiced the desire for freedom eloquently when Charles Barton, interpreter stated:

We are surprised to come into your house we never thought we would come to visit you in your house. You have the power to give us what we want, which is to be free. You can keep a bird in a cage but even if that cage is beautiful the bird will never be free. We want to be free. How can we ever be free under the laws of Queen Victoria?¹⁷⁶

The delegation of Nisga'a and Ts'msyen chiefs from Fort Simpson argued, on February 3rd, 1887 that oppression and the violence that accompanies it is imprisonment for the oppressed. They understood that the oppressor has the power to give freedom and over the past one hundred and twenty years the provincial and federal governments as oppressors have demonstrated that Freire's treatise is true: "The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves."¹⁷⁷ The social statistics are a clear indication of the lack of virtue in the power of the oppressor to transform the reality of oppression.

¹⁷⁶. James Cullingham & Peter Raymont, prods., *As Long as the Rivers Flow: Time Immemorial*, VHS No. 113C 9191058, directed by Hugh Brody (Montreal: NFB & Tamarack Productions, 1991).

¹⁷⁷. Freire, *Pedagogy*, 26.

The determination to transform oppression can clearly be witnessed in the struggle for ancestral lands. Frank Calder was a Nisga'a leader, recipient of the Order of Canada and Order of British Columbia, and first Indigenous politician in both the provincial and federal legislatures. The documentary titled Time Immemorial provides through his life story an example of the focus required to obtain freedom.

I was adopted into the Calder family and of course I didn't know how lucky that was until my later years when I found out that I was adopted by perhaps one of the most outstanding Indian fighters, Indian politicians of the day. And I was in the old sailing fish boat with him and of course he had all the books, piles of documents which the poor man couldn't read. And I was 12 years old in 1927 when he figured that it was high time that this boy he was building up to be a champion of this whole case, high time for the boy to receive these books. So he took all these documents and he placed them before me in this little fish boat and he said, "Start reading them."¹⁷⁸

It was apparent to Arthur Calder, Nisga'a leader of the late 1800's, that it was going to be necessary to learn the laws and dynamics of European domination to fight for recognition that had been denied in colonization. Arthur Calder understood at that early date in colonial relationships in British Columbia that the power of

¹⁷⁸. Cullingham, *As Long as the Rivers Flow*.

oppression was not a power that had respect as a guiding principle. Arthur Calder and many other Nisga'a, Gitxan and Ts'msyen leaders knew from the Adaawx that gaining and exerting power through heartless, thoughtless force would not yield an outcome that is congruent with the Ayaawx.

In the Adaawx of Waux, force-power follows disrespect. When Waux forced his power, the result was being trapped by his intention. Waux had been disrespectful by failing to observe the instruction given to him by his supernatural father. Through relations with the Europeans, it had become apparent to the early leaders of the Land Question that the forced power of the colonizer was not going to yield to the authority of the Indigenous people over ancestral lands. Although illiterate according to the colonized definition, Arthur Calder was literate in his evaluation of the untrustworthy character of the colonizer.

At the tenth annual Nisga'a convention in 1965 at Gitwinksihlkw, James Gosnell was filmed making the case for the need to push forward out of complacency to act from a place of respect for the land. In his speech he addresses those present by stating:

Mr. Chairman, this is the tenth annual convention of the Nisga'a Tribal Council. That's 10 conventions now we have taken. No result no action, no action. Waiting. That's the reason why I said in that meeting I will make a motion Mr.

Chairman I said that we go now. We want to get the settlement once and for all now. Not a hundred years from now. We're not going to sit here and allow the white man to use it and to make fun of us, in this land of ours. We've been sittin' here. Take a look around you. There's people in New York that are getting rich over my country. Our mountains are getting stripped. Everything is taken away from us. And I think I can say, and excuse my language, we're getting fed up, I'm getting fed up. I went last year where my father and I use to trap across here. There isn't a tree left there. If it wasn't those animals at that time I wouldn't have been standing here. This is what hurts me, I want that to be clearly understood, it hurts me deeply.¹⁷⁹

The result of oppressive power can be easily recognized in the condition of the surrounding land and more so today. In his speech, James Gosnell presents the land, the sacred land that connects one generation to the next, as the visible result of the destructive power that they were allowing to dominate them as Nisga'a people. He successfully brings to consciousness the power of the relationship of human beings with the land and animals, crediting the animals for feeding and clothing him. He reminds everyone at the convention that they are intimately connected to the animals and the land and because of that connection, they must move to ensure that their relationship with their environment and their ancestors be respected.

¹⁷⁹. Ibid.

In the Adaawx of Waux¹⁸⁰ and Txamsem brings light to the world,¹⁸¹ central to these two Adaawx is the necessity for respect. When working toward transforming oppression, it is necessary to initiate action from the intentional act of viewing self and the other as human beings first. To return hatred for hatred will not transform hatred, it will instead perpetuate the destructive acts that accompany hatred.

The many Adaawx that have been passed down in families, house groups, tribes and communities have provided many examples of transformation through tests of courage and understanding. The act of transforming disrespect to understanding, compassion and right intention is the same today as it was in the times of the birth of the Adaawx. Transformation is a spiritual, a supernatural act that is born out of necessity. As Ts'msyen people, we are currently at the place of urgency in the need to transform our suffering and return to the assurance in the teachings of loomsk.

¹⁸⁰. National Museums of Canada, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987) 173-74.

¹⁸¹. *Ibid.*, 1.

Eulogy

Arthur Amos Vickers
April 11, 1925 - April 29, 2007

Our father was the third child born to Kathleen Collinson and Henry Vickers in Gitxaala on April 11, 1925. Art was predeceased by his parents Kathleen and Henry, wife Grace Isabelle, daughter Faith, brothers John, Roy and Perry and sisters Lorine, and Lydia. He is survived by his brothers Brodie, Clarence and Ted and his six children: Roy (Andrea), Arthur (Jessica), Margaret (Mark), Matthew (Candice), Patricia and Noel (Marianne), twenty two grandchildren: Tracey, Gord, Judah, William, Jordan, Wakas, Grace, Dan, Erin, Dina, Matthew, Aliah, Joshua, Faith, Jessica, Cameron, Jacob, Rebekah, Jonathan, Sophia, Chelsea, Danika, Audrey and Isabelle and great grandchildren: Connor, Shannon, Grayson, Curtis, Taylor and Noah.

At a time such as this we have chosen to send our father on by telling the truth, encouraging further healing between us, our children and grandchildren. May God bless the truth and truly set us free from the pain that suffering has brought. May the truth we speak set not only us free here but our father free as he journeys onward.

We acknowledge the great suffering that residential school brought into our family through our grandmother and father and we address the messages of worthlessness that were passed on by inhumane behaviours toward children. Toward us standing here. We say to such a child:

- There's nothing to prove to anyone

- You don't need to earn love
- You never failed anyone
- It was too much responsibility for a child to carry
- The burdens and roles were too heavy
- His hand was too large for a child's face
- You don't have to try harder
- You were never meant to accomplish the work of an adult
- The child's needs always come first
- A child's pain is worthy of comfort
- A child is not a sexual object but is an innocent, sacred gift from God
- The arms are for love, not rage
- A child is never to be left alone in danger

Telling the truth is showing respect. One of our father's favourite scripture verses was from the Book of Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5-7: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." We acknowledge the power of God to bless the truth and we ask that God will continue to direct our path as we tell the truth without blame. Words we wanted to hear from our father as children, teenagers and adults are:

- I love you
- You did a good job
- You make me happy
- I'm proud of you
- You matter to me
- I'm glad you were born
- Don't let anyone ever tell you you're worthless
- Happy Birthday
- I'm sorry
- Please forgive me for harming you

We heard him play the guitar and sing the song, "It is no Secret (what God can do)." We recognize that by telling the truth we are standing in a place of responsibility, with God's help, we can transform suffering to love. "The chimes of time ring out the news, another day is through. Someone

slipped and fell, was that someone you? You may have longed for added strength your courage to renew, do not be disheartened for I have news for you. It is no secret what God can do, what He's done for others, He'll do for you. With arms wide open, He'll pardon you. It is no secret, what God can do." We own the words our Grandfather Henry gave to us:

- "Instead of getting even, it's getting good."
- "There's no such thing as bad people, just bad teachings."
- "Never give up."

Our father released in his times of anguish and loneliness prayers of longing to rest in the wide-open arms of God. His struggle is over. Together, we proclaim that it is over. It stops with us. The things our parents were unable to do for us, we can do for each other. As Heiltsuk, Gitx̱aał̱a, Haida, White, we say we are one people, may all be children of God.

Arthur Amos left unfinished business with us and with others. Saying "I'm sorry for my wrongdoing" is necessary according to our Ayaawx. Our intention is to complete the work by telling the story of grace. The truth will uphold him and carry him to the loving arms of the Creator of all life and to be in the presence of our mother, our sister, his parents, his brothers and sisters a new man, the father we longed for, a man at peace. Jesus sits beneath the tree calling the child to come home and rest on his knee. Hagwil yaan Arthur Amos. Hagwil yaan.

Who at the door is standing
Patiently drawing near

Entrance within demanding
Whose is the voice I hear

All thro'the dark hours dreary
Knocking again is He
Jesus art Thou not weary
Waiting so long for me

Sweetly the tones are falling
Open the door for me
If Thou will heed my calling
I will abide with Thee

Door of my heart I hasten
Thee will I open wide
Tho' He rebuke and chasten
He shall with me abide

May our words bring healing to us left behind, to our children and grandchildren and to all of you who are witnesses. Thank you for holding us up, for helping us to walk, for giving us the strength we need to send our father on in peace. Our words are said with love and respect, we thank you for being here to support us in our time of grief and assisting us in sending our father to his final resting place.¹⁸²

¹⁸². Eulogy for the author's father, read by his six children at his Memorial service in Prince Rupert, BC. (May 3, 2007).

The Collection

Signs direct patrons
past hallway cases
Laden with some body's regalia
An unidentified chief's headdress
End of the hallway
The Dundas Collection
No direction of where to begin

the
viewing

Intricately carved alder combs
Naxnox mask with asymmetrical face design
Eagle feast bowl
Thinly worn sheep horn spoons
Killer whale clapper
Hand smoothed soul catcher
Prayer carved bone war clubs
Faces peer back at me
Penetrate my composure
Press me to collapse

Alone in the exhibit room
Walls fade
Altered mind views past raven pole
Guardian of the space
To a cluster of men and the communal bottle
Congregated on the staircase landing

Weary from broken fingers
 Pierced tongues
 Bruised faces
 Swollen tissue
 Lost dreamtime
 They wait for the vessel
 That will carry them to rest

Resilient carvings
 Reflecting, absorbing, projecting light
 ɫagyigyɛt
 Essence of our ancestors
 reach through plexiglass
 Capture the soul
 Impose passion on indifference
 shift despair's shape
 Incise compassion's discipline
 Extend beyond confinement
 Summon the warrior and
 The child-bearer
 Open Mouse Woman's box
 Envision pathways

Dundas collection
 No
 Ts'msyen ancestors
 ɫagyigyɛt¹⁸³

¹⁸³. © Patricia June Vickers, March 14, 2007.

Chapter 8: Suwilsgütık: uniting teachings

For over one hundred years we have been conditioned through training children at residential schools and through early missions to believe that our spirituality is "of the devil." Robert Tomlinson,¹⁸⁴ missionary in the northwest in the early 1900's believed that it was necessary "To overthrow dark superstition and plant instead Christian truth to change the natives from ignorant, blood-thirsty cruel savages into quiet useful subjects of our gracious Queen...."¹⁸⁵ All Indigenous cultural ways were considered inconsequential, meaningless, and of no value in the newly formed colonial society.

Concerning colonial Christian beliefs Nisga'a leader Rod Robinson teaches:

When the missionaries first arrived here, it was quite obvious to my people that they had considered the culture of my people as the enemy. The enemy they wanted to stamp out... As an act of accepting Christianity, my grandfathers--forefathers, were encouraged to chop down their totem poles, which was considered a deity that was being worshipped. Now the missionaries they did not realize, maybe they did realize what

¹⁸⁴. Royal British Columbia Museum, Living Landscapes--Northwest, <http://www.livinglandscapes.bc.ca/northwest/sounds/project.htm> (accessed August 5, 2008)

¹⁸⁵. Rod Robinson, speaker, in James Cullingham & Peter Raymont, prods., *As Long as the Rivers Flow: Time Immemorial*, VHS No. 113C 9191058, directed by Hugh Brody (Montreal: NFB & Tamarack Productions, 1991).

those poles stood for, they stood for, for history, the history of our people, the history that told about the, about the time of the flood. The history that told about the migration of our people when they were washed away by the flood, when they were looking for their homeland. And that was what those poles stood for.¹⁸⁶

The misunderstanding was great resulting in the loss of many ceremonial and crest objects from totem poles to hair combs. Many converts to Christianity chose to burn their ceremonial and crest objects out of a sign of changing their spiritual practices. This form of cleansing has not brought about spiritual balance. We, as Indigenous people, have arrived at the place of needing to carefully examine ancestral cleansing practices in relation to the teachings of Christ. To critically reflect after one hundred years of studying the teachings of Christ, if the missionaries who brought the teachings to our ancestors were correct in their conclusions and resulting demands.

In the first half of the 1900's the Gitxaala people had translated the Communion and Morning Prayer services in the Anglican Common Book of Prayer from English to

¹⁸⁶. Rod Robinson carried the Lax Sgiik Sm'oooygit name Meneeskw and was one of the Nisga'a leaders involved in the land question.

Sm'algyax.¹⁸⁷ They had also translated many of their favourite hymns. Today, in the villages throughout the Bulkley and Skeena Valleys and in the Ts'msyen villages on the coast it is not unusual to see clergy such as priests and attending officiates wearing Indigenous regalia for their ceremonial robes along with carved implements for ritual and furniture.¹⁸⁸

To examine the congruence between the teachings of Christ and the teachings of the Ayaawx, particularly addressing suwilsgütk,¹⁸⁹ there are four elements in the spiritual realm that connect us with the supernatural world. These four elements include: power, love, wrong doing/sin (separation from God) relating to spiritual balance and, forgiveness.

In Ts'msyen society, teaching effective methods of suwilsgütk, or methods for increasing power through cleansing have and continue to be private--kept within the

¹⁸⁷. Grace Vickers (née Freeman), conversations with the author in approximately 1992. She was hired by the Anglican Church bishop in 1943 to teach in the single-roomed federal day school and carry out Sunday school and field-matron duties. She was the only non-Indigenous person living in the community of Gitx̱aał̱a at the time.

¹⁸⁸. See Cullingham, *As Long as the Rivers Flow*; and Raymont, Peter (Producers) & Brody, H. *Before Time* (New Aiyansh, BC: Nisga'a School District #92, 1991).

¹⁸⁹. Kenneth Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation* (Prince Rupert, BC: School District #52 & Tsimshian Nation, 2005) 57.

family and Waap. If we are to change the death rate of our people, in particular the youth, we must consider how we are going to change – evolve to meet our need. The need is to learn how to acquire power that will honour our past, present and future, integrating the good and transforming the destructive. Integration can be done in a way that respects those who dedicated their lives to translate the teachings of Christ because they believed in the goodness of the teachings disregarding the contradiction of the violence residential schools brought to them and their families. Our task in transforming our suffering involves finding the teachings of the Ayaawx that will assist in putting to rest the anguish of the past. Many of our leaders have stated publicly that the Ayaawx was given to us by Sm'ooygidm Laxa,¹⁹⁰ for example Bert McKay wrote that it was the "Supreme God" who created us and "gave us our place in the world."¹⁹¹ This published statement made by McKay confronts Robert Tomlinson's statement that refers to Ts'msyen spirituality as "dark superstition."

Regardless of these public confrontations, Christian leaders maintain the colonial belief that the cleansing

¹⁹⁰. Ibid., 56.

¹⁹¹. Nisga'a Tribal Council, *Nisga'a: People of the Nass River*. (New Aiyansh: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993) 125.

ways of our ancestors are not acceptable in Christian life. Yet an intimate relationship with the land was an integral part of the teachings of Christ. If as Indigenous Christians, we were to practise our traditional cleansing ways, we would be following the leadership of Christ who looked to the land as a source of renewal and strength.

The references of Christ's relationship with the land are numerous. The birth of the Messiah was not in a home but in a place where feed for animals was kept, in a manger.¹⁹² The Baptism of Christ, the affirmation of his mission to follow the teachings of his Father in Heaven, happened in the River Jordan.¹⁹³ "At once" following his baptism and affirmation, Christ went into the desert where he didn't eat for forty days, where he "was with the wild animals, and angels attended him".¹⁹⁴ At the conclusion of his isolation and fast, while he was still in the desert he was tempted by the devil.¹⁹⁵ Before choosing the twelve disciples, he "went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."¹⁹⁶ His very well

¹⁹². "Luke 2:1-7," in *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, King James Version, ed. Spiros Zodhiates (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1991).

¹⁹³. Mark 1:9-11, *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴. Mark 1:12-13, *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵. Luke 4:1-13, *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶. Luke 6:12, *ibid.*

known teaching, the Beatitudes, was given to "a great multitude of people"¹⁹⁷ while he sat on a mountainside.¹⁹⁸ Witnessed by his disciples, Peter, James and John, the transfiguration of Christ happened on a mountain where Moses and Elijah appeared to affirm Christ's mission and the voice of God was heard affirming his chosen son.¹⁹⁹ Christ's teachings happened out on the land. His teachings brought the everyday events of their lives and the world around them demonstrating through example, the workings of Love.

In Christ's parables and teachings he speaks of "ravens and lilies"²⁰⁰ being taken care of by God; those of the faith being likened to the salt of the earth and a light;²⁰¹ knowing a good person by their "fruits" the goodness they give to others that is life-giving;²⁰² Christ calms the storm to ease the fear of those in the boat;²⁰³ the teachings of God in the heart are like seed growing in different kinds of soil.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁷. Luke 6:17, *ibid*.

¹⁹⁸. Matthew 5:1, *ibid*.

¹⁹⁹. Luke 9:28-36, *ibid*.

²⁰⁰. Luke 12:22-31, *ibid*.

²⁰¹. Matthew 5:13-16, *ibid*.

²⁰². Matthew 7:15-20, *ibid*.

²⁰³. Matthew 8:23-27, *ibid*.

²⁰⁴. Mark 4:1-8, *ibid*.

The life of Christ was one that was strongly connected to the land; "And in the day time he was teaching in the temple; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives."²⁰⁵ And; "And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the Mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him."²⁰⁶ He went to the land, the desert, the mountain and the garden to pray. It was out on the land or the water - the natural environment that restored him and assisted him in finding strength and power to fulfill his life's purpose. Today the land is, clear-cut, split open for mining, streams are being re-routed by roads causing mud slides, and the land remains, scarred but it continues to produce the medicine plants and power that it has given since "time immemorial."

The quest to control nature according to Erich Fromm is attributed to the industrial age. Regarding the belief in progress that Europeans brought to this world Fromm writes:

To be sure, our civilization began when the human race started taking active control of nature; but that control remained limited until the advent of the industrial age. With industrial progress, from the substitution of mechanical and then nuclear energy for animal and human energy to the substitution of the computer for the human mind,

²⁰⁵. Luke 21:37, *ibid.*

²⁰⁶. Luke 22:39, *ibid.*

we could feel that we were on our way to unlimited production and, hence, unlimited consumption; [greed] that technique made us omnipotent; that science made us omniscient. We were on our way to becoming gods, supreme beings who could create a second world, using the natural world only as building blocks for our new creation.²⁰⁷

Fromm's definition here of the delusion of progress is congruent with the history of colonization in Canada. The progression has been toward increased greed rather than toward understanding the beauty of the land and learning to *live with* that beauty rather than exploiting the beauty to increase material accumulation. The definition of power in the colonial world and the contemporary world is accumulation of material goods, the will to have power over rather than to live with the other. To succumb to such a definition of power as a Christian, or one who believes in the teachings of Christ is to deny the omnipotence of God. To succumb to such a definition of power as one who believes in the Ayaawx and the teachings of Christ is to be disrespectful to the land that was given to us by Sm'ooygidm Laxa (God).

²⁰⁷. Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?* (New York: Continuum, 1997) 1.

Concerning respect for the land, the Ayaawx teaches us that *hoomsk*²⁰⁸ is the most important aspect of ancestral law and in Christianity, the two most important laws identified by Christ are to love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself.²⁰⁹ According to Genesis, chapter one, God spoke the world into being. The land then is a concrete reminder of the voice of God, and the power of that voice is represented in the intricate way in which the eco-system functions. If as a Christian, you believe in the power of God to speak the world into being, then his voice, his presence exists in all of nature. What then is the significant difference in the belief of the Ts'msyen people before and after the coming of the teachings of Christ?

The central message of Christ is uniting man with God. In Christianity, the belief is that humans were separated from God in the Garden of Eden by an act of the desire to become as God (Genesis 3:4).²¹⁰ The act of disrespect toward

²⁰⁸. Ts'msyen fluent speakers and language teachers Doug Brown, Marjorie Brown, and Sampson Collinson, in conversation with author, [Prince Rupert, BC], November 2003.

²⁰⁹. Mark 12:28-31, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible, King James Version*.

²¹⁰. M.G. Kline, "Genesis," in *New Bible Commentary*, Rev. ed., eds. D. Guthrie & J.A. Motyer (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1970) 84-85.

the command of God not to eat the fruit of knowledge caused human beings as they were in the Garden of Eden to die and the birth of a new human being emerged. The end result was a new human being that knew both good and evil, the human being that God created in the Garden no longer existed. The Hebrew word for knows in this section of text in Genesis chapter three is *yâda* "used in a great variety of senses."²¹¹ The Genesis text about the eating of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil is similar to the *Adaawx* of *Txamsem*. When *Txamsem* transformed himself into a pine needle floating on the drinking water and the princess drank the water, she became pregnant from the pine needle.²¹² The knowledge of evil according to a *Ts'msyen* *Adaawx*, would be an ingestion and permeation, evil/wrongdoing became a knowledge that was in our body tissue, mind and heart. Prior to the ingestion of the fruit, human beings only knew good, they only knew God but following the succession of events in Genesis, it becomes obvious that a change has happened following the ingestion

²¹¹. James Strong, "A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible with Their Renderings in the Authorized English Version," *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, King James Version, 47.

²¹². National Museums of Canada, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987) 4.

of the fruit. Adam and Eve then attempted to cover their nakedness and hide from God. Following their transformation to knowing evil they are banished from the Garden and the unhindered presence of God.²¹³

The meaning of the word knowledge in Genesis is a complete knowing that simultaneously separated human beings from God, prior to the taking in of evil, human beings only knew good or God. As though the knowledge of good and evil is the pine needle that alters human consciousness and the transformation created by the swallowing of the fruit then destroys the perfect union with God. Being cast from the Garden of Eden, the first recorded offering is a thanksgiving offering by Cain and Abel.²¹⁴ Following the first murder,²¹⁵ the wickedness of human beings increased grieving God resulting in the decision to eliminate humans from the earth through a great flood.²¹⁶ Noah with his family were the only surviving humans.²¹⁷ On his return to

²¹³. See Genesis chapter 3, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, 6-8.

²¹⁴. M.G. Kline, "Genesis," 86.

³². See Genesis 4, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, King James Version.

²¹⁶. See Genesis 6 & 7, *ibid*.

²¹⁷. *Ibid*.

the dry earth, Noah built an altar to burn clean animals as a propitiation sacrifice to God,²¹⁸ restoring balance.

The birth of Christ according to the four Gospels was the gift of God to human beings reuniting humans with God, a once and for all sacrifice.²¹⁹ If then, the central teaching of Christ is to love God with the whole mind, body and soul and to love one's neighbour as self, then it will be necessary to practise rituals and ceremonies that will assist human beings to fulfill that command. Christ gave the bread and wine symbolizing his body and blood,²²⁰ a reminder of his perfect sacrifice reuniting human beings with God.²²¹ The Greek word for church is Ekklesia referring to all who are called to the redemptive power of Christ and secondly, referring to a body of people in a specific location.²²²

The wrongdoing of the Christian church in the history of Indigenous Canada is an example of the need to differentiate between the intention of human beings and the commandment of God. The great two-fold commandment

²¹⁸. Genesis 8:20-22, *ibid*.

²¹⁹. See John 3:16-17, *ibid*.

²²⁰. See Matthew 26:26-30 (known as "The Lord's Supper"), *ibid*.

²²¹. See Anglican Church of Canada, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1962.

²²². Zodhiates, "Lexical Aids to the New Testament," *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, 1712.

reiterated through the actions of Christ are to be the life purpose of any person who believes in the sacrifice of Christ. To accomplish the task of loving God in the entirety of one's heart, soul, mind and strength and loving one's neighbour as self requires clarity, focus and determination of the will.

The mind in both Christian teachings²²³ and Ts'msyen teachings²²⁴ is not to be trusted and must be trained to focus with sharp intention to whatever task is presented to an individual or group of people. Harnessing the mind requires spiritual discipline through ritual practise. The Ts'msyen words that discuss the mind also have the word heart as part of the word. For example, sigootk to start thinking about something, hawgoot= to consider or decide, hawmgoot to like something or someone²²⁵ all of these words have the word goot/heart. The intimate connection between the mind, heart and acts is summarized by Christ when he explained to his disciples, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile

²²³. See I Peter 1:13, Romans 8:4-7, Philippians 2:5, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, King James Version.

²²⁴. "The myth of the land otter," in National Museums of Canada, *Tsimshian Narratives: Tricksters, Shamans and Heroes*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1987) 158.

²²⁵. Doug Brown *et al.*, conversations with author.

the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:"²²⁶ ritual cleansing addresses any disparity between the heart and mind.

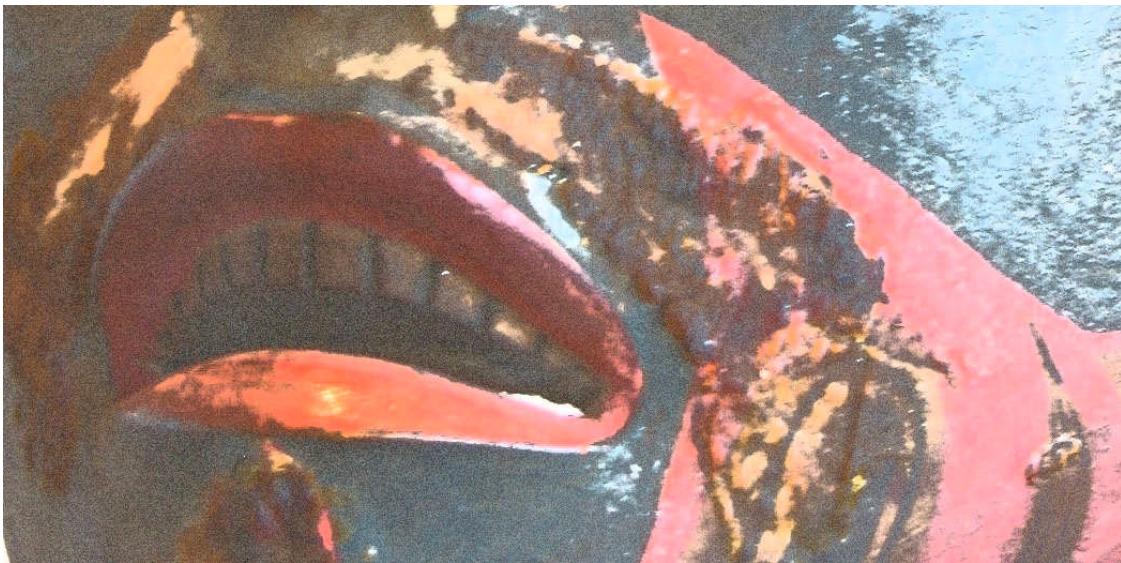


Figure 11. Ts'msyen Halaayt mask

The ancestral practise in physical cleansing does not contradict the teachings of Christ: the practise of suwilsgütk will strengthen an individual to complete their intention to love. Suwilsgütk is outlined in simplistic form in the recently published text by the First Nations Education Services of the Prince Rupert School District.²²⁷

²²⁶. Matthew 15: 18-19, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, King James Version, Zodhiates, "Lexical Aids" 1203.

²²⁷. Kenneth Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation* (Prince Rupert, BC: School District #52 & Tsimshian Nation, 2005).

Whether made into a tea for internal purification or externally as a medicine to neutralize body odor before hunting, wooms (devil's club) is a part of the cleansing ritual. The actual bathing is practiced either in privacy by an individual or in a group in either fresh or salt water. Purification unites the heart, mind and body focusing the seeker toward greater strength and power to accomplish their mission. The Ts'msyen belief in the power of the unity of the heart and mind goes beyond intention to making the act complete in the spiritual world with the physical world following after the spiritual act.

Anthropologist Guédon²²⁸ writes concerning thought - intent and conversation:

The wish has, however, to be expressed or formulated explicitly to be effective. Not everyone knows how to control this "wish," which is sometimes triggered against one's will, or as one would say today, subconsciously. Formulating it in words imposes a much better focus on the intent. So does singing it. The song is supposed to carry the intent one step further, perhaps because it is "inspired." In any case, the decisive act in many myths is not a physical movement; rather it is the expression of one's desire or intent, which sets events in motion.
(p.141)

²²⁸. M-F. Guédon, "Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984) 141.

Congruent with Christian teachings that looking and lusting is the same as committing the act,²²⁹ Ts'msyen ancestral teachings advise that thoughts are action in the spiritual world. Guédon further explains:

This mental aspect of the "powers" affects the definition of the world so much that rightful intent becomes a synonym for purity. The hunter is supposed to think of his hunt in positive terms. Yet he cannot say, "I am going to kill a bear today," because if the bear hears this, he may take it as boasting and will kill the hunter in retaliation – or to teach him a lesson.²³⁰

The importance of focused, respectful thought and action is evident through the consequences of an offensive act toward guests at a feast. Ranked Chief of Chiefs by the Nisga'a nation, Frank Calder stated that if a person was to spill food on one of the guests the restoration of balance could be as great as an apology feast.²³¹ The importance of the mind and actions being united in a respectful manner is demonstrated by Calder's teaching. The Christian churches must not limit restitution to public apologies and financial support for the Indian Residential School survivors.²³² True acts of reconciliation would approach the

²²⁹. See Matthew 5:27-28, *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*.

²³⁰. Guédon, "Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview."

²³¹. Frank Calder, conversation with the author, Victoria, BC at the residence of the author. (June, 2002).

²³². See Indian and Northern Affairs Canada: Resolution Sector, <http://www.irsr->

offended by respecting their ancestral teachings. For example, the Anglican, Roman Catholic and United church clergy in Ts'msyen territory can make personal statements of wrongdoings supported by their congregation through the feast system. Hosting a cleansing feast as a non-Ts'msyen to ask for forgiveness from wrongdoings of the past is not only demonstrating the will to change the direction of the pathway of oppression, by practicing Ts'msyen ancestral law, one shows of respect to Ts'msyen people past and present. When the intention of the heart rests in respect we are taught that the pathway will be clear and the necessary support will be there when needed. Action toward reconciling the history of injustices and violence needs to be founded on a relationship with Indigenous communities.

Our thoughts and intentions are like a rock tossed into the water creating ripples on the surface of the water that extend outward impacting other living beings. To have intentions and thoughts that extend toward spiritual balance and peace can create transformation. The acquisition of power through suwilsgütk can be used today to transform the suffering that is evident in our individual and collective lives.

rqpi.gc.ca/english/truth_reconciliation_commission.html
(accessed August 6, 2008).

The Guests

The darkness has fallen
and the demons
stand at the uncurtained window
Fear is sleeping
The whispering voice of Miyaan
gently assures me
the table is being prepared
Rest now and let strength
be renewed²³³

²³³. © Patricia June Vickers, May 2, 2007.

Chapter 9: Sag_ayt k'üülm goot: all together of one heart

The challenge of working toward living life with a respectful and compassionate heart requires knowledge and practise of the Ayaawx taught through the feast hall, Adaawx and cleansing ceremonies. The maalsk (historical narrative)²³⁴ of the conflict at Gits'ilaasü published by The Tsimshian Chiefs and School District #52²³⁵ is an example of hearts united in conflict and in peace. The maalsk is about strategies and conflicts to control wealth between the Gits'ilaasü (Kitselas Canyon on the Skeena River)²³⁶ and "the leading chief of the Tsimshian", Laxsgyiik (eagle clan) Sm'oogyit (chief) Ligeex. The maalsk goes as follows:

Strategy for control

Unable to force their control over the Gits'ilaasü, the Gispaxlo'ots Sm'oogyit established an allegiance with them through marriage thereby establishing control of trade with the upper Skeena River peoples in Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en territories. The Gitxsan and Wet'suwet'en

²³⁴. Kenneth Campbell, *Persistence and Change: A History of the Ts'msyen Nation* (Prince Rupert, BC: School District #52 & Tsimshian Nation, 2005) 8.

²³⁵. Tsimshian Chiefs, *Conflict at Gits'ilaasü* (Prince Rupert, BC: Tsimshian Chiefs & School District #52, 1992).

²³⁶. Rocque Berthiaume, *The Kitselas Canyon* (Terrace, BC: First Nations Education Centre & School District #82, 1999) 87.

"were rich with furs, moccasins and clothing from caribou, elk and other animal skins along with soapberries²³⁷ and dried meat and berries."²³⁸ They traded with the Gits'ilaasü and Gispaxlo'ots for "seafood such as clams, halibut, dried oolichans, oolichan grease, abalone, seaweed and herring eggs."²³⁹ Both the Gispaxlo'ots and the Gits'ilaasü were united in their strategy to control the trade with the upper Skeena River nations blocking out the Nisga'a.²⁴⁰

Colonization & change

The trading ships brought increased incentive for coastal nations to trade with the interior nations to increase their wealth. As chief of his Waap, Ligeex worked toward increasing his wealth through trade with the European ships.²⁴¹

Nisga'a tribe competes

Łitux, a laxgyibuu (wolf clan) Sm'oogyit (chief) from the headwaters of the Nass River, traded with the Gitx̄san and Wet'suwet'en by way of a trail from Gitlaxdamks to the

²³⁷. Nancy J. Turner, *Food Plants of Coastal First Peoples: Royal British Columbia Museum Handbook* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995) 73-74.

²³⁸. Campbell, *Persistence and Change*, 74.

²³⁹. Ibid.

²⁴⁰. Tsimshian Chiefs, *Conflict*, 6-7.

²⁴¹. Ibid., 5.

Gitxsan village of Gitwinlguul. Families who had inter-married between the Nisga'a and Gitxsan nations had created the trail between the two communities.²⁴²

Conflict

Ligeex heard of the Nisga'a chief, litux trading in his territory and waited for him to journey down the Skeena River through Kitselas canyon when the river ice melted. ligeex ambushed litux, his goods were destroyed and he was shamed in front of all of the Gits'ilaasü villagers.²⁴³

Eagle down

Sm'ooygyit Gitxoon of the Laxsgyiik had family inter-married with the Nisga'a and when he heard of the treatment the Nisga'a received, he sent a messenger to invite them to his tribe across the river. Sm'ooygyit Gitxoon then welcomed them with a peace dance with eagle down to signify peace and friendship and sent them off with gifts and provisions. litux warns Gitxoon to stay way from where the Gits'ilaasü fished and processed oolichan.²⁴⁴

litux's revenge & escalated conflict

When the Gits'ilaasü went up to the oolichan fish camp litux attacked two Gitlaan wounding one while the second

²⁴². Ibid., 7.

²⁴³. Ibid., 10-13.

²⁴⁴. Ibid., 13-17.

escaped. A group of Tsimshian killed a Nisga'a chief and a Nisga'a scout. Realizing their impulsive acts the Ts'msyen retreated from their oolichan processing fearing the escalating anger of the Nisga'a causing the Nisga'a villages on the Nass River to join together against the Gitlaan and Gits'ilaasü. Hostility escalated with both sides taking captives and the Nisga'a and Gitlaan and Gits'ilaasü prepared for war.²⁴⁵

Peace restored

Sm'ooogyit Gitxoon intervened by speaking and taking gifts of compensation for Sm'ooogyit Litux's loss stating that the acts of violence were through "carelessness and thoughtlessness" and they should settle their trouble in a peaceful manner. Sm'ooogyit Litux responded by saying, "Brother, Chiefs, Princes and Headmen, it really happens in the world that the hearts of people suddenly change. It is well that now we stop. Let there be peace among us from this day."²⁴⁶

The struggle for increasing power is the motivation in this account of conflict between the Ts'msyen and Nisga'a. The lust for power and control has and will continue to be a human condition causing conflict and suffering.

²⁴⁵. Ibid., 19-21.

²⁴⁶. Ibid., 23.

Oppression is the lust for power and control not only over a specific people making them inferior and in need of domination,²⁴⁷ oppression is also the delusional belief that one human being or group of human beings are superior to another individual or group of human beings.

Gitux's words are significant in this recording of the maalsk retold by Agnes Haldane, Robert Stewart and John Tate. His admission of his wrongdoing in the conflict following Gitxoon's address was the second part of an agreement that united the hearts of two leaders to initiate peace between the Nisga'a and the Gitlaan and Gits'ilaasü. Their agreement to unite their hearts in peace was affirmed through the chief's peace dance when they spread eagle down on each other from their headdresses.

Submitting hearts to a unified force rooted in a particular belief is not unique to Ts'msyen/Nisga'a/Gitxsan people. From Christian teachings about a unified heart, Paul writes to Christians in Philippi, "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus,"²⁴⁸ and Paul writes

²⁴⁷. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1994).

²⁴⁸. "Philippians 4:7," in *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible*, King James Version, ed. Spiros Zodhiates (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1991).

to the Christians at Thessalonica, "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."²⁴⁹ In Christianity, the ability to unify hearts comes through the belief in the redemptive power of Christ founded on the love of God. In the maalsk of the Kitselas Canyon, the address for peace came through words and gift giving that pointed the hearts of those present toward the principles of the Ayaawx and the importance of both compassion and forgiveness.



Figure 12. "The Heart." Retouched photo from personal collection of the author.

²⁴⁹. 2 Thessalonians 3:5, *ibid.*

The central principle of the Ayaawx is łoomsk, and is congruent with the Christian teachings of believing in the power of love and compassion. Associated with compassion, patience and love, łoomsk holds power for the individual who believes in ancestral teachings. Suwilsgütk, smudging with plant medicines, song, re-telling of ancestral teachings and stories, dance and feasting are all opportunities to increase the meaning and understanding of łoomsk. Contrary to beliefs from political and religious colonial leaders and teachers, the spiritual principles imbedded in the Ayaawx are necessary in the task of restoring our collective soul as the Indigenous people of Canada. There are many examples of the principles of the Ayaawx emerging in other Indigenous nations individually and united to restore dignity and łoomsk. The policy paper from the National Indian Brotherhood of 1972 is such an example.²⁵⁰

Indigenous leader George Manuel²⁵¹ from the Shuswap nation was the voice for the National Indian

²⁵⁰. See history of the National Indian Brotherhood, Assembly of First Nations, <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=59> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²⁵¹. R.C. Ryser, "The Legacy of Grand Chief George Manuel," Centre for World Indigenous Studies, <http://www.cwis.org/manuel.htm> (accessed August 6, 2008).

Brotherhood (NIB) when they presented the Indian Control of Indian Education policy paper²⁵² to the Minister of Indian Affairs in 1972. The NIB Policy Paper is an excellent example of working together as one heart. The project included a "Special Committee of the Executive Council of the National Indian Brotherhood"²⁵³ and included compiled information from papers and dialogue concerning Indian Education from across Canada.

The power in the policy paper comes from the unity of the leaders toward a common goal for the good and from common principles in ancestral teachings of Indigenous people across Canada. The paper clearly outlines the collective philosophy of education:

Pride in one's self

Pride encourages us to recognize and use our talents, as well as to master the skills needed to make a living.

Understanding one's fellowmen

Understanding our fellowmen will enable us to meet other Canadians on an equal footing, respecting cultural differences while pooling resources for the common good.

Living in harmony with nature

Living in harmony with nature will insure preservation of the balance between man and his environment which is necessary for the future of our planet, as well as

²⁵². See University of Victoria, <http://www.uvic.ca/ablo/documents/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²⁵³. Ibid.

for fostering the climate in which Indian Wisdom has always flourished.²⁵⁴

The three principles in this philosophy of education are intended to be a beginning to assist each individual nation in developing their school curriculum. For example, if this document were to be applied in the Ts'msyen communities, the first principle, pride in one's self would be associated with *łoomsk* and respect for self and others. The second principle, understanding one's fellowman would be associated with respect in the family, house, clan, feast hall and community. The third principle, living in harmony with nature, would be associated with respect for the land and all of the *Adaawx* that teach adults and children ceremonies of respect. The document goes on to outline the common values in Indigenous nations prefaced by the following explanation:

We want education to provide the setting in which our children can develop the fundamental attitudes and values which have an honored place in Indian tradition and culture. The values, which we want to pass on to our children, values that make our people a great race, are not written in any book. They are found in our history, in our legends and in the culture. We believe that if an Indian child is fully aware of the important Indian values he will have reason

²⁵⁴. National Indian Brotherhood & Assembly of First Nations, *Indian Control of Indian Education*, policy paper (Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations, 1972) 1.

to be proud of our race and of himself as an Indian.²⁵⁵

This first paragraph in the "Statement of Values," directly refutes the teaching that George Manuel himself along with many other Indigenous Canadians received in residential school.²⁵⁶ The entire document is a response to the treatment of many Indigenous children who were taught to be ashamed of their ancestral teachings and language in residential school. Applying these ideas in a school curriculum in a school in Ts'msyen territory would involve developing a language immersion program, developing a curriculum that would involve fluent speakers and elders who know the Adaawx, protocol for feasts, songs and dances belonging to the local house groups and procedures for gathering plant medicines and food.

The document goes on to suggest ways in which the disparity in understanding the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada can be bridged:

To overcome this, it is essential that Canadian children of every racial origin have the opportunity during their school days to learn about the history, customs and culture of this country's original inhabitants and first citizens. We propose that education authorities,

²⁵⁵. Ibid.

²⁵⁶. See his biography, Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, <http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/about/george.htm> (accessed August 6, 2008).

especially those in Ministries of Education, should provide for this in the curricula and texts which are chosen for use in Canadian schools...Our concern for education is directed to four areas which require attention and improvement: i.e., responsibility, programs, teachers, and facilities.²⁵⁷

Oppression has created many challenges for Indigenous people in educating children, adolescents and adults. Less than two months after submitting the document to the Department of Indian Affairs, the National Indian Brotherhood received a reply to their policy paper from the Minister of Indian Affairs:

In a letter to the President of the National Indian Brotherhood, dated February 2, 1973, the Minister gave official recognition to Indian control of Indian Education, approving its proposals and committing the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to implementing them.²⁵⁸

Twenty-three years after the Minister of Indian Affairs committed to implement the NIB policy paper, The RCAP published five volumes on the state of Aboriginal Canadians. In Volume three, Gathering Strength, chapter five consists of 151 pages on the condition of education in

²⁵⁷. National Indian Brotherhood, *Indian Control*, 2, 4.

²⁵⁸. *Ibid.*, iii.

the Aboriginal population of Canadians with forty-four recommendations²⁵⁹ for change.

Over the past thirty-five years we have seen minimal change in schooling at every level and the failure of governments and educational institutions to enact the recommendations put forward by Indigenous leaders. We must examine where critical change takes place. It is apparent that we cannot rely on change to come from the outside world.

In spite of accomplished educational leaders such as Marie Battiste²⁶⁰ and Vine Deloria Jr.,²⁶¹ we have seen only minor changes in post-secondary institutions. The Indigenous/First Nations/Native studies programs in provincial post-secondary institutions are not founded on ancestral law²⁶² where methods, theories and philosophy are taught through practical application. The post-secondary programs that have the title "Aboriginal," "First Nation,"

²⁵⁹. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: Gathering Strength*, vol. 3 (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996) 433-584.

²⁶⁰. See University of Saskatchewan, <http://www.usask.ca/education/people/battistem.htm> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²⁶¹. See New York Times article, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/15/national/15deloria.html> (accessed September 20, 2008).

²⁶². P.J. Vickers, "Aboriginal Teacher Education Bridging Initiative Recruitment Report" (unpublished manuscript in possession of author, 2006).

"Indigenous," or "Native" and are not founded on careful consultation with the local Indigenous communities are offerings of "false generosity."²⁶³ To acknowledge the need for change in education and then to ignore the ancestral principles of the local Indigenous nation in the post-secondary or secondary curriculum is to perpetuate colonial injustice. Concerning "true generosity" Freire writes:

True generosity consists precisely in fighting to destroy the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the "rejects of life," to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands—whether of individuals or entire peoples—need be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, working, transform the world.²⁶⁴

The working of individuals in developing, for example, an Indigenous studies program at the University of Northern British Columbia or North West Community College in northern British Columbia, needs to be founded on Ts'msyen, Nisga'a and Gitxsan cultures. Elders and fluent speakers must be involved in the program development. The importance of fluent speakers are summarized by Marie Battiste:

Aboriginal languages are the means of communication for the full range of human experiences, and they are critical to the

²⁶³. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 26.

²⁶⁴. *Ibid.*, 26-27.

survival of the culture and political integrity of any people. These languages are a direct and powerful means of understanding the legacy of tribal knowledge. They provide the deep and lasting cognitive bonds that affect all aspects of Aboriginal life. Through sharing a language, Aboriginal people create a shared belief in how the world works and what constitutes proper action. The sharing of these common ideals creates a collaborative cognitive experience for tribal societies that is understood as tribal epistemology.²⁶⁵

The ideal delivery of an Indigenous Studies program is founded on Ts'msyen epistemology, however, the difficulty with basing a program on the principles of the Ayaawx, is the lack of written resources for education curriculum available to date. With residential schools interrupting generational teaching, the challenge of transcribing the Ayaawx becomes more urgent with the death of each elder and fluent speaker. Such a task needs to be community based with involvement from the Houses and Tribal groups of each village. To thoroughly research Ts'msyen epistemology will involve working with our history of violence we are now perpetuating on ourselves. Careful, patient, compassionate co-operative work is required for ancestral teachings to emerge from our despair and suffering.

²⁶⁵. Marie Battiste, "Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language and Culture," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000). 199.

When confronting suffering, Buddhist teachings are very similar to Ts'msyen ancestral teachings and can be considered a relative or "cousin" teaching. According to Ts'msyen Adaawx, true generosity is the positive, productive teaching of ɭoomsk. ɭoomsk includes the four aspects of love²⁶⁶ outlined by Zen Buddhist Monk, Thich Nhat Hanh²⁶⁷ with the first being:

Loving-kindness is not only the desire to make someone happy, to bring joy to a beloved person; it is the ability to bring joy and happiness to the person you love, because even if your intention is to love this person, your love might make him or her suffer²⁶⁸.

In teachings concerning suwilsgütk, the individual purifies to gain power to fulfill specific tasks in a respectful, understanding manner. According to Hahn:

The second element of true love is compassion, *karuna*. This is not only the desire to ease the pain of another person, but the ability to do so. You must practice deep looking in order to gain a good understanding of the nature of the suffering of this person, in order to be able to help him or her to change. Knowledge and understanding are always at the root of the practice. The practice of understanding is the practice of meditation.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶. Thich Nhat Hanh, *True Love: A Practice for Awakening the Heart* (Boston: Shambhala, 2004) 1-4.

²⁶⁷. See Plum Village Practice Center, <http://www.plumvillage.org/HTML/ourteacher.html> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²⁶⁸. Hanh, *True Love*, 1-2.

²⁶⁹. *Ibid.*, 3.

Today, with the majority of Ts'msyen people converting to Christianity, the belief is that the power to look deeply comes from connection with Sm'ooygidm Laxa (Chief of the Heaven/God) as individuals maintain connection to the land and ocean.

The third element of true love is joy, *mudita*. If there is no joy in love, it is not true love. If you are suffering all the time, if you cry all the time, and if you make the person you love cry, this is not really love—it is even the opposite. If there is no joy in your love, you can be sure that it is not true love.²⁷⁰

Through generations of suffering from oppression joy has been greatly suppressed by grief among Indigenous people in losses that include language, traditional cleansing ways, coming of age ceremonies, childhood innocence, loved ones through violent acts at residential school, and loved ones through alcohol and drug related accidents. Cree comedian from the Alexander First Nation, Don Burnstick states on his website, "After all that we have gone through, we've never lost our sense of humor and it's time to share that. This is the spirit of healing and

²⁷⁰. Ibid., 4.

the essence of my performance.”²⁷¹ The fourth aspect of love identified by Hanh is:

...equanimity or freedom. In true love, you attain freedom. When you love, you bring freedom to the person you love. If the opposite is true, it is not true love. You must love in such a way that the person you love feels free, not only outside but also inside²⁷².

Regardless of the harsh impact of oppression in Canada, the rituals in Indigenous ceremony is the central medium for transforming suffering to respect. Our Adaawx indicates that the change must happen within our minds and hearts as individuals first and then taking what we have learned to our families, clans and communities. The transformation of suffering needs leaders who believe in ancestral law through study and practical application. Leadership needs to reflect on the principles of the Ayaawx through practise in schooling children, social services, spiritual guidance and the arts.

The need for change in schooling in Canada is outlined in the RCAP chapter on education.²⁷³

For more than 25 years, Aboriginal people have been articulating their goals for Aboriginal education. They want education to prepare them to

²⁷¹. See Don Burnstick, <http://www.donburnstick.com/index.php> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²⁷². Hanh, *True Love*, 4.

²⁷³. Royal Commission, *Gathering Strength*, 433-584.

participate fully in the economic life of their communities and in Canadian society. But this is only a part of their vision. Presenters told us that education must develop children and youth as Aboriginal citizens, linguistically and culturally competent to assume the responsibilities of their nations. Youth that emerge from school must be grounded in a strong, positive Aboriginal identity.²⁷⁴

The development of education institutions that are founded on ancestral law must come from the elders and fluent speakers as well as from anthropological sources that have been affirmed by the teachers who hold clan history. This is not to say that the federal and provincial governments should not be held accountable for the injustices of the past, their history of greed and hatred must be confronted on a practical level that assists in transforming the suffering. The responsibility to gather information to develop curriculums that assist our children in knowing the integrity of ancestral teachings and giving an accurate account of Canadian history for adolescents and adults is ours as Indigenous people. The statistics on Indigenous education in Canada indicates that we are not yet in the process of transforming our suffering.

The combination of seeking power and control in territories as in the conflict in the maalsk of Gits'ilaasü

²⁷⁴. Ibid., 433-434.

and fragmentation of the family and community unit through “displacement and assimilation²⁷⁵” has left Indigenous people in a place of soul loss. Our collective soul remains the captive of agony and despair reflected in our social statistics.²⁷⁶

The power to transform our suffering will not come from reversing polarities of power. Establishing social or educational services that are modeled after provincial or federal systems is the internalization of colonial delusions. Continuing to blame provincial and federal governments for our suffering is to remain powerless to create change. The struggle against injustice of both the past and present must, as the Ayaawx, Christian, Buddhist and other religions teach us; the power must come from the ceremonial integrated act of *suwilsgütk*.

Gitxsan elder, Mr. Fred Wale, an accomplished runner in his youth and survivor of a childhood of alienation and abuse at residential school stated the need for a home that offers ancestral teachings.²⁷⁷ He proposed along with many

²⁷⁵. Ibid., 5.

²⁷⁶. Ibid., *Aboriginal-Identified Social Problems*, 59; *Causes of Death*, 154; *Social Assistance*, 168; *Highest Level of Education*, 440.

²⁷⁷. Fred Wale held the name *Atiitkalwo’o*, House of *Sm’oogyit Xgwoimtxw*. He attended St. George’s [residential] School in Lytton. Along with local awards in

others throughout the recommendations of the RCAP²⁷⁸ the need to establish educational institutions in our communities where elders, children and adolescents can meet to learn teachings through ceremony, song, food preparation, language and ceremonies that strengthen the heart.

One of the positive attributes that suffering has brought to Indigenous people is the journey to find freedom from suffering through spiritual ceremony. For example, the federally funded treatment centre in Kitwanga, Wilp Si'satxw, offers facilitated sweats every Sunday. Purification amongst the Gitx̄san, Nisga'a and Ts'msyen were individual, private ceremonies. With the rejection of purification by the Christian church in Ts'msyen territory many who attended treatment centres such as Round Lake and Wilp Si'satxw have participated in sweat ceremonies from Cree, Lakota and Arapaho nations in their healing process and have brought the teachings back to their home communities.

According to ancestral teachings, accepting ceremony that strengthens the heart from the practise of other

the past, he recently received an award for 25-year participation in the Terry Fox Run.

²⁷⁸. Royal Commission, *Gathering Strength*, 242-47, 528-29.

nations is a gift and respect is the appropriate response. Indigenous nations from the Prairie lands throughout the central regions of North America have shared teachings such as the Four Directions, the Sweat and the Pipe. All of the rituals through ceremony associated with these three vehicles for prayer to Sm'ooygidm Laxha are being adapted by other Indigenous nations uniting hearts in the process of transforming suffering.

The power for transforming suffering rests in the meditative practise of traditional purification ceremonies, submitting one's thoughts and heart to truth, respect, love and compassion. All purification ceremonies are vehicles to transform suffering. An example of how ceremony can be combined with ancestral principles is Heiltsuk community member and teacher, Frank Brown. After being convicted as an adolescent for break and entry, assault and theft, Frank Brown's family asked for permission to use traditional Heiltsuk methods for intervention. The video, Voyage of Rediscovery, is Frank's story of transforming rage to compassion.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹. See Index of Movie Reviews, <http://www.movierevie.ws/movies/1676177/voyage-of-rediscovery.html>, (accessed September 20, 2008).



Figure 13. "Cedar bough." Retouched photo from the personal collection of the author.

Traditional ceremonies connected to Adaawx are an integral part of the arts. The arts have and continue to be our relational connection to the spirit of our ancestors. The expression of the dialogue between human beings, animals that inhabit the land, water and the supernatural world displayed on house fronts or hair combs, the love and respect for the relationship has been visible for thousands of years. As well as painted and carved expressions of the relationship between humans, animals and supernatural

beings, songs and dances about the conflicts and restorations in these relationships are being resurrected by youth such as the Nelson twins²⁸⁰ in Bella Coola and William Wasden²⁸¹ in Alert Bay.

The development of art schools such as K'san²⁸² located in Gitxsan territory in the town of Hazelton at the confluence of the Skeena and Bulkley Rivers and Northwest Community College's Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art²⁸³ located in Terrace, British Columbia in Ts'msyen territory are steps toward providing opportunities for individuals to learn more about ancestral teachings through art.

In order to determine our destiny as Indigenous Canadians and simultaneously honour our ancestral teachings in schooling, social programs, economic development, and art education there are two major tasks that must be accomplished. The first task is to return to the teachings of our ancestors that help us to access the strength to

²⁸⁰. For more information on Chris and Lance Nelson's singing involvement see, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARHQfz1YLQw&feature=related> (accessed September 20, 2008).

²⁸¹. See William Wasden, <http://www.williamwasden.com/> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²⁸². See <http://www.ksan.org> (accessed September 20, 2008).

²⁸³. See Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art, <http://www.nwcc.bc.ca/FNFA/index.cfm#1> (accessed August 6, 2008).

transform the oppressor power of domination, greed, hatred and lies to peace. The second task is to take the transformative teachings that assist in spiritual balance to both the oppressed and the oppressor through means and methods that encourage freedom and peace for both of them.

Eagle Submerged

Feet concealed from sight
Holding below the flat surface
The face of God
Reaching as a branch
Her feet clinging
To His contour
With only
The reflection of a mountain
Between them²⁸⁴

²⁸⁴. © Patricia June Vickers, April 30, 2007.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Suffering through violence in my family of origin and personal struggles with depression, entrenched beliefs of inferiority due to ethnicity, and displacement compelled my search to understand the origins and nature of their power and influence over me. My study reveals that colonial oppression caused suffering in the lives of many Indigenous North American families. The despair and anguish in our communities today is rooted in generations of direct, structural, and cultural violence in colonial oppression that fractured families, tribes and nations – all aspects of Indigenous ways of living have been affected. From bodies of work such as the RCAP,²⁸⁵ giving detail to the history of discriminatory violence, the term, “colonial oppression,” has come to mean acts of terror and violence that assaulted our ancestral law, language, traditional territories, spiritual teachings and land-based knowledge of respect.

Colonization in the “new world” has not brought the joy of freedom for North Americans. The search for progress and freedom in North America resulted in accelerated consumption alongside oppression of Indigenous people. One

²⁸⁵. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1996).

of the dynamics underpinning the violence in North America's history is greed without a conscience. Concerning unconscious action Freire wrote:

The oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time—everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal.²⁸⁶

Through domination power, children were conditioned to an environment of terror, objects to be controlled through systemic discriminatory violence in education institutions. Residential and federal day schools, willfully worked to extinguish ancestral teachings and Indigenous languages, forcibly assimilating us into the world of "the civilized" through domination. Domination power is destructive power. Several generations of conditioning children toward violence and inhumane behaviour is the legacy of oppression in North America, not creating an advanced civilization in the new world. The Christian churches were allies, acting as a conduit for terror and violence rather than teaching the principle of love through example.

Government legislation assumed responsibility by overseeing the management of Indigenous people and lands.

²⁸⁶. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1995) 40.

Such an act of domination has created poverty, dependency and on-going division amongst us, creating an on-off reserve distinction and acceptance-rejection through blood quantum rather than honouring ancestral ties regardless of ethnic inter-marriages. Forced relocations of entire communities to gain greater control of Indigenous people and resources has caused further psycho-spiritual displacement and anguish.

Our social state of poverty is not due to inferiority. Our suicide rates of five to seven times higher for our youth²⁸⁷ is due to uprootedness, displacement, a history of oppression and a fragmented connection to our ancestral teachings. The violence and neglect in our families today is directly related to the condition of our beliefs.

Domination has not brought liberation to a higher way of being - to the contrary, it has forced us to accept that our destiny is as we experience it in our communities today - dark and depressing and pulsing with despair. We have come to accept the lie that we are inferior, sub-human, heathen savages. Such beliefs are now evident in our families and communities, in our child neglect, fetal

²⁸⁷. See Health Canada, www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fnih-spni/promotion/suicide/index_e.html (accessed August 6, 2008).

alcohol syndrome, spousal abuse, alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual abuse, prostitution, poverty, economic dependency, mental disorders, high school drop-out rates, injury related deaths and suicide. Clearly, there is on-going evidence that we have lost respect for each other and ourselves in our communities. The abuse through domination suffered by our grandparents and parents is now being passed on to our children and grandchildren. Transforming our beliefs must include our ancestral teachings that direct us toward restoring respect and spiritual balance.

Education institutions, health services, churches and governments can assist us in re-connecting to our ancestral teachings through practical application. Sloughing off colonial relegation to inferiority in post-secondary education institutions requires on-going dialogue. Without concerted, focused, intentional efforts to confront oppression of Indigenous people, there will be little change in program delivery regardless of what the program offers. An effective Indigenous program, whether it is a language, teacher certification, business administration, social services, or art program, needs to confront the delusional nature of colonial beliefs, and to articulate the wisdom and knowledge of local Indigenous epistemologies. To establish a post-secondary department of

Indigenous (or also titled First Nations or Aboriginal) Studies -- whether anthropologists, historians, psychologists, graduates with honours or prestigious fellowships -- the creation of a true Indigenous program must be developed not only by scholars, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, but in consultation with Indigenous communities.

What causes Vine Deloria Jr. to write, "Professors in the classrooms still promulgate outmoded and erroneous characterizations of tribal practices and beliefs. We have made very little progress in building a bridge over which future generations can cross"?²⁸⁸ A post-secondary Indigenous program without community involvement is simply one more post-secondary initiative conditioning Indigenous students to outmoded colonial beliefs of insignificance. The task of working with elders and fluent speakers to develop academic programs and curriculum is challenging. The co-creation that must happen to develop Indigenous curricula must be founded on our ancestral principles of respect, truth, and compassion. Program developers must sit patiently to listen, knowing that the wisdom of our

²⁸⁸. Vine Deloria Jr., "Anthros, Indians, and Planetary Reality," in *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology*, eds. T. Biolsi & L. Zimmerman (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997) 211.

ancestors will emerge with dedicated, patient, intentional focus. Yet there are barriers to retrieving the Ayaawx: we have layers of abuse in our families – elders who have abused children as they were abused in residential school, repression of violence from residential school creating emotional distance, generations of addictions, sexual acting out in an attempt to dull the pain of an abusive, neglectful childhood, an overall lack of accountability and responsibility for wrongdoing due to our state of dependency, fear of betraying family integrity, and oppressor dogma that the Ayaawx is of the devil. These are some of the barriers I have encountered as a clinical counselor, post-secondary instructor, and consultant in our communities on and off reserve on the Northwest coast of British Columbia. Research and study of our Ayaawx will require patience, awareness, understanding, courage, compassion and dedication. Developing an Indigenous program will take time; trust in the power of our ancestral teachings existing within our despair is a pre-requisite. Ts'msyen epistemology is a living power that is relevant to Canadian society and deserves both the time and effort to articulate student courses and programs for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Respect and power can be increased through not only education but provincial and federal mental health services to Indigenous Canadians as well. The Assembly of First Nations has described current mental health services for Indigenous Canadians as having "large gaps."²⁸⁹ As mental health providers, there needs to be extensive documentation regarding the extent of disorders that include depression, post traumatic stress, anxiety, dissociative disorders, sexual and addictive behaviours and the relationship of psycho-social imbalance to residential school survivors as well as a history of social and cultural oppression. Further, we need to document the effectiveness of programs such as Rediscovery²⁹⁰ and other land-based treatment programs founded on ancestral teachings.

A good example of incorporating ancestral law into mental health services is the use of cleansing ceremonies. With the high rate of youth suicide in our communities, support workers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, need to be assessed using both cultural and psychotherapeutic methods. Culturally, when any person has a history of

²⁸⁹. For Resolution 15 passed at the July 5-7, 2005 assembly in Yellowknife, NWT, see Assembly of First Nations, <http://afn.ca/article.asp?id=1851> (accessed August 6, 2008).

²⁹⁰ See the website at, <http://www.rediscovery.org/>, (accessed on September 20, 2008).

suicide attempts, it is believed throughout Indigenous communities on the northwest coast that their soul is stuck at the place of trauma and needs to be called back, restoring their power. When an individual has a series of traumatic events, their recovery process is one of retrieval of the soul trapped in layers of trauma. Elders in the community can offer cleansing methods to address the worker's personal history with suicide to assist them in restoring personal spiritual balance. In Nuxalk territory, the elders use cedar branches, fire, prayer and dialogue with family in their "smoking ceremony." Cleansing ceremonies address the offense and ground the individual in ancestral teachings through practical application restoring balance. Witnesses are always a crucial aspect to cleansing ceremonies and can vary from the immediate family to the community as invited witnesses, depending on the nature of the offense. It is best to consult with local Indigenous communities regarding soul loss and retrieval practices if the Health services have not advanced to include resources of cultural methods of restoring individual and collective balance.

Restoring balance by the Christian churches must not be limited to public apologies and financial support for

the Indian Residential School survivors.²⁹¹ True acts of reconciliation approach the offended by respecting their ancestral teachings. For example, the Anglican, Roman Catholic and United church clergy in Ts'msyen territory can make personal statements of wrongdoings supported by their congregation through the feast system. A non-Ts'msyen hosting a cleansing ceremony to ask forgiveness for wrongdoings of the past is not only demonstrating the will to change the direction of their individual pathway of oppressive offenses, they are also respecting Ts'msyen ancestral principles. By practicing Ts'msyen ancestral law, one shows respect for Ts'msyen people past and present. We are taught that the pathway will be clear and the necessary support will be there when needed when the intention of the heart rests in respect. Action toward reconciling the history of injustices and violence needs to be founded on a respectful relationship with Indigenous communities.

This dissertation is the beginning of necessary steps to recover our ancestral principles. As Indigenous people on the Northwest coast, we must discuss the future of our tribal system applied to areas such as: inclusion, conflict

²⁹¹. See Indian and Northern Affairs Canada: Resolution Sector, http://www.irsr-rqpi.gc.ca/english/truth_reconciliation_commission.html (accessed August 6, 2008).

resolution, immersion schools, confronting generational abuse, transcending on-off reserve mentality, adult learning founded on ancestral teachings and cleansing practices. Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars studying ancestral teachings of the Northwest coast need to dialogue with each other and speakers to unite as one heart to meet the challenge of articulating epistemology specific to each separate First Nation. Where the principles of each Northwest coast First Nation overlap, a Northwest coast Indigenous epistemology can be developed. The focus on the work of scholar Freire in this dissertation evolved because his writing transformed my counter-productive belief system as the oppressed. Our research and writing as Indigenous scholars needs to submit to the power of respect to assist the transformation of oppression: our work must contribute to transforming suffering.

As Indigenous people of Canada, we are at a crucial and critical time of choosing our pathway, one that honours the heart and ancestral teachings of respect or one that perpetuates domination power. Concerning power, Frank Calder had much to share during many of his personal visits. Once, he recounted witnessing the movement of a

powerful halaayt²⁹² from Gitx̱aał̱a while visiting the village of Laxgalts'ap in the Nass Valley. According to Calder, Gitx̱aał̱a was known for halaayts with great spiritual power but this one childhood experience in particular was memorable for Calder. There was commotion in his uncle's house and he watched as his uncles followed the Gitx̱aał̱a halaayt who ordered the Laxgalts'ap village followers to dig in a particular spot and there they unearthed the first of four "boxes" with paraphernalia.²⁹³ The halaayt had a growing number of followers as he continued to instruct the villagers to dig at specific spots, each time unearthing or uncovering a box. By the time they reached the fourth site, the box was gone and there was only a hole. The boxes belonged to the haldaawgits of the village.²⁹⁴

²⁹². The word *halaayt* can be used to refer to spiritual power, a shaman, or a dance of a chief or a shaman. See *Lingual Links* (Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Authority), <http://smalgyax.unbc.ca/> (accessed August 6, 2008). See also M-F. Guédon, "An Introduction to Tsimshian Worldview and Its Practitioners," in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present*, ed. Margaret Seguin (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984) 147.

²⁹³. *Ibid.*, 146-49.

²⁹⁴. Frank Calder, in conversation with author, Victoria, BC at the residence of the author, June 2002.

Haldaawgit medicine (witchcraft), according to Ernie Thevarge,²⁹⁵ a spiritual teacher from D'Arcy, British Columbia, is easily learned and for this reason continues to be practised in our communities. Thevarge states, that good medicine – halaayt power – is not as easily learned, and requires on-going dedicated daily practise that discourages individuals who seek power for domination and control of others and situations. The theme of good and evil exists in Ts'msyen ancestral teachings. The struggle against evil has been, and continues to be, a reality, which may result in sickness and even death of loved ones or relatives through the practise of haldaawgit medicine. Today, our fear need not be of such practise but of the secrets of violence and abuse hidden away for generations in our families.

The abuse, neglect and violence in our families today are the bad medicine box buried in our homes causing the spiritual imbalance or sicknesses found in the social statistics of this dissertation. To transform our suffering, we must begin by cleansing ourselves. The Law

²⁹⁵. Thevarge is from the Lil'wat Nation and lives in D'Arcy, BC. He facilitates purification ceremonies for members of his community and nation.

Commission of Canada,²⁹⁶ RCAP,²⁹⁷ and more recently, the "suicide epidemic" in the Hazelton region,²⁹⁸ and death of two toddlers on the Yellow Quill reservation²⁹⁹ all give account of the fact that we are still suffering as one heart on or off reserve. Oppression is a spiritual condition and must be transformed by a spiritual act. But our ancestors have left us a clear, well worn but narrow pathway to freedom. The pathway requires disciplined, intentional, meditative action. Acting on the importance of our spiritual condition is emphasized by Ella Deloria in her book, Speaking of Indians:

All that which lies hidden in the remote past is interesting, to be sure, but not so important as the present and the future. The vital concern is not where a people came from, physically, but where they are going, spiritually.³⁰⁰

Originally published in 1944, the words remain relevant today. As with Christianity and Buddhist teachings, the teachings of the Ayaawx stress the importance of the condition of the heart and mind. As Ts'msyens, as the

²⁹⁶. Law Commission of Canada, *Restoring Dignity: Responding to Child Abuse in Canadian Institutions* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2000) 51.

²⁹⁷. *Report of the Royal Commission*.

²⁹⁸. David Wylie, "Hazelton cries for help amid suicide 'epidemic,'" *Vancouver Sun*, November 23, 2007.

²⁹⁹. Tim Cook, "Grieving grandmother calls for change," *Globe and Mail*, February 4, 2008.

³⁰⁰. Ella Deloria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998) 2.

Indigenous of North America, we have a great task, a spiritual task. We must grasp the ball of light in the box of our ancestral teachings and release it to our world of dark despair. We must value what Sm'ooygyit dim la_xha has given us, to breath life-compassion into our state of decay. The power of the Ayaawx will never diminish. The portal to understanding the power of the Ayaawx is in our Adaawx and in our language. It is imperative that we choose to honour the language and teachings of our ancestors; for in doing so we choose respect. As we choose loomsk, as we choose compassion, we will transform our suffering and the suffering of humankind.

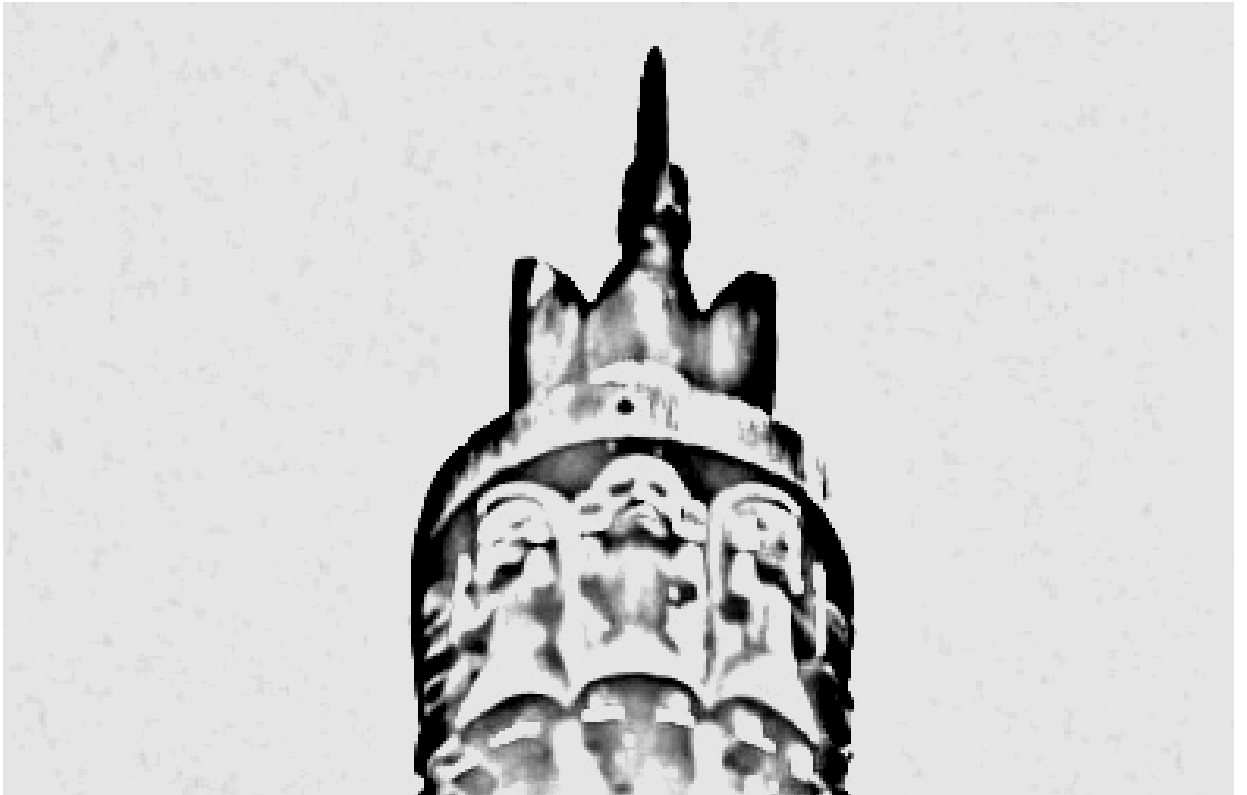


Figure 14. Gitanyow, pole detail top. "Under the power" photo from the personal collection of the author. The pole belongs to Sm'ooygyit Gwaas Hlaam.

Appendix

- Pg ix Photo in the personal collection of the author. Totem pole belongs to Sm'ooygyit Gwaas Hlaam of the Lax Gyibuu Clan in Gitanyow, British Columbia. Used with permission.
- Pg 27 Photo in the personal collection of the author. Totem pole belongs to Sm'ooygyit Gwaas Hlaam of the Lax Gyibuu Clan in Gitanyow, British Columbia. Used with permission.
- Pg 28 "Peradventure" Personal collection, unpublished poem © Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 30 Photo "Fasting Blanket" in the personal collection of the author.
- Pg 58 "From the attic" personal collection, unpublished poem © Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 62 "Sun Bear children" Photo in the personal collection of the author. Totem pole belongs to Sm'ooygyit Delgamuukw of the Lax Seel in Kispiox, British Columbia. Used with permission.
- Pg 78 "Halaayt headdress" personal collection of the author. On display in the Prince Rupert Museum, Prince Rupert, British Columbia.
- Pg 100 "Swanaskxw" personal collection, unpublished poem © Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 109 "The journey" photo in personal collection of the author. Totem pole belongs to Sm'ooygyit Delgamuukw of the Lax Seel in Kispiox, British Columbia. Used with permission.
- Pg 119 "Crying woman" photo in personal collection of the author. Totem pole belongs to Sm'ooygyit Tsiibasa of Kispiox, British Columbia. Used with permission.

- Pg 132 "Chilkat woven robe" in personal collection of the author. On display in the Prince Rupert Museum, Prince Rupert, British Columbia.
- Pg 134 "He's waiting" personal collection, unpublished poem © Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 153 "Eulogy" personal writing, Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 157 "The Collection" personal collection, unpublished poem © Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 172 "Ts'msyen mask" personal collection of the author.
- Pg 176 "The Guests" personal collection, unpublished poem © Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 182 "The heart" personal collection of the author.
- Pg 198 "Cedar bough" from the personal collection of the author.
- Pg 201 "Eagle submerged" personal collection, unpublished poem © Patricia June Vickers.
- Pg 216 "Under the power" photo from the personal collection of the author. Totem pole belongs to Sm'oogyit Gwaas Hlaam of the Lax Gyibuu Clan in Gitanyow, British Columbia. Used with permission.

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