

Nihl Adagwiy T'gun
Adaawaks GalksiGabin
(Here Is the Story of *GalksiGabin*)
A Modern Auto-Ethnography of a Nisga'a Man

Andrew Robinson
GalksiGaban

B.A., Malaspina University College, 1999
First Nations Studies

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements For the Degree of
Master of Arts
in
First Nations Studies

The University of Northern British Columbia

May 2008

©Andrew Robinson, 2008



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48763-1
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48763-1

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

Dedication

To Sean and James.

May the history you are a part of provide you strength and
guidance during your journey in this world.

Love, Dad.

Abstract

This thesis is an auto-ethnographic description of my life as *GalksiGabin*, Andrew Robinson, a proud member of the Nisga'a Nation who has grown up during extremely monumental and influential times for Nisga'a people. Not only have my people been witness to the first Comprehensive Land Claim settlement in British Columbia's history, but we have found the ways and strength to make our traditional lives and *Ayuukhl* (laws) work with the Canadian State. Within this work, I describe the importance and foundation of our existence as Nisga'a. This includes: geography and culture, social organization and language, and finally, Nisga'a governance.

By beginning each of my chapters with a story, I honour the integrity of the oral society I am born from, while placing each of my ethnographical headings in a context that is appropriate to the chapter. In discussing geography and culture, one will find my elaboration on the Nisga'a lands that I come from and the intricate relationship those lands have with dictating much of our social system. In my chapter on social organization and language, the reader will get a glimpse into how the Nisga'a social system is dependent on the sustainability of a society that has been in place for thousands of years. Finally, in regards to governance, I discuss the infamous Nisga'a Treaty and its new-found, interrelated relationship with the Nisga'a *Ayuukhl* (laws) that have governed our Nation since time immemorial.

Throughout the thesis, I have utilized my language where it is necessary and appropriate in order to bring forward that this thesis represents a world view that Nisga'a people call, *Sayt K'ilim Goot* (Of One Heart). Writing this thesis has given me an opportunity to revisit the foundations of my world view and reminded me of the testimony of the Elders I grew up with who taught me their wisdom. For this I am grateful, and even more proud to know the sacredness I have been blessed with in my life. I am honoured to share my story with you. *T'yooyak'siy`niin*.

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	vi
1.0 Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
1.1 <i>Dim Sit'ama'ay Lits'xkw</i> (I Am Going to Tell You This First).....	1
1.1.1 <i>Amgoodiy</i> : To Recall.....	1
1.2 Background: Being Nisga'a.....	2
1.2.1 Nisga'a Post Contact History.....	9
1.2.2 Nisga'a Land and British Columbia.....	11
1.3 Thesis Rational: Nisga'a and Western Worlds.....	14
2.0 Chapter Two: Methodology and Preview.....	20
2.1 <i>Ganwilaak'ils/Ganwilxo'oskw</i> (Knowledge and Wisdom	
2.1 Methodology.....	20
2.2 Theory of <i>Sayt K'ilim Goot</i> (Of One Heart): A Nisga'a Worldview.....	27
2.3 Preview of Chapters.....	32
2.4 Chapter Three: Geography and Culture.....	33
2.5 Chapter Four: Social Organizaton and Language.....	35
2.6 Chapter Five: Nisga'a Governance.....	37
2.7 Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	38
3.0 Chapter Three: Geography and Culture.....	41
3.1 <i>Ts'etsiks Ang'oosgum</i> (Soil and Dirt): The Land the People of the Nass River	
Own and Are Born From.....	41
3.2 <i>O'lie's</i> (My Great-grandmother's) Influence: The Beginning.....	41
3.3 My Family's Land.....	42
3.4 Our Connections.....	48
3.5 Nisga'a Land.....	49
3.6 The Role of Nisga'a Culture.....	53
4.0 Chapter Four: Social Organization and Language.....	57
4.1 <i>Wila Loom' ii Wila Algaxam</i> (The Way We Are and Our Language).....	57
4.2 Receiving My Nisga'a Name, <i>GalksiGabin</i>	57
4.3 Nisga'a Social Organization.....	58
4.4 Our Roles Within our Nation, Our Families and to Ourselves.....	67
4.5 Communication: An Expression of Language and Knowledge.....	72
5.0 Chapter Five: Nisga'a Governance.....	75
5.1 <i>Ayuukhl</i> Nisga'a.....	75

5.2 University of Victoria and the Nisga'a Treaty: The Meeting of Two Worlds....	75
5.3 The Journey and the Goal.....	77
5.4 Treaty Realities.....	82
5.5 Working For our Nation: A Journey.....	85
6.0 Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	91
6.1 <i>Si' Aam Wilin</i> : Be Diligent in your ways.....	91
6.2 Sharing and Evaluation.....	92
6.3 Nisga'a Government: The Golden Chariot	98
6.4 Final Thoughts	101
References.....	104
Appendix I – Glossary of Terms.....	108

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all of my family and community members who brought me into the world. This is not my story alone, rather it is something that stems from years of looking for something that was always right in front of me, home. My great-grandparents, and of course, the late Marion Robinson, and my grandfather John, who instilled the beauty and love for life into me, thank you.

To my Mother, Noreen, my aunts Dianna, Lavita, Ann, and Sherry, your knowledge of “mom” (Marion Robinson) is something I crave and so enjoyed during this process. She is not gone; she is in each of you. To my father, Peter Cross, thanks for your acceptance and constant support of my ambitious goals in life, and the reality you always showed me behind all things I thought were so simple.

Nita Morven, at the Ayuukhl Nisga’a Department, thanks for the many days that you spent with me, supporting me and making my days there holistically enjoyable and supporting the idea of this work. To the many leaders of the various *Wilp* that I call my friends and the political leaders that added the fuel to my personal fire, many thanks. A special thanks to the family of the late Alvin McKay, who took me to many dinners as a child, and in my university days, keeping me in the loop about what was occurring with our Nation.

My thesis committee in all of its incarnations was the most powerful tool in this process. The final committee members are Dr. Antonia Mills, Dr. Ross Hoffman, and Dr. Jim McDonald; you each tested me on every turn and made me recognize the value of my ideas. I thank each of you for your dedication to the expansion of writings of this kind in the ivory towers, you are each conduits that institutions must have to bridge the divide between ways of knowing; thank you for sharing yours with me.

Last but defiantly not least, my wife Rheanna, for your dedication, persistence, and consistency with me during this journey. Your place in what I achieve in my life is clearly evident, your love and dedication to our children is what this work is for. I could not have completed this without your support and being Nan.

Chapter One: Introduction

Dim Sit'ama'ay Lits'xkw (I Am Going to Tell You This First)

Amgoodiy (To Recall) Memories

Memories are the connection that we all have to people that have left this world to continue their journey. As a child my fondest memories were of my great grandmother, *Sigidimnak Aamt'ugwax*, Clara and her ability to take the weight of the world off my shoulders with nothing more than a smile. As a child I spent a great deal of time in her home, getting popsicles, getting to stay up late, and enjoying stories of when she was little and the amazing things she got to live through as the world changed around us.

My grandmother Clara was a powerful Nisga'a women. She lead community groups, spearheaded fundraising, was an active member in the church, and a leader for all of our family to look up to. The greatest memory I have of my grandmother is one where she shared the reality of her lived experience in the transitioning worlds with my eager and influential young mind.

I recall a moment in time when I was sitting with my *Giits* (great-grandmother) in her hot home, listening to her tell me that I “look like one of ‘THEM,’ I could learn their ways and make life better for our people.” I responded with a smart remark that “I am not a white boy, I am *Nisga'a*.” I recalled my friends on our reserve constantly making sure I was aware that I was half white, and could not be like them. My *Giits* knew this and made sure I was aware that there are only two things that matter in one's life.

First, you are born into a way of being and knowing, and what I have as my knowledge base is what she and our community members shared with me. What I learned was based on the many days I got to participate in a community that constantly flexed to the demands that were imposed upon us. The stories shared with us are tools that provided intricate details that facilitate a way of being and knowing what was right and wrong with all things around us. Respect was the cornerstone of all that I learn and understanding that no matter what people said to me because of the way I looked (not as dark skinned as many other First Nations people) had nothing to do with who I was or, what I would become.

Second, the life that I was inheriting was a life made up of two worlds, “Their” world (westerner's) and “our” world (*Nisga'a*). Only through knowing where you came from are you able to ground yourself in the complexities of shifting environments and perspectives. By becoming educated and learning how to read and write the westerners' way we could begin to play in his world. While on the other hand, only through understanding that your heart and soul are *Nisga'a*, can you develop the balance to walk between the two worlds and share knowledge that so many seemed to think was not there.

As I traveled along my personal journey, I began to notice exactly what my *Giits* shared with me. No matter what we know as *Nisga'a*, we need to know the western ways of

being, their ways of sharing history, sharing knowledge, and the reasons for their perspective. I was blessed with the statement shared with me that day, and blessed to share in a life that taught me how special I really was. It shaped me and guided me along a journey of reconciling two worlds that strayed from one another in a young man's mind. Our ways of knowing and being are beautiful and sophisticated on every level; understanding that we can share this with each other is our answer. Understanding that our ability to share is within each of us no matter who we are, is common sense.

Background: Being Nisga'a

Nisga'a nii, GalksiGabin nee, Wilp Niisyuus, Gisk'aast niy, Laxgalts'ap wil witgwiy, Prince George *wil Jogay wil wit*. I am Nisga'a and my name is *GalksiGabin*, "To Surface Between Two Points." I am from the House of *Niisyu'us* (our Chief's name which describes how killer whales hunt like a family), and am *Gisk'aast* (Killer whale clan). I grew up in the community of *Laxgalts'ap*, otherwise known as Greenville, British Columbia. I have since relocated to Prince George where I have started a family, began my career, and am furthering my post-secondary education. I am a proud member of the Nisga'a Nation and it is from this platform that I write this thesis for a Master of Arts Degree in First Nations Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia.

In an auto-ethnographic format, this thesis will present some of the knowledge I possess of the Nisga'a Nation, and how I have come to learn about my Nation's history through my family. Reed-Dunahay describes auto-ethnography as, "a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay *in* Holt 1997: 2003). In my journey through western academia I have come to understand that knowledge is something that is not only heard, but is something that is experienced in order to facilitate the expansion of knowledge as a whole. I believe that as a Nisga'a person I have grown up walking between two worlds (western and Nisga'a), constantly trying to realize how my innate and inherent identity as

Nisga'a can complement, and contribute to a society dominated by western values and worldview. This thesis will provide my personal expression of what it means to be born and grow up as a Nisga'a person after the influential Calder Case of 1973, and experience the geographical, social, cultural, and governing implications of the era that led to the Nisga'a Treaty. I hope that through the interpretation of my life experiences and the stories and traditions I have been endowed with, this thesis will bring forth a unique and powerful perspective of Nisga'a identity and society.

This first chapter of my thesis will contextualize the vantage point from which I write about Nisga'a society by initially discussing my "place" among the Nisga'a Nation through my Nisga'a name and tribal affiliation. Then, this chapter will carry forward with a brief explanation of what being Nisga'a means to me, and why I am writing the thesis. Finally, it concludes with a methodological and theoretical breakdown of this work.

My Nisga'a name, *GalksiGabin*, is a name that was given to me by a *Sim'oogit* (Chief) in my family in order to give me a place within my hereditary line. It was a name I was given in the feast that celebrated the life of my late grandfather, *Sim'oogit Niisyuus*, Eric Martin, my maternal grandmother's eldest brother. It is through this name and what it stands for that I am privileged to speak about the power of Nisga'a knowledge, our ancestors, and our Nation. The knowledge I will speak of is something that is passed down through the oral testimony that our social, economic, political, and cultural arenas rely upon.

Nisga'a people are from an oral tradition based on a matrilineal society where our system of kinship and extended family is determined through one's *Wilp* (House) and

tribe.¹ When children are born in a Nisga'a family, they are automatically tribally associated through their mother and the tribe and *Wilp* (House)² she belongs to. There are four tribal groups in Nisga'a society represented by *pdeeks* (a crest or sub-crest) and they include: *Gisk'aast* (Killerwhale/Owl), *Laxgibuu* (Wolf/Bear), *Laxsgiik* (Eagle/Beaver), and *Ganada* (Frog/Raven). Each tribe has *HuWilps* (many Houses) that work together as traditional governing bodies of the Nation. In this, the *HuWilps* act as caretakers of the stories, land, and communities through a traditional system of governance that is exercised in our *Yukw* (feast, or referred to by westerners as potlatching) system.

The high-ranking members in *HuWilps* (Houses) are *Simgigat* (Chiefs) or *Sigidimhanak* (Matriarchs), they are the people who decide what "business" needs to be done and help make important decisions about the Nation and its community members. They decide when community members will receive hereditary names and how those names will define that individual. As Nisga'a people, our roots are tied directly into our lands; and our history is derived from the relationships that came from the land along *K'alii aksim Lisims* (the Nass River), located along the Northern coast of present day British Columbia. The work that is done within the tribes and *Wilps* through our feasting system signifies this relationship and brings forward a continued evolution of our history.

A former Nisga'a *Sim'oogit* (Chief), Hubert Barton, eloquently discusses the framework of being Nisga'a and the impact having a Nisga'a name has on identity:

¹ Please note that the terms "clan" or "tribe" will be used interchangeably throughout this document in reference to any of the four *pdeek* (clans) Killer whale, Wolf, Eagle, or Frog.

² The term *Wilp* is translated into English as "House." However, when I speak about a "House," I am not describing a physical dwelling place, but rather a group of people who are linked and bonded together in a familial relationship and hold a direct connection to the land of the Nass Valley and can be territorially defined. In this "House" unique and powerful stories, culture and history are held sacred by the people who belong together as a group under the name of that *Wilp* (House) and the land they are associated with.

Around the ways in which we use our land and its resources, we have woven our traditions, beliefs, and values. Land has been fought for and defended; it has been argued over and used to fill obligations. Land has been acquired and owned, all within the framework of our Nisga'a Laws. Having a name means having a place in our society, having the rights to territories, and having a history. It is through owning a name that we know who we are. This is of such fundamental importance that almost everything in our culture revolves around this fact. (Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study Vol. III: Nisga'a Society: 1995, 6)

From the vantage point of holding a Nisga'a name and being groomed my entire life to speak about my Nation with pride, it is imperative that I share my perspective on being Nisga'a through academic discourse.

I was born on August 4, 1976 in the community of Terrace, located one-hundred and thirty kilometers from *Laxgalt's ap* and I was named after my mother's father's father, the late Andrew Robinson, *Wilp Amagat* from the *Laxgibuu* (Wolf Clan). I spent much of my younger life residing in the home of my *Giits* (my mother's mother), Marion Robinson, and my *Ye'e* (my mother's father), John Robinson, *Sim'oogit Gwiix Maaw*, of the Eagle clan. Both of my grandparents come from prominent *Wilps* (Houses) along the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (the Nass River) and respectively held/hold equally prominent *Sigidimnak/Sim'oogit* (matriarch/chief) names in their *Wilps*. In this, I am the oldest grandchild of the late Marion Robinson (formerly *Sigidimnak We'e*), a senior ranking matriarch in the *Wilp Niisyu'us*, born to her oldest daughter, Noreen Cross (Nee: Robinson; and currently holding my late grandmother's name: *Sigidimnak We'e*). We are all in the line of the generations that lived before us that held the ranking names of the *Wilp* (House) and territory that we were born into.

Not only am I fortunate to have a close relationship with my maternal grandparents, I am also privileged to have had three of my maternal great-grandparents in my life when I was a young boy. I was able to have a relationship with my grandfather's

mother, Elizabeth Robinson, until I was about eight years old and my grandmother's father, Herbert Martin, until I was six. The most influential of them all, my grandmother's mother, Clara Martin (*Sigidimnak Aamt'ugwax*), remained in my life until I was twelve years of age. As a young boy I grew up in all of their homes, in an isolated community, with many memories of the relationships that were taught to me for the betterment of my future. This genealogy has a strong social significance as I am the descendant of Elders who held prominent roles in our Nation and through their Nisga'a names, carried many stories that tell our history and explain the identity of Nisga'a society. I believe my relationship with my *Nits'iits'* (grandmothers) and *Ye'e's* (grandfathers) enabled me to be taught and nurtured by leaders in our Nation who insisted I be an active and strong member of our community. With this, I was able to learn about our culture and history and always be reminded of the unique and magnificent place I come from as a Nisga'a person.

Paternally, my biological father (who is of European ancestry) was not a part of my life until my later adolescent years and therefore I have always identified myself with my mother's husband, Peter Cross (who is of English ancestry) as my father and the tribe that adopted him, the *Laxgibuu* (Wolf Clan) and *Wilp Du'uk* are my *Wilksibakws* (paternal relatives).³ Peter Cross has been an influential and important mentor in my life and has taken the responsibility of being part of our Nation and part of the *Laxgibuu* (Wolf Clan) proudly and seriously. The paternal relationship we have in our communities is held in high regard as it is a key part of ensuring that all of our relationships are working together so we can govern ourselves according to our *Ayuukhl*

³ *Wilksibakws* and *wilksilaks* are used interchangeably, with the same meaning. They refer to the paternal relatives, especially the immediate family members of the father.

(Nisga'a laws) and it is therefore Peter's tribe and his *Wilp* (House) that would take care of me if I ever needed anything.

In collaboration with the Nisga'a Tribal Council,⁴ author Daniel Raunet wrote a book entitled, "Without Surrender without Consent."⁵ The original version was published in 1984, and was reprinted in 1996 in conjunction with *Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a* (Nisga'a House of Wisdom)⁶. In this text, Raunet focuses on the history of the Nisga'a people to the early 1980's. The subjects Raunet discusses are: contact, social organization, encroachment by westerners, missionaries, the incorporation of Christianization, land claims, and the more modern collective knowledge about Canadian colonial and assimilative practices.

By working with Nisga'a leadership in the Nisga'a Tribal Council and our Elders (who are our cultural authorities), Raunet was able to put forward in his writing important concepts that provided Nisga'a people a formal foundation in their efforts towards a resolution of Nisga'a land claims in Canada. The foundation laid out in Raunet's work was put forward in language that politically could be understood by western society. However, although Raunet's document reflects important concepts of our society, I believe that the reality of Nisga'a life is hard to realize through his words. For instance, Raunet discusses the social organization of the Nisga'a people as "*Wilp* or house, a matrilineal group that included several groups and carried the name of a prestigious chief" (Raunet 1996: 2). I would take the idea further by stating that our social

⁴ The Nisga'a Tribal Council was the predecessor of Nisga'a Lisims Government, the self-governing body of the Nisga'a Nation today.

⁵ Raunet, Daniel. *Without Surrender Without Consent: A History of the Nisga'a Land Claims*. Douglas and McIntyre, Vancouver, 1984/1996.

⁶ *Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute* (Nisga'a House of Wisdom), is a satellite university of the University of Northern British Columbia. The foci of their institutional efforts are on studying Nisga'a history, culture, language, and other arts based programs, along with modern trades training. For more detailed information, refer to www.wwni.bc.ca.

organization/national structure is made up of more complex relationships between different *HuWilp* (House Groups) since we are connected to numerous other *pdeek* (Clans) and *HuWilp* (House Groups) through marriage. For example, in my life, the intricate relationships I have with my maternal grandmother and grandfather's family obligates me to be accountable to not only the social organization of my matrilineal family, but the paternal family on my grandfather's side that I identify with as well. It is from this basis that traditional social, political, economic, and cultural activities were and are interwoven on social, economic, and political levels.

As Nisga'a we all share from the *Sayt K'ilim Goot* (common bowl/one heart) and exist with our land and *Lisims* (river) which defines a complex relationship between *HuWilps* (House Groups). As a product of an oral society, I learned through my family members, community members, and by participating in feasts where we practice the Nisga'a Laws (*Ayuukhl*) in the four modern communities along the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (Nass River).⁷ Learning and participation is the step to understanding and grasping the reality of what life is like for Nisga'a people.

There are deep-rooted connections between all of the *Wilp* (House) members, and the territories that we call our home. In a more modern context, the relationships between communities and members of the communities, has taken on the same vigor as traditional homes/villages for all of us who are Nisga'a. Raunet relies heavily on the missionaries that lived among the Nisga'a post-contact. The Reverend Robert McCullough of the Anglican Church was one such missionary in the community of *Gitlaxt'aamiks* (Aiyansh) who discusses Nisga'a people:

⁷ The four communities along the *Lisims* are: *Gingolx* (Kincolith), *Laxgalts'ap* (Greenville), *Git win ksihlkw* (Canyon City), and *Gitlaxt'aamiks* (Aiyansh)

No better description could be given to the Indian people than the one supplied by the name they give themselves—“Alu-gigiat.” Truly they are “Public People”, for they have no private business, no private rights, and no domestic privacy. Every right is “holden” (that is the meaning of the word YUQU, which the white-man, judging from outward appearances, calls potlatch, i.e., (“giving”), and in every matter regulated by a public manifestation of assent on the part of the united clans. And this public expression of assent, made by the clans and acknowledged by the individual, is what we call potlatch. (McCullough *in* Raunet 1996: 30)

As a Nisga’a person, this form of living is our way of life. Everything is public in our society no matter how hard you try to keep something to yourself. The larger family and composition of National membership ensures that we survive as individuals, large families (*Wilps*), and as a distinct group of people known as Nisga’a. From this context I can begin to establish a brief history of the Nisga’a nation post-contact. This is part of the history that shapes me.

Nisga’a Post Contact History

On July 21st, 1793, Captain James Vancouver, while on an exploratory journey along the North Pacific, traveled to the mouth of the Nass River where he met some of my ancestors wanting to “trade with him and his ships” (Raunet 1996: 22). Raunet describes the situation as Nisga’a people wanting to trade with Captain Vancouver as they did with the “Haida, Tlingit, or the Kwawkwalth” (Raunet 1996: 23). As a group of people that traded and communicated with all of our neighboring Nations, my ancestors were most likely there to exercise an already established trade relationship with other *Aluugigat* (First Nations).⁸ There is much research that supports evidence that Nisga’a

⁸ In many of our oral stories, our people were more than aware that *Kamsiwwaa’* (Ghost People/Whites) were already in our region before Vancouver arrived and “found” our people. Many scholars discuss the relationships between the numerous First Nation along the Northern Coast, one such author is McDonald (1994), who gives direct evidence of trade relationships between the Nisga’a and Tsimshian.

people bargained skillfully and traded for items that were of value to our people and culture.⁹

After contact, the Nisga'a people continued to utilize the land and water and also participate in western based activities, while providing for their respective family members the best they could in light of the newcomer's laws and ways of living with Canada's Indigenous people. Some of the first Europeans to stay in the region besides the traders were members of the Church Missionary Society, an affiliate of the Church of England. Many of our communities and members still bare their names such as: Robinson, Doolan, Allan, Stephens, Stevens, and Angus, to name a few. This was one attempt utilized by colonizers in de-heathenizing our ancestors by removing Nisga'a names and with those names, our traditional association to the land.

As a young man I had the opportunity to read about missionaries, and participate in our church in the community of *Laxgalt's'ap* (Greenville) as both a church member and altar boy. From my participation I learned that the church was not a bad place, rather it was a place of refuge in our community for people that needed prayer and assistance in times of need. As a child, I interpreted St. Andrew's Church (*Laxgalt's'ap* Community Church) as an extension of our cultural and social expression that exemplified us as being Nisga'a. I saw it as a place where we came together emotionally, physically and spiritually. However, as I grew older and began to read more into the reality of the religious vigor that enveloped our homelands, I understood that the church did not teach about truth all the time.

⁹ Tomlinson (1983), Patterson (1982), McNeary (1976), and Raunet (1996), discuss the Nisga'a bargaining skill. Within their research there is evidence that my ancestors were skilled at "driving a hard bargain." This skill is connected to our social systems, and our cultural practices in the *Yukw* (feast), which westerners call the potlatch. During contact, items like iron, guns, and numerous other European items were traded for and utilized in our traditional feasting practices.

E. Palmer Patterson describes the mission on the Nass in a very academic fashion; from the onset of the Church Missionary Society, to the civilization of the “heathens.” In a very clear and concise manner, Patterson shows the progression of the church and Christianity up the Nass River through his writing. In my opinion, Patterson provides very interesting insight into the short-sightedness of the Europeans when establishing missions on the Nass River. He states:

Doolan had very quickly become engaged in two commonly cited roles of the missionary in relation to the indigenous life: disruption and refuge. While the missionary contributed to the disruption, other forms of conflict and disruption characterized during the period by competitiveness, and status-seeking which expressed conflict and tension with the culture. The fur trade brought changes which contributed to the accelerating changes which by the middle of the nineteenth century took the form of population movements and decline, increased rivalry among native groups, changes in artistic accomplishments, and changes in the technology employed in traditional activity. (Patterson 1982: 38)

This statement is one example where one can read about the impact Christianity had on our Nation. Christianity, small pox, alcoholism, and western technology all played a major role in upsetting the life and activities that our people harnessed for thousands of years, in the geographical distinctiveness that our *Wilps* (Houses) existed within. Through population devastation and social change, Nisga’a society and culture was forced to transform to accommodate new and more socially delicate interactions with the western settlers. Little did our ancestors know, but this was only the beginning of the challenges our Nation would have to endure in order to survive in the new world.

Nisga’a Land and British Columbia

On November 1, 1966, Thomas Berger made the following statement regarding First Nations land loss:

The history of the Indian people for the last century has been the history of the impingement of white civilization upon the Indian: the Indian was virtually powerless to resist the white thief. This, of course, has already been done in eastern Canada and on the Prairies, but the apartheid policy adopted by B.C. was of a particularly cruel and degrading kind. They began by taking the Indians' land without any surrender and without their consent. Then they herded the Indian people on to Indian reserves. This was nothing more nor less than apartheid, and that is what it still is today. (Berger *in* Raunet 1996: 167)

This provides an insight into why the relationship between First Nations and non-First Nations can be described as being riddled with mistrust and misunderstanding. Our ancestors always knew our land was appropriated unfairly. Even though the Nisga'a people asserted themselves in trying to engage in a land resolution through treaty in the nineteenth century, Berger describes how Indian people were "powerless" to stop the onslaught. In the Nisga'a experience, the dislocation of our peoples from the land began when the first missionaries arrived at the mouth of the *Lisims* (Nass River) and shunned my ancestors for believing in "heathenish gods." As Nisga'a people were inundated with more and more western technology, the encroachment and extraction of resources on Nisga'a lands was occurring without any consent or consideration to my people.

The land claims battle in the Nass Valley began in my community of *Laxgalts'ap* (Greenville). *Laxgalts'ap* adopted the name "Greenville" after Alfred Green, a missionary in the community between the years of 1877-1890, under the direction of the Methodist Church.¹⁰ Green seemed to enjoy his tenure in my community, and focused his attentions on teaching people to learn and progress within a western world. Although we are all aware of the colonial implications of Green's actions in the context of his job, he did see my ancestors as having rights, and requiring equality and justice. In

¹⁰ Alfred Green was the reason the English name of Greenville was given to *Laxgalts'ap*. In Nisga'a, *Laxgalts'ap* means 'place built upon dwelling places.' More specifically, the name means a community built upon generations of settlement and memorial/burial grounds. Presently, when you enter the community of *Laxgalts'ap*, the sign states, "The Birth Place of the Nisga'a Land Question."

correspondence between Green and a journalist from Victoria, the confrontation between non-Indians and Indians is very clear when the newspaper alleged “injustices by the Indians and Green” (Patterson 1982: 88). The battle continued between Green and his Nisga’a counterparts, and the non-Indian parties in Victoria:

Most of the trouble I have in carrying on my work arises from a few of the Greenville Indians, who are more meddlesome and aggressive than others. Nor is this to be wondered at, for Mr. Green tells them that in reality all the land is their own. (Victoria Colonist August 21, 1883, pg. 2)

Patterson utilizes the content of this quote in a very useful manner in his book, *Mission on the Nass* (1982). The reason I give it so much credit is because the gentlemen writing about the Greenville Indians at that time obviously knew little about the tenacity of the Nisga’a people on the threshold of conflict. Patterson even mentions that the “banning of the potlatch” had little weight in Nisga’a society compared to the new issue called the “land question” (Patterson 1982: 94).

During the McKenna and McBride Commission of 1912-1916, the Nisga’a knew that the Nass Valley was their land and was not under the ownership of the Queen. The Commission was sent to the Nass Valley to address the concerns of white settlers and government officials blaming the education and Christianization of the Nisga’a people for their demands to have their rights recognized. People need to know that as Nisga’a, we define ourselves as a Nation and we are a group of people that have always defended our lands. We did not stand idly by when our neighboring Nations attempted to encroach upon our territory, unless agreements were in place that were established in feasts (*Yukw*) for all to witness. Alfred Green educated the Nisga’a residents in *Laxgalts’ap* (Greenville) that they had the right in western government to defend the land that was theirs according to European laws.

Once it was realized that our land was being occupied and expropriated, our People came together to facilitate a combined effort to address the discussion that was required between the Nisga'a people, the Government of Canada, and British Columbia.¹¹ This is the battle that I grew up with: Nisga'a Land Claims. Personally, my goal and objective in my life is to see "all of our land returned," since it was taken from my ancestors during complicated times. As a child who had some family members that were spared from the Residential School experience, I was privileged to spend time with my *Nits'iits'* (grandmothers) and *Ye'e* (grandfathers) who could teach me to understand and obtain the spirit of my ancestors who knew wrong from right, justice from injustice, and hope from hopelessness.

Thesis Rationale: Nisga'a and Western Worlds

In providing this brief introduction to my name and my place within my *Wilp* and community, and of course my larger Nation, I am facilitating an auto-ethnographic approach in this thesis. I will be discussing events in my life between the dates of 1976 to the present day. *GalksiGaban* will surface throughout the narration, sharing my Nisga'a life experiences coupled with the western academic perspective I have learned which produces this auto-ethnography.

As an active participant in the academic world, I have also experienced the actions and reactions of being Nisga'a within the framework of formal western schooling. In this context, I feel that although our voice is listened to and heard; it is my belief that for the most part, the core values that we possess have not been understood or accepted

¹¹ The larger discussion in regards to Governance will be described in chapter four, where I will give a briefing on the events and occurrences in Nisga'a Lands Claims History.

within the realm of western political or academic institutions. I understand how our membership as Nisga'a is developed through our ability to communicate and facilitate philosophies that have been developed over generations of learned experiences on the land. An oral society such as the Nisga'a Nation has a great deal to share about our respective social, political, economic, and cultural endeavors within both worlds. It is based on this idea that I am approaching my thesis from my own perspective: as Nisga'a, *GalksiGaban*.

In providing an auto-ethnography, I am delving into my personal experiences, teachings, and journeys to date, while focusing on the concepts of an ethnographic approach in the structure. In providing this as the material for the completion of my Masters Degree within a western institution, I am hoping to open a door for more of our thinkers to come forward and share our experiences and history through narration. In addressing the Nation I am a part of, I am sharing as I was taught by my predecessors. I am providing a perspective that connects my experiences to the events that shaped the Nisga'a Nation post Calder Case, 1973 to 2008. As Nisga'a, we are a part of an elaborate social system and culture that continually flexes in the midst of colonial presence. As a witness and participant in this change which includes entering into treaty, my discussion will provide a Nisga'a auto-ethnographic perspective on the events that shape my life.

Mark Currie addresses the concepts of "narration" in modern academics and its role in political and historical discussions:

This is an emphasis that informs many New Historicists revisions of old historiographic assumptions, and here, as elsewhere, dissent becomes a writing strategy which opens narrative out from its singular linear character. From the early new historicism to recent postcolonial writings there is a sense that material things and metaphorical discourse are inseparable, often becoming part of an

individual's material experience through a psychoanalytic identification with an imaginary and symbolic structure such as the western Nation. (Currie 1998: 93)

In sharing life stories with any person it is crucial that people are aware that it is a personal perspective. Currie mentions that there is a push towards holistic discourse in modern academics; that the ideas are inseparable, therefore they are additions to the historiographic assumptions that we make as human beings in the search for holistic knowledge. Thomas King also mentioned the concept of historical and meaningful inclusion in the Massey Lectures on CBC Radio, which I once listened to while I was on a journey back to Prince George from the Nass Valley. King's discussion was in regards to colonial history and Aboriginal voice, and the value that First Nations stories have in their Nationhood of Canada (King, Thomas. CBC Radio: Massey lectures, 2004). It supported my belief that it is fundamental for us (as First Nations people) to share the concepts of our stories in academic and social realms of Canadian society in whatever way we can. Therefore, I would like to take ownership of what I state in this thesis and acknowledge that this discussion is derived from my personal experiences. For the purposes of this work and my story, this is only my perspective.

We are taught that all our members and their respective *HuWilps* (House groups) have their personal stories about what occurs and that sharing in it develops unique perspectives on what is going on around us as Nisga'a people. The Nisga'a ability to have continued discussions in regards to the multiple levels of interactions between our two worlds (Western and Nisga'a) melding is a positive challenge that we must share more of in order to facilitate the progression of our society and its knowledge. By sharing my story, I add to other stories that have already been shared by members of my Nation where collaboratively we are developing a perspective that benefits the discourse

that takes place within western academics and in the Nisga'a world. What we know now is derived from countless generations of our people sharing their stories and experiences. Now it is up to our generation of Nisga'a people to utilize knowledge and strategically plan for our future as a self-governing body in the context of contemporary Canada.

When I was a teenager and young adult, I periodically attended secondary and post secondary schools outside my homeland. Living outside my community, I was not necessarily considered Nisga'a, but considered to be an Indian, First Nations, and/or Aboriginal. I realized through this interaction in a western, urban experience that I am someone who possesses core values and a worldview that is greatly different from my counterparts outside of my traditional territory. Since this was a time in my "growing up" years that I first felt intellectually rejected in an academic environment, I had to share (as I am doing within this thesis) that I believe that we must contribute to knowledge and ideas as equals. Now it is my time to share knowledge and offer intellectually stimulating ideas in another way (a First Nations, Nisga'a way) to open up the discussion that needs to take place. I am grateful to have the opportunity to share my perspective of the western and Nisga'a worlds that I live in, in the most constructive and useful, meaningful manner available through this thesis.

Growing up in between the western and Indigenous worlds I live in, I came to understand that both worlds were very different, but both possess curious people wanting to know more. As a young man I encountered numerous levels of racist behavior, along with seeing social, political, and economic inequalities. For me, when I was at home, life was easier, but what I recognized and encountered in the battle to have my voice heard outside of my homeland needs to be shared. In fulfilling the obligations for this degree I

will provide a perspective that has not yet obtained its full potential in the world of many western thinkers.

Nisga'a people have elaborate systems and structures that have facilitated our existence in the animate and inanimate worlds for countless generations. Our ability to absorb and nurture these connections between the animate and inanimate is the engine that constantly stimulates our survival. In sharing the oral histories that we are a part of, we bring forth a different story, a different experience of the interaction that we the "Nisga'a" encounter through time. In our discipline of First Nations Studies we are taught to bring forth our ideas and experiences, giving life to the discussion that shapes and directs our lives in so many ways. Therefore, my rationale is to focus on the "Nisga'a" view, which is part of who I am. George Sioui, a Huron-Wendat author, writes so eloquently about the rationale behind Amerindian discourse:

Such moments made it clear to me that the time had come to begin writing the "other" history books that my father had talked of more than a quarter-century earlier. I had thought much about such books ever since and had long been convinced that Amerindian North America, like Central and South America, had produced great civilizations. These northern civilizations were certainly less materially and technologically imposing than their southern counterparts; nevertheless, the ideas they embodied perhaps had a greater influence on the social outlook of the New World that was emerging on a global scale at the moment when Europeans began making observations about the Americas. (Sioui 1999: xviii)

When I first arrived in a post-secondary institution in 1994, I was startled at the level of discussion about "Indians." When I say "Indians," I mean the First Nations peoples of North America and the history that has been created post contact. While studying the colonizer in school it became very evident to me that I need to share our distinct ways of knowing and acquiring knowledge as humans in order to bring truth and essence to a new and emerging discipline in academia. Through the awareness that I

developed along my journey, I know the stories and developments we encountered are valuable assets in the development of social, political, and economic thought within First Nations Studies and all other disciplines. Thus, my rationale for this thesis is to present a personal, social, political, and economic perspective of myself, about my family, my *Wilp* (House), and my ancestors, and the Nation that I am a part of from my birth to the present.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Ganwilaak'ils/Ganwilxo'oskw (Knowledge and Wisdom)

When I think of ways of knowing and achieving outcomes from a process, there is only one item that I can share, and that is a story of the *Lisims* (Nass River). When you grow up along the *Lisims* you learn that it is the reason for your survival, your form of travel, and the connections to the generations of Nisga'a that once lived along its shores.

As a young boy I spent many days huddled on a boat keeping warm, watching my grandfather speed between sandbars, stumps, and rocks. Through these teachings I did not only lay witness to the navigation skills required to travel the river, I was also told stories of each of the places we went to, learned of the locations of old village sites, access points to resource gathering areas, territorial boundaries of *Wilp*, and our communal fishing areas. While growing up in the "Three Dog Night"¹², I began to recognize how important the *Lisims* is to our survival as Nisga'a, and the integral role it plays in teaching that the *Lisims* is a way of being.

Growing up on the *Lisims* teaches you that there is a way of being in all things in life. No matter where you are, who you are, and what you're doing, we are learning from our forbearers about ways of knowing, and the teachings that they have learned throughout their lives. The unique thing about being Nisga'a is that the *Lisims* has and always will be our life source. Through respect and understanding about the *Lisims* and its life cycle we as Nisga'a people have flourished along the Northern coast of British Columbia. Our *Yukw* (Feasts) are founded on the bounty that the *Lisims* provides to us. Our culture and ways of knowing are formed along its shores. The teachings and respect we have for nature and its resources are founded upon the respect that we learned from the *Lisims*. It can grant us life in so many ways, and by the same hand take all away from us that we hold so dear.

Methodology

In providing a First Nations way of knowing and perceiving, I am providing another perspective on the activities that shape our lives together as Canadians, and within our distinctive spheres as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as reflected in the story of the *Lisims*. Therefore, a large percentage of this work will recall my history and life experiences, along side secondary resources that touch on the subject matter of each

¹² "Three Dog Night" was the name of my grandfather's Fiberglas fishing boat that was equipped with an 85 horsepower Johnson motor that gave it great speed. My grandfather owned this boat for nine years, all of which I spent on it, hunting sea lions, getting halibut, crabs, and fishing for salmon year round.

of my chapters. In my conflict over how to begin the writing process for this thesis, I did not want to regurgitate materials that were already documented about the Nisga'a Nation from a western perspective.

In Paulo Freire's, "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1969) there are some very interesting points about the predicament that the colonized find themselves within in this new era. Freire was not discussing the Nisga'a Nation in particular; however, he addresses the dehumanization of the oppressed, which in turn removes authority of the colonized in the progression of the oppressor's rule:

The struggle for humanization, for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men as persons would be meaningless. This struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. (Freire 1969: 445)

Freire is correct on so many fronts when he addresses the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. On numerous occasions as the token "Indian" in Canadian universities, I find it daunting to address the colonial situation that so many classes ponder. As the "dehumanized" academic "object," I thought that this relationship could all come to an end if my non-Aboriginal peers understood that we are people too; we have knowledge, and possess communication skills. Freire furthers this by stating that, "the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressor of the oppressors, but rather restorer of the humanity of both" (Freire 1979: 445). It is from this perspective that academics are now feeling the pressure to acknowledge the narratives that differ from western interpretation of history and knowledge. From this stage, the oppressed are playing the oppressor's game and infiltrating the sacred walls of institutional education and having another story emerge. I

believe institutions should have embraced a progression of holistic narrative knowledge a long time ago.

Peter Kulchyski discusses “What is Native Studies” in an attempt to focus the institutionalized framework of western academics with stories of Native intrusion. Kulchyski focuses on the narrative as paramount in the development of the discipline for Native peoples, and the importance of dialogue in the discussions between the dominant western methods and methods of the Native Peoples:

[I]n Canada at least, Native Studies represents the best of its university system. It is where the most interesting scholarly discussions are taking place. It is resolutely anti-elitist in impulse. It is vibrant, active, engaged. It moves both inside and outside the boundaries of the academy. It is insistently questioning and self-questioning. It challenges the institutional form of the very institutions that house it. (Kulchyski 2000:16)

From a Nisga’a perspective, I thought it would be beneficial to foster a sharing of the holistic knowledge that was shared with me as I was growing up to build and support First Nations knowledge in a western academic institution as an oral author. When you share your perspective with people on the outside of our First Nations world, fear can be one of the most common attributes that hinders Indigenous peoples’ ability to transmit our knowledge freely. As a Nisga’a person, my methodology is based on what Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes as an “insider approach” since I am talking about a very personal history that is not being written by someone on the “outside” who does not have an inherent identity with my people. Smith discusses the dilemma of approaching research and writing as an Indigenous person in her text “Decolonizing Methodologies.” She says:

At a general level insider researchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality of richness in their data and analysis. So too do outsiders, but the major difference is that insiders have to

live with the consequences of their research on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities. (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 137)

It is from this basis that I am addressing my method of providing an insider perspective on the subjects of land, culture, social responsibility, language, and governance systems/structure. Within this, the issue of respect and ethics to my own people (which takes precedence over the academic institution) are paramount. Linda Smith explains:

Insider research has to be ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research. It also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles, relationships, status and position...[t]his makes Indigenous research a highly political activity and while that is understood by very experienced non-Indigenous researchers and organizations it can also be seen as a threatening activity. (Tuhiwai Smith 1999: 139, 140)

Nisga'a culture is rich and vibrant on numerous levels, so in providing a view from the inside I am opening another channel for communications to begin in the academic realm. As a knowledgeable, and culturally attuned Aboriginal man, when studying interpretations of First Nations people that are written by inexperienced non-First Nation scholars, I quickly become aware of interpretive inaccuracies. Rarely is the interpretation evaluated from the inside out, rather, the focus from the outside still relies heavily on outside sources for the development of a valid perspective according to western academic institutions. I want to ensure that readers are aware that I do respect western academics for the tools that they provide me to facilitate my documented perspective, and for the richness its literature holds for people. My work is focused on the resilience of the Nisga'a people, my name *GalksiGabin*, and our theory of *Sayt K'ilim Goot* (Of One Heart).

While our ancestors inhabited this land we made decisions about our interactions with all things around us, both animate and inanimate life forms, incorporating this

interaction into all of our social systems, and elaborating on this over time for the development of Nisga'a knowledge. As an oral society the progression of knowledge is something that is shared with many of us on numerous occasions throughout our lives. I will utilize an auto-ethnographic inquiry for this purpose, I will provide the personal internal story that many westerners try to write about, but with the essence that Sioui mentions in his auto-historical piece about his respective Nation:

I have always regarded my Huron-Wendat ancestors with boundless pride and immense longing to free their memory from the formidable conceptual prison that linear thought has built for it. I am something of a dreamer, but very early in life I became aware that I had a duty to define and defend the dignity of my people. (Sioui 1999: xiv)

Sioui does great justice to First Nations knowledge in bringing forth the sense of pride for survival, the courage of our ancestors in the battle they unwillingly participated in, and of course, the energy built in the minds of modern First Nations academics. This energy to survive and flourish in a western academic institution means to focus on another worldview and way of knowing, and translate it into something that can make sense, and be familiar to us as First Nations people. The essence of my auto-ethnography could be considered political in tone, but nonetheless, I am Nisga'a and was born into a contemporary political society that constantly stokes its fire with the energy derived from the knowledge my ancestors provided our Nation through our oral history, social systems, land, and names. As such, I feel compelled and obligated to share my First Nations, Nisga'a perspective.

John Creswell discusses theoretically grounded ethnographical approaches in research that are relevant to my method:

As a process, ethnography involves prolonged observations of the group, typically through participant observation in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-

day lives of the people or through one-on-one interviews with members of the group. The researcher studies the meanings of behavior, language, and the interactions of the cultural-sharing group. (Creswell 1998: 53)

My name, *GalksiGaban*, will be the foundation of my interpretation throughout this work. By focusing on the ethnographic lived experience with the personal self-evaluation I will provide the reflexive auto-ethnographic reality of my life. I live as a Nisga'a; I also live in a world where the approaches mentioned above are perfect paths for First Nations peoples to address the re-historization of their respective lived experience through documented narratives as discussed by Ellis and Bochner;

Although reflexive ethnographies primarily focus on a culture or subculture, authors use their own experience in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at the self-other interactions. In native ethnographies, researchers who are natives of cultures that have been marginalized or exoticized by others write about and interpret their own cultures for the others. (Ellis and Bochner, 2000: 740)

In light of the ideas presented by Ellis and Bochner, I begin each chapter with a *GalksiGaban* perspective, articulated through a personal narrative, or from Creswell's perspective, as one "immersed" (Creswell 1998: 53), thus allowing myself time for reflection in the latter part of the work. My name *GalksiGaban* signifies looking out, the top of the killer whales fin as it rises out of the water. In my work I will surface in the beginning of each chapter utilizing my name as a process, where I focus on my life through story, and share the connections between the events and other beings that are a part of my narration. Each narrative will focus on the themes of that chapter, and deal with my personal experiences and perspective on the major historical events in conjunction with available literature. From my perspective, this is the most useful way to facilitate a very complex connection in the worlds that I exist within.

Once I have completed the personal narrative I will then delve into the subsections of each chapter. I will not stray from the idea that this is a Nisga'a perspective, built on years of education and life in the changing landscape that the vast majority of First Nations peoples exist in. This method is similar to how George E. Sioui and Linda Tuhiwai Smith approach researching one's own people, and the complexities that go along with the development and presentation of Indigenous methodology. In *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, contributor Maurice Stevens, discusses the complexities of narratives and how narratives must be considered valuable:

However, rather than decrying identity politics writ large, we must formulate critical questions that will highlight both the delimiting dangers and the political urgency inherent in the articulation of political positions grounded in identities figured in narratives of historical (re)memory. (Stevens, 1996: 203-204)

It is from this perspective that I am aware of the complexities involved in writing about a history which is coming from my memory that is documented by western academics who are my "other." As mentioned previously, I do not wish to regurgitate the western historical and anthropological narratives composed by detached scholars that evaluated our Nation based on their principles. Rather, I will focus on internal approaches that are only available to people that live the narrative. Thus, the focus is on a singular interpretation of a Nisga'a lived experience. From a western framework the approach is providing balance and the pursuit of social justice as mentioned by William Hazlitt in the early 1970's:

Patriotism, in modern time, and in the great states, is and must be the creature of reason and reflection, rather than the offspring of physical or local attachment. It was once said by an acute observer, and eloquent writer (Rousseau), that the love of mankind was nothing but the love of justice; the same might be said, with considerable truth, of the love of our country. It is little more than another name for the love of liberty, or independence, or peace, or social happiness. (Hazlitt 1970: pg 67-68).

It is clear that Hazlitt is discussing the Nationalism of the United States; however, the exact same statement can be transposed onto “Indigenous North American Nationalism” in the light of our pursuit of liberty, independence, peace, and social happiness. From my perspective, the adoption of an insider approach is only logical; especially when it is joined with the theoretical approach of *Sayt K’i’lim Goot* (Of One Heart).

Theory of *Sayt K’i’lim Goot* (Of One Heart): A Nisga’a Worldview

Westerners attempted to displace and segregate our ancestors/people from the land that we call home. Our systems were denigrated; our social structures were dissected and pondered, and new Christian forms were imposed. In essence, our knowledge as a people was/is becoming colonized. Linda T. Smith describes:

It is not the intention of this chapter to tell the history of Western Knowledge, but rather draw that history down onto the colonized world, show the relationship between knowledge, research and imperialism, and then discuss the ways that it has come to structure our own ways of knowing, through the development of academic disciplines and through the education of colonial elites and indigenous or “native” intellectuals. (Smith 1999: 59)

As I study western curriculum, I find that history lacks a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous societies from their point of view. As Nisga’a we are taught to learn our lessons from the past, make decisions based on what we have learned and what has been shared with us through our oral history, all in order to avoid complications in our journey. As mentioned by Smith above, the ideas are woven together in contemporary social organizations, while preparing a generation of the “colonized” to interact on the intellectual level with the colonizer. For hundreds of years North American “Indians”

tried to portray their perspective within the western world, but the systems and structures in place at the time did not facilitate mutually beneficial respect. The entire time Nisga'a people based our approaches/relationships on *Sayt K'ilim Goot* (Of One Heart), in all of our mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional interaction with the world. Theories like *Sayt Kil'im Goot* (Of One Heart) were not acceptable in universities until thinkers such as Edward Said (1978), Frantz Fanon (1990, see Gordon et al), Homi K. Bhabha (1990), and Paulo Freire (2000) continued the discourse to address the colonial situation in the shadow of the colonizer.

Sayt K'ilim Goot is a theoretical approach towards a life long journey of acquiring and participating in the progression of holistic knowledge. Understanding that everything is connected to the heartbeat of the earth is the fundamental aspect to our survival and cohesion with all things that we each interact with throughout our lives. No matter your race, creed, or religious ideology, the concepts of *Sayt K'ilim Goot* need to become universal, and focus on truths that the environment shares with us as living beings. These concepts facilitate our ability to develop methods to share this information through dialogue.

As a Nisga'a, *Sayt K'ilim Goot* is something that provides grounding for me and it is from this perspective that I begin my dialogue within any setting, academic or otherwise. I found it unsettling in my university classes not to question students about their background, who their family is, or their cultural, political, economic, and social affiliation outside of the walls we learned within, as this is a standard encompassed by *Sayt K'ilim Goot*. From my perspective it is from those foundations that we as people create and live within diverse knowledge's and worlds. When I recall the Nisga'a

practice of our *Sayt K'ilim Goot*, I recall my people(s) sharing stories of our land, and our social, political, and economic points of view. It is because of this reality that I am utilizing *Sayt K'ilim Goot* as an application for learning and knowing. Through my auto-ethnography I can describe how *Sayt K'ilim Goot* forms my mind, guides me, and facilitates my interaction, reaction, and association with the changing environment all around me. *Sayt K'ilim Goot* is all-encompassing, holistic and creates a place for belonging for everything in our universe.

Dr. Richard Atleo, Umeek, a Nuu-chah-nulth Hereditary Chief, approaches the discussion of Indigenous theory in his book titled *Tsawalk* from a similar holistic perspective. He focuses on the concepts of connectedness and more generally that “everything is one” approach towards First Nations theory and ways of knowing (Atleo 2004: 117). Atleo writes:

...I originally conceived *Tsawa'lk* as a theory of context. In one respect, context defines recognizable groups or units of existence, such as age group, gender, home, school, geographical region, society, and heritage, but *Tsawalk*, by comparison, also refers to the nonphysical and to unseen powers. Consequently, because the theory does not exclude any aspect of reality in its declaration of unity and, most important, because the concept of *hehook-ish tsawalk* demands the assumption that all variables must be related, associated, or correlated, I now call this view of reality the theory of *Tsawalk*. (Atleo 2004: 117)

Under the tutelage of Dr. Atleo while I attended Malaspina University College, I came to further understand through our discussions that there are similarities between *Sayt K'ilim Goot*, *Tsawalk*, and other Indigenous worldviews and theories in general. These First Nations ways of knowing are similar in construct, association, and adaptability with the environments that generated their foundation. I associate the connections with the likeness in the geographic regions that the coastal groups reside within and I believe our rich culture, social structure, political systems, geographic residency and natural

resources all facilitate the evolution of such interconnected theoretical concepts between the Nisga'a and Nuu-chah-nulth people.

In the CBC Radio program "Ideas," Michael Ignatieff spoke about the concepts behind the rights revolution in contemporary Canada. This particular program I am referring to focused on the legacy after the Late Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau, of the impact of "Aboriginal Rights, Women's Rights, Minority Rights, and how they forced their way into the center of governance discussions in Canada" (Ignatieff, "Ideas," Program One, Massy Lectures, 2006 min: 26.00-27:30). In regards to First Nations people, the discussion reflects how there is a shift happening in Canadian society in consideration to the lands, social, and political authority for Aboriginal people within the Canadian context. The foundations of Canadian society are based on a complex relationship that focuses on western dominance and infiltration. Now, the ideas and knowledge that First Nations people possess are at the forefront of discussion in Canadian political and academic thought. Through this complex relationship, First Nations peoples in Canada have opened the flood gates in academics and social discussions about rights to self-determination and governance, and ecological sustainability, all of which are connected to the core of all First Nations and their respective World view.

First Nations history/existence is an integral part of the discussion, in geography, in political discourse, and in social and economic reorganization. Through the Indian Act, "Indians" are not equals within Canada. Now agreements and treaties are in place (such as the Nisga'a Treaty) which focuses on self-determination, self-governance, and development alongside other Canadians. In reference to my people, now that we have

signed our treaty and have been granted the authority to exist outside the Indian Act as a self-governing Nation we are no longer politically categorized as “Indian,” but as “Nisga’a.” As wards of the state, our social, cultural, and political history was negated and our relationship to the land we live on was jeopardized. Our theoretical approaches that form the internal foundations of our thought processes as Indigenous people have been undermined through the jurisdictions of the Federal and Provincial Governments, their Ministries, Indian Act, religious indoctrination, and of course Residential Schools. Still, First Nations people across Canada continue to exist and live within a world that is undeniably different than that of a western culture.

Edward Said discusses issues of “authorities” in *Orientalism*, thus dealing with the loss of authority that the colonized felt in the shadow of the ship:

Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it: in short ruling, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism, is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having the authority over the Orient. (Said 1978: 2)

Based on Said’s notion of western dominance writing the authority out of the colonized’s existence, whether it be the Orient or First Nations, it becomes understandable that the voice of the colonized peoples theories were never available for communication. Now that the concepts of Orientalism are evident in Nations like Canada, the United States, and numerous other European colonial areas, the evaluation and humanization of the global community is shifting the balance of knowledge for the world as a whole, thus expanding the thought and perception of theoretical connectedness. Bhabha also writes about the relevance of history in the context of time, noting, “*the necessity of the past and the necessity of its place in a line of continuous development...finally, the aspect of the*

past being linked to a necessary future” (Bhabha 1990: 295). In this statement, Bhabha connects time through a progression from past to present. From my perspective it is imperative to understand that *Sayt K'ilim Goot* never breaks in time, nor is there reason for deliberation on the concepts of time. All of the concepts of time, space and thought, are orientated and interwoven in the connectedness that *Sayt K'ilim Goot* provides. The fact is, within this theoretical perspective, there is no separation, our past is our present and this necessary connection is the heartbeat of our world within its unique existence. As Richard Atleo says, “the preeminence of human cognition, or reason, in Western culture constrains humans to focus on physical experience, subsuming soul, or spirit” (Atleo 2004: xvi). It is through our stories and the spirit of those narratives that we, as an oral society are able to survive and remember. Even though this interpretation of theory may be judged by westerners as less than adequate, as a product of my Nation, our thought, thus our theory needs to be accepted as a theory and a world view that is human, and a worldview that has a great deal to teach the Western world, and the whole World.

Preview of Chapters

In creating the five chapters with two parts, my goal is to facilitate the connectedness that all of the core ideas have for me. Geography and culture, social organization and language and Governance, each subject has connections for me personally in my understanding about being Nisga'a. If I begin to separate them too much I will not present the reader with the connections between the points that I require. My goal is to utilize a personal story to begin each chapter, and then focus on the key concept of each chapter heading. In this work I am providing my perspective on the

activities and events that I encountered and experienced that have truly impacted me and my identity. The unique part about this work is it will connect with documented resources that focus on the chapter headings in the progression towards a single point of view: Where are we going as Nisga'a people? What tools do we have to make these decisions? Both of these questions will be answered through the framework I utilize to deliver my auto-ethnographic approach to this work.

Preview of Chapter Three: Geography and Culture

As I have already stated above, in order to begin this journey, people must be aware of who I am, where I am from, and what my connections with geography are. My *pdeek* (Clan) is *Gisk'aast* (Killer whale), I am from the House of *Niisyyuus*, our family has inhabited many locations from the southern Nass River to the mid waters of the Nass River, all depending on the seasons and cultural activities we were involved in. Our connections with geographical locations are fundamental to our existence in the animate and inanimate worlds that we live in as members of the Nisga'a Nation.

When I begin to talk about animate and inanimate beings in terms of geography there is a direct reason for this. Land to me is not something that we just mow over and make what we want of it. Rather, it's something to be respected, cherished, and honored for its provisions. To me the land speaks to us about where things are going to be and the seasons facilitate a form of communication that our people have harnessed over thousands of years. The ocean, rivers, streams, and mountains are crucial parts of our geography that foster definitive boundaries between other *HuWilps* (Houses) and the respective Nations that neighbor our territory. Geography to the Nisga'a Nation's

respective House groups is the foundation upon which all is built and fostered in all social, political, and cultural arenas. Personal *Adaawak*, clan *Adaawak*, National *Adaawak* (stories or Histories), are connected with the lands and both animate and inanimate resources; all that surrounds us influences our lives in some manner.

When I bring forth the terms animate and inanimate I do so with the perception that readers are aware about how Nisga'a peoples hold certain things like trees and animals to be spiritual and living beings. Mountains, streams, cliffs, caves, weather; all hold connections to our lives and their own, all play a role in the existence with one another. Our oral narratives shared about the volcano teach our people that many died from gases associated with certain types of volcanoes. Currently, scientists have supported our oral narratives by noting that the Nass Valley volcano was a para-plastic flow that pushed hot gases down the mountain side towards our ancient communities now covered by the modern lava park.¹³ With that, the scientific and Indigenous knowledge support each other and validate that component of our history.

When discussing geography in the context of the spiritual and non spiritual, the reader must be aware that Nisga'a culture teaches that there is no distinct separation, no walls or barriers, no mental barriers to hinder the concept that life is everywhere, of one heart. On a daily walk while working for the Nisga'a Government, I met a Nisga'a Chief on the road to the store. We had an in depth discussion about the term *Aluugigat* (public peoples). He mentioned to me that it meant that we are born into the world naked, therefore we cannot hide anything, and there is transparency in our lives. Therefore,

¹³ The Royal British Columbia Museum worked on a Project with Nisga'a *Lisims* Government for the Living Landscapes exhibit in 2003. There is still information available on this study at www.rbcm.ca. Another valuable resource for the Nisga'a volcano is the Gingolx Village Government's Media Centre clip on the same topic, information is available at www.gingolx.ca.

based on this interpretation, we have nowhere to hide anything, thus, everything is there for discussion.¹⁴ As Richard Atleo describes, “[t]he relationship between the spiritual and physical dimensions is characterized by the latter’s dependence on the former. Spiritual things do not derive from physical things, but physical things derive from spiritual” (Atleo 2004: 18). This spirit of connectedness is the approach behind geography and our physical landscape, and of course, the theory of Sayt K’ílím Goot, everything is one, impacts Aluugigat; the public peoples

A cornerstone to the land is the culture that goes along with the people that inhabit the Nass River valley and basin. Our matrilineal culture is shaped by the land we inhabit. Our cultural ceremonies are reflective of our interactions through history with the land that we call home. Nisga’a culture is based upon the narrative values of respect, honor, and knowledge of the age old teachings that our people learned along our journey.

The knowledge I have of Nisga’a culture has been acquired as I developed over time and is constantly honed by all participants in the meta-narrative of orality. I participated in many different community activities where our culture facilitated an adjustment, event, occurrence or interaction. At all activities there are specific ceremony, specific cultural-communal response, and each strengthened the oral connections between witnesses and the active participants in the cultural activity. Therefore, culture is the basis of our connections with geography, our connections with each other in the various capacities as Nisga’a. It forms the foundation for our survival and success today, and Chapter Three will expand upon these themes.

Preview of Chapter Four: Social Organization and Language

¹⁴ Discussion with Herbert Morven, *Sim’oogit Keexkw, Laxgibuu, Wilp Duuk*

Social organization and language facilitate the structure and communication that our Nation requires for existence. Nisga'a social organization is developed following a matrilineal structure and process. Dependent on the age of a woman and her birth rank within her family, her children would follow a possible royal line to ensure that there is a direct path for cohesion and coherence in our oral systems.

Alex Rose describes:

Since the Nisga'a had no written language, their intricate social system and the rules for the appointment of resources were embodied in a complicated code called the *Ayuukhl Nisga'a*. As well, elaborate rites and ceremonies were used to establish responsibilities and ownerships, the most important of them being the potlatch...the potlatch was a feast, theatrical performance, gift-giving and confirmation ceremony. Status was formally and publically assumed at one of these gatherings because, though place within the community was hereditary, it was not automatically assumed at birth. Potlatch guests served as witnesses to the bestowal of noble titles, crests and ceremonial rights...In addition to the announcement of honours and titles, children of low-rank group members were awarded names, and sometimes, minor prerogatives. (Rose 2000: 52)

Only through this means can our geography and culture be facilitated to maximize the resources that we have all around us in all shapes and forms. The clan system connects our nuclear and extended family groups to larger tribal groups. This is our clan system, most eloquently described in the *Ayuukhl Nisga'a Reader* demonstrating the connections and developments of each and every clan and how they got their possible symbols:

Each clan also took various animals to be their crest or emblem. It often happened that members of each clan were lured away by animals. When such a person returned, the clan naturally adopted that animal as its crest. The significance lay in the fact that all those deceived were given great honor in the midst of their captors. These animals also provided, or rather showed, foods that were edible; that was the reason for adopting them as crests. These clans are truly the foundation of the Nisga'a. The people who recently came to our country from Europe do not know the history of our land. They do not believe it; and why not? Because they do not belong here in the first place. (*Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study*, Volume 2, 1995: ii).

In order to fully understand Nisga'a social organization one must first address the language of the Nisga'a Nation, called *Sim'algaax*. This is the language that fosters the understanding and dialogue between Nisga'a. My comprehension of our language is minimal, since I participate in an English dominated society. However, I desire to become fluent in speaking my language in order to fully comprehend the necessary dialogue that I will need to understand as I make my progression within my cultural arena. Chapter Four will focus on the Ayuukhl Nisga'a texts, published in part by Nisga'a Tribal Council, now Nisga'a *Lisims* Government, in cooperation with our respected Nisga'a elders, past and present, and the Wilp Wilxo'oskwahl Nisga'a Institute. The texts are guides that facilitate the reader's progression through the basics of our culture.

Preview of Chapter Five: Nisga'a Governance

When I bring forth terms about the modern era, I mean my generation, from the 1970's to today. In the late 1960's our leadership participated in a Canadian court in the Calder Case that ultimately determined that our rights were not extinguished. From there, we (as a Nation) have moved forward to develop the first modern treaty in Canada in August 1999. Ironically, the Nisga'a Treaty was initialed on my birthday while I was attending summer classes at the University of Victoria where much to my discontent, protesters amassed to object to this historic event.

Based on the era in which my teachings and social interaction were honed, I became a very vocal and proud supporter of being Nisga'a. I did not care about western rules and ideas that were hindering our people from governing themselves, nor did I care

for western interpretations of me and the Nisga'a Nation from their outside perspective. In many high school and post-secondary classes, I voiced my opinion to the amazement of many of my classmates, especially in history, since that is the discipline that facilitates and fosters the "narratives" of interactions between Nisga'a and non-Nisga'a people since contact. In the modern post Frank Calder Case era, Nisga'a people began to really articulate our perspective onto all realms of the western world. We have valuable things to share; our personal life stories are complex and distinctly Nisga'a perspectives that focus on the reality of Nisga'a life. By participating in the western world and the academic world, and placing our narratives within a literate tradition in English we can make some of our knowledge more accessible and move the evolution of our oral society beyond what is presented by the popular press. As explained by Ong, a scholar who writes about the importance of orality in literacy, "Literacy opens possibilities to the word and to human existence unimaginable without writing" (Ong 1982: 275). So although Nisga'a history will continue to evolve through the oral society we exist within, these written words will contribute to a written Nisga'a history, by a Nisga'a person.

Preview of Chapter Six: Conclusion

In order to fill the gap that I see in the western academic process, I knew that I had to write from my proactive perspective. I wanted to be able to show the direct connection of academic discourse to the life experiences and association that I have as being Nisga'a. Our oral systems foster the discussion in regards to topics that relate to our land, culture, history, social systems, and political realms. When I encountered westerners calling me a "greedy Indian," because we were stealing their tax dollars for

our Nisga'a Treaty, I did not back down. Our people have suffered enough through this process of colonization, through the assimilative practices of Europeans and later Canadians, through the dislocation from our traditional lands, and from access to our families and culture. All of these are reasons why I choose this subject for my Masters thesis.

In preparing for my MA, I thought it would be best if people heard my interpretation of what it is like to be *GalksiGaban* from the Nisga'a Nation. I am a product of my ancestors and soon it will be my turn to man the watch post to ensure that our land and people are safe, hence my name, *GalksiGaban*. Now it is time to present perspectives in the best way we see fit for each individual situation we encounter along life's journey. Only we (as Nisga'a) can facilitate a perspective for our respective membership in regards to what history was like for our people. By addressing the circumstances that I grew up within, I will show the reader that modern *Adaawaks* are a constructive method of expression for First Nations people in a colonial context. Our perspectives have never been on the same playing field as our western counterparts, nor have our systems and structures been recognized for facilitating the Nisga'a Treaty and the modern era we now find ourselves in.

Being the "other" that many scholars such as Said (1978) talk about is one of the most daunting things that a human being can live through. Removing myself from the "other" mold is something that comes easy to me as a Nisga'a person. When I traveled outside our lands I felt the full force of the western world collide with me. My strength is my home, my family, which is what we are taught as Nisga'a people. Our history and connections with each other are the fundamental aspect to our survival as a Nation in the

modern World we live in. We will gain more in providing our knowledge for the argument and discussion surrounding who we are and what we are capable of.

Sayt K'ilim Goot is focused on all things, our participation in life and everything that we encounter as Nisga'a people produces our knowledge. In these modern times we have come far from the days of "lock stock and barrel"¹⁵ in regards to Nisga'a land claims, to being a self-governing body that is just beginning to address, and take responsibility for, the situation(s) that we constantly encounter regarding our land as a Nation of peoples inhabiting a diverse and adverse world. By providing a Nisga'a perspective in each of the chapters, it contributes to my belief that we have a great deal of information to reevaluate for the next phase of our lives in the world that "we choose" to live within. What are we doing? Where are we going? Do we know what is happening? All of these are questions that we must ask in order to accomplish our goal as a collective of individuals, as our ancestors did for thousands of years, in the context of having signed the Nisga'a Treaty.

¹⁵ The term "lock stock and barrel" was utilized by the Late James Gosnell, as a term stating that Nisga'a Land was not for Sale, nor would our people sacrifice anything, as the land is ours "Lock stock and Barrel." He stated this in a meeting in the early 1970's. The term was utilized heavily by the Nisga'a Tribal Council as a political term focusing our people; it is referenced in a poster and in many places within the *Ayuukhl* Nisga'a texts...

Chapter Three: Geography and Culture

Ts'etsiks Ang'oosgum: The Land the People of the Nass River Own and Are Born From and live on

O'lie's (My Great-grandmother's) Influence: The Beginning

As a young child in the community of *Laxgalts'ap* (Greenville), I had the opportunity to know three of my four great-grandparents; by far my favorite was my maternal grandmother, the Late Clara Martin. I spent many days in her home, asking for popsicles and candy, sweating while worrying about my great-grandfather, Herbert Martin, chasing me with his cane...all the while asking me to get him some more smokes. The fun and games were the little things that I hold so close, it was not until I was older that I began to recognize the connections that my grandmother was sharing with me over hot cups of tea loaded with sugar, by an old forty-five gallon stove that I played too close to.

On numerous occasions I was told about acting in a certain manner within our community, participating in community functions with our *Wilp* (House) members, and always showing up no matter how "lazy" I was. I thought that my grandmother was training me to be a hard worker, but that is not the only teaching. She was teaching me that my role was within my community; my role was alongside my counterparts that held the same rank as I did, as an heir to their respective *Wilp* (House), as a primary or secondary *Sim'oogit* (Chief).

The parts of my role are, knowing our land, our stories, our old village sites, and our connections between the land and the other families' house groups that surrounded and lived with us. I knew we had deep rooted connections with certain eagle *Wilps*, and rivalries with others. All of this information was shared with me through my *Giits* Clara.

What these teachings provide me is a learned perspective on the spiritual connections between the Nisga'a people and the land. We were told about the volcano and why we should not play with fish. We were taught that otters change into men/women to lure children close to the *Lisims* to take them in. Therefore, we stayed away from the rivers unless we had people with us. I recall stories of regions in our valley where spirits protect our lands. If you listen you can hear them in the mountains. All of these stories scared me, but later taught me that the lands and all of its parts deserve the utmost reverence for their power, and its contribution to our existence. All of these points were taught to me in an overheated house, where popsicles were salvation, and going to the store for cigarettes for grandpa was not that bad.

In preparation for my potential role as a primary chief, I was taught that our land is connected to everything that we are as *Niisyuus*. We are from the *Gisk'aast* (Killer whale) clan, and hail from territories in the south. I spent many days out on the *Lisims* (Nass River), because we are fish people and the *Wilp* I belong to represents how a family of killer whales hunts together and flourishes from what nature provides. The river is our life, the fish and *sa'ak* (oolichan) are the reasons we belong to the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (Nass River). Through my grandmother's little stories, I was able to understand that I had a role; it was there for me from the beginning. I was shaped and formed by my family, my community, and history, to do what I was required to do, which is protecting and insuring our land is there for our family forever. I learned about our homes in the old villages, across the river from present day *Laxgalts'ap*. I knew that we had territory in the south along the Pacific coast; this is the location where we gathered seafood during the summer months. All of this was transmitted to me in little stories that we shared over tea and popsicles, the simple little situations in life that make such a difference in a persons' life. Alex Rose describes:

Nisga'a culture emphasized the teaching of etiquette and moral standards, and all older relatives, particularly grandparents, participated in the education of children... Instruction began in infancy, at an age most educators would consider too young to learn effectively. Children of status learned not only routine etiquette, but also the lengthy traditions of rank and privilege, including the songs and prayers that denoted ownership. (Rose 2000: 54)

Alex Rose speaks to this nurturing and my life experiences represent these elements of Nisga'a culture and the traditional methods of teaching our young people. These educational philosophies still exist and are absolutely fundamental to the succession of our society.

My Family's Land

As a member of *Wilp Niisyuus*, I was born into a territory that our family has maintained ties to for thousands of years. I was brought into a family, a history, a

culture, and most importantly, the majestic and mystic Nisga'a lands (see Figure 1). The land I talk about is something that you must see and feel in order to comprehend what words cannot convey. Through the wisdom of our ancestors we survive and develop alongside all of the rich diversity that our river valley provides, while harnessing the connections that we witness in nature, our social, political, economic, and cultural activities.

One can see from examining the map in Figure 1 that the lands of the Nisga'a people hold specific Nisga'a names. All of these names have significant social, cultural, physical and spiritual meaning. The traditional lands of *Wilp Niisyuus* include land within the region of *X'anmas* (Kwinimass Bay), to the east of *Ts'im K'ohl Da oots'ip* (Fishery Bay) and in the North west region of Nisga'a lands, *Laxgalt'sap*, (Greenville), and finally, the region directly across from *Xts'init* (near Kitsault). Each region was utilized for a variety of different situations and functioned through the seasonal cycle that we existed within. Our most prominent regions were located in *X'anmas*, and across from *Laxgalt'sap*. In both of these regions our family had established homes for our respective members during pre-contact times. All of these relationships between the territories and membership are rooted in the oral traditions that are shared with all of us from the day we are born.

At a very young age, I began to understand what my grandmothers and grandfathers shared with me on a daily basis. While growing up I came to know that the connections our ancestors divulged to my family and community members facilitated a form of respect that ensured our survival with all the animate and inanimate beings on our land. I understood that the land did speak. When you look into the forest it provides

clues to what is safe and what is dangerous. If you listened to everything around you, it was not hard to hear the voices of your ancestors coming out in the teachings that our family and community members provided to us. By connecting these concepts at a young age, I began to value the teachings and recognized the reasons for our survival on the land.

The *Lisims* (Nass River) is our life. Our river is the reason for our existence on the land that we inhabit and fought so diligently for, for the last one hundred years. When I was young I have fond memories of being on the river, catching salmon, and on the land moose hunting, or, just going for a ride to test a new motor. This is our life, as it was our ancestor's lives to travel the river to trade goods, attend *Yukw* (feasts) to exercise the *Ayuukhl* (Nisga'a laws), or gather goods according to the seasonal cycle. These activities solidified the connections between different *HuWilps* (house groups), different geographic locations, and of course the connections with the *adaawaḱ* (narratives) and *yukw* (feasts) that our people participate in.

When I am engaged in discussion with Nisga'a people, the concepts of Nisga'a culture and land are always, at some level, part of that experience. In a modern context many of our discussions focus on the communal connections and economic prosperity of a respective *Wilp* (house group) via western adopted standards of monetary resources, which is reflective of the colonial world that we exist within. If my tribe is preparing for a Settlement or Stone Moving feast, it is imperative that each of us as *Wilp* (House) and tribal members are aware of the necessary actions and responsibilities required, ensuring that our *Ayuukhl* (Nisga'a laws) are being followed appropriately. Historically, during such cultural practices, there was not so much of a discussion about material or monetary

necessities of such a feast. The focus was on land or water based forms of economic wealth, such as furs, seafood's and all other harvestable resources in a *Wilps* respective territories. In 1985 the Nisga'a people compiled and documented much of our *Ayuukhl* (Nisga'a laws) so that there could be a permanent record of these within our history for all to read about. The *Ayuukhl Nisga'a* compilation has a great deal of relevant materials in regards to our *Wilp*'s power:

Wilps or houses, as the basic corporate unit in Nisga'a society, had their own harvesting territories. The separation of land into *Wilp* controlled *ango'oskws* allowed the Nisga'a to control harvesting activities on discrete territories, and ultimately had to do with the management of food and other types of resource harvesting. (*Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study Vol IV 1995: 11*)

In our progression through contact, colonization, and treaty, the culture has adapted and maintained its focus on the transmission of our oral history and connections through the land. In our personal and family names, you can recognize the deep connections with the animate and inanimate beings that populate the respective territory we inhabit, via *adaawak* (story), and place names that are directly associated with our creator and our families' associations with their respective lands. The names we host are normally reflective of our lands, special resources on them, and of course with our interaction with the animate and inanimate beings in our *adaawak*.

Our land is something that our ancestors provided to us as caretakers for our respective House groups, as mentioned by a Nisga'a Chief, *Sim'oogit Gadee'libim Hayatskw* (late Rufus Watts). "The Nisga'a and their chiefs always provided for their people. No one man ruled a piece of land. Rather one chief held the rights to the land and shared the land with his people" (*Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study, Vol II, Clan Histories: xviii*). Statements of this nature focus on the reality of what land and resources meant to

each respective *Wilp* (House). Chiefs were spokesman in feasts and communal activities, along with trade leaders in inter-*Wilp* (House) trade prior to contact.

Our Connections

Many authors, like Vine Deloria, in *Spirit and Reason* (1999), or Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits In Places* (1996), have written about the deep spiritual connection between First Nations people and place. As a member of *Wilp Niisyuus*, many of our stories have direct connections with shape shifting narratives between the killer whales and my ancestors who inhabited our lands.¹⁶ These are narratives that form the basis of our spiritual connections with the land and the animate and inanimate beings/nature that surround us. Some provide teachings on the fishing techniques our family and national membership practiced, while others are more personal and connected to the foundation of our existence as *HuWilp* (house groups). These are forms of knowledge that directly connect us to our territory and provide for our existence on the land. My name was handed on to me from my great-grandmother who informed me at a young age that I would attain a certain status “if I earned it.” I didn’t fully comprehend the words that she shared with me and sometimes took it for granted. Not until I was twenty one was I able to really see what my role was as *GalksiGabin*.

To attain a ranking name you “must” be born into it, like royalty. When I was born, my destiny was already determined, and I had to insure that I knew certain things about being Nisga’a while participating in my community and culture in a useful manner.

¹⁶ Due to the sensitive nature of our personal names, my objective here is to only refer to my name. I did not receive permission from each individual of our *Wilp* to discuss their names and stories. The vast majority of our family stories are for our family and only them. These are forms of knowledge that directly connect us to our territory and provide for our existence on the land.

In a modern context this meant going to feasts, participating in fishing with uncles and other community members, sharing your hunt with elders, and of course listening to the many teachings that all people shared with you as a Nisga'a member. The major point is the connection with the land that we truly call "home." Martin Heidegger explains "spaces receive their essential being from particular localities and not from 'space itself'" (Heidegger 1977: 123). From this statement one can grasp that the connections between locations are only a portion of the equation, the essence of space is derived from the beings that inhabit it. As a Nisga'a person, we have many spaces that are defined by the animate and inanimate connections with the environment and spaces that we inhabit, and of course our direct interaction with all of the life forms that inhabit the space.

Nisga'a Land

Nisga'a land has been at the forefront of First Nations political discussion in British Columbia for over one-hundred years. Our ancestors fought diligently for the immediate recognition of our rights to Nisga'a land. *Sim'oogit Axdii Wil Luu Gooda* (the late William "David" McKay), one of the members of the 1913 Nisga'a Land Committee, stated it most eloquently in 1897:

What we don't like about the Government is their saying this: "We will give you this much land." How can they give it when it is our own? We cannot understand it. They have never bought it from us or our forefathers. They have never fought and conquered our people and taken the land in that way, and yet they say now that they will give us so much land—our own land. These chiefs do not talk foolishly, they know the land is their own; our forefathers for generations and generations had passed their land here all around us; chiefs have had their own hunting grounds, their own salmon streams, and places where they got berries; it has always been so. It is not only during the last four or five years that we have seen the land; we have always seen and owned it; it is not a new thing; it has been ours for generations. If we had only seen it for twenty years and claimed it as our own, it would have been foolish, but it has been ours for thousands of years (Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study Vol. IV: The Land and Resources: ix).

From the onset of the land question debate our social system facilitated the political battle plan for our Nation. *Sim'oogit Axdii Wil Luu Gooda* (the late William “David” McKay), recognized the fact that “white people” were taking our lands without our permission. For thousands of years we owned land from the ocean to the head waters of the *Lisims* in the North, as far east as the regions now known as Meziadan Junction, and west into present day Alaska. The term “lock stock and barrel” is one utilized by the late James Gosnell, when he was involved in the Comprehensive Land Claims process of the Nisga’a Treaty.¹⁷ There are numerous references to James Gosnell’s statement about this as “Nisga’a Land, Lock, Stock, and Barrel” (Nisga’a Tribal Council, Citizen Plus, 1980, pg. 3). When it was first stated was most likely in a public meeting or Special Assembly in the early 1970’s. These terms are at the core of the statement made by *Sim'oogit Axdii Wil Luu Gooda* (the late William “David” McKay), because we were firm in our claim, firm in our commitment to maintain our authority in the land that is our home. Our connections with the land are not just an association to land itself, it is deeper and more elaborate than that.

I realize in post-secondary Geography programs, there is a movement towards understanding the connections that First Nations people have with their respective territory. In my participation in geography courses at Malaspina University-College and at the University of Northern British Columbia, I began to recognize how interested people are in understanding the connections the First Nations have with the land and

¹⁷“Comprehensive land claims are based on the assertion of continuing Aboriginal rights and claims to land that have not been dealt with by treaty or other means. Comprehensive land claims negotiations address concerns raised by Aboriginal people, governments and third parties in Canada about who has the legal right to own or use the lands and resources in areas under claim.” (Available: www.cccm.nrcan.gc.ca/english/comprehensive_claims_e.asp)

ways of knowing land. Mugerauer and Seamon note the profound connection between the land and resources that shape humans.

Words including names are not merely labels, but the evocation of what things are and [of] how they are related to other things in the web of particular lives and places. And more than the names and words, there is language itself, which is not a fanciful artifact, but that which has the power to articulate and join humans to plants, animals and activities in the surrounding world. The entire fabric of a people's meaningful world-the total environment-comes along with the whole of that people's language. (Mugerauer and Seamon et al; 1985: 59)

When Nisga'a leaders discussed the land and our passion for it as a Nation, the above mentioned comment reflects direct reason for that passion. Nisga'a people have lived on the land for thousands of years, and our connections with the "Nisga'a Web of Life" is our holistic approach to the territory. Our *pedeek* (clans) are part of this relationship, the environment all round us made us Nisga'a and focused our attentions on the development and connections to the land we inhabited. Mugerauer was correct in his connection between the "joining of humans to plants and animals" etc. that he evokes. Emphasis can be added by the Nisga'a way of life on the land, and our social, economic, and political essence as a people. The idea here is, Nisga'a people have always known that the land was part of our being, our existence and our social systems and communal connections are derived from it.

Nisga'a land is connected to the heart of each of our members that exist within our territory. The term *Sayt K'ilim Goot* (Of One Heart) is the ultimate expression of geography in a modern cross-cultural context, in that the term facilitates a First Nations approach to the environment. These are the ideas that come from all things that make up where we live, and how our Nation interacts with our living environment and our respective territories and membership.

These deep rooted connections with the land that we call home come from countless generations of knowledge, similar to the ideas shared with me around the hot stove in my grandmother's house. I knew that the connections were derived from holistic concepts and experience that focused on respect, understanding, and listening to the heart beat all around us. Even when beings pass on to the next plain, we are taught that we are required to say good bye to the being that left you for the remainder of your own life journey.

From a Nisga'a perspective, the association between Nisga'a people and the land is still as loud as the drum that beats our Nation's heart. Our connections provided the ammunition for the fight that we have had to endure for over one hundred years. Our association with the geographic locations that make us Nisga'a formed the foundations with the environment that dictate our existence. Our understanding of the environment is something that developed since time immemorial, and still develops today in the reclamation process we now find our Nation enveloped in, called the Nisga'a Treaty. In this process, our Nation is placing the "proper names" on geographical locations that make up the land that has always been Nisga'a land. Prior to our treaty, the communities in the Nass Valley were all represented by the names that colonizers chose and imposed. However, since the Nisga'a Treaty was enacted, people who drive through the Nass Valley will see our communities recognized within their own right in *Sim'algax* (Nisga'a language). This process of returning the place names into the Nisga'a language is an important process for my people. We are now able to revisit those stories that are encompassed within the names and teach them to Nisga'a and non-Nisga'a people alike. Ultimately, these names represent a strong extension of our culture. Our culture is

derived from our association with land that we call home; it is also reflective of our names and associations with the territory of each respective *Wilp*.

The Role of Nisga'a Culture

Nisga'a culture is directly connected to the stories that my grandmother shared with me as a young child. Through her teachings and transmission of associations that I was required to know, I was learning what culture was for me. When you are born into a Nisga'a family you are born into a culture that developed along the *Lisims* for thousands of years. My grandmother prepared me to recognize the land and connections between our House name, family names, place names, and the *adaawak* (oral history) that provides for the transmission of the knowledge that we all require to be Nisga'a.

The Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study volumes developed under the Nisga'a Tribal Council address the culture and history of the Nisga'a Nation in over seven hundred pages of work with our Elders and their knowledge of our history. The Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study was completed in the early 1980's, it was a culmination of work completed in the Traditional Land and Occupancy Study (TLOS) for the Nisga'a Treaty Process under the Nisga'a Tribal Council (NTC). In each community, the NTC hired one interviewer and translator to work with all the Elders and discuss their names, families, and history to document it for our future generations and our treaty negotiations. The main copy of the study is held by the Ayuukhl Nisga'a Department within the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government. The magnitude of the compilation is primarily focused on social organization and inter-*Wilp*/inter-nation communications. The secondary focus is on materials of how *HuWilp* (House groups) function as single units, and how they interact with each other as members of the larger Nation. At the core of this connectivity is an elaborate culture that

harnesses the animate and inanimate life and spiritual forms surrounding us, all of which is transmitted to the new generation like me, through narratives by the stove.

In our culture, the primary focus between all points is “respect.” We are taught to respect our Elders and respect the lands that we are on. In the *Ayuukhl* Nisga’a texts *Sim’oogit Gadee’libim Hayatskw* refers to our Nisga’a ways of being, and our laws, all structural strings in our web of being:

Oral traditions--the Ayuukhl and the Adaawaḱ - the Ayuukhl are the law. They determine how all Nisga’a should live and interact with each other. The Adaawaḱ are the stories, the collective oral history, which authenticates the origin of particular Houses and clans and their place within Nisga’a society. Some Adaawaḱ are the property of specific groups and cannot be told by anyone outside the group. Other Adaawaḱ more broadly pertain to the entire culture and may be told by any elder. The Ayuukhl are one example of these. They are transmitted from generation to generation, from uncle to nephew, through the Adaawaḱ. The Ayuukhl are many. Some deal with codes of moral behavior such as how Nisga’a should behave towards one another, what kinds of responsibilities and obligations individuals have to their families and larger world, and so on. Other are more authoritative and strictly define the nature of social activity through the prohibition or enforcement of certain kinds of behavior. Still others regulate the all important relationship the Nisga’a have with the land. (Ayuukhl Nisga’a Study: Nisga’a Clan Histories, Vol II, 1995, xix)

From this vantage point non-Nisga’a people can recognize that there are social guidelines, and there are laws that are administered to facilitate a fully functioning social structure and system that has a direct relationship with the land that we call our home.

Simgigat (Chiefs) articulate this idea in all feasts to this day, and insure that people present are aware that business is about to take place, and their attention is required to lay witness to the proceedings. This is utilized in all *Yukw* (feasts), where people from the respective *HuWilps* (Houses) pay attention to the transmission of information for the insurance that the materials and knowledge that have been shared are remembered and recalled when issues or subjects arise about situations dealing with lands and resources.

Nisga'a cultural practices are directly connected with the seasonal cycle of the environment and the lands that we live on. Certain times of the year are associated with the *sa'ak* (oolichan), our salvation fish after hard winters; others to the times when the *ya'a* spring salmon traveled up our creeks and rivers for harvesting.¹⁸ Both of these points facilitated our cultural and social agreement within the environment in which we live. Our cultural practices and ceremonies differ during the seasonal cycles; historically, different *Wilp* carried out different duties on their respective lands for the larger social trading that went on in the *Yukw* (feast). We have numerous *Yukw* (feasts) that deal with marriage, death, names, retribution, honor, and of course, seasonal celebrations that our respective *HuWilps* participate in.

Nisga'a culture is a complex web that stretches throughout the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (Nass River). People gather and prepare resources for their respective *Yukw* (feast) and their yearly requirements for sustenance. There are many different cultural ceremonies that we have as Nisga'a. However, the most significant to Nisga'a people is the *sa'ak* (oolichan). From the mouth of the *K'alii aksim Lisims* to the far reaches of the interior of British Columbia, the Nisga'a Nation's resources provided *sa'ak* and *t'ilx*¹⁹ (oolichan's and oolichan grease) to other First Nations for trade.

As a young boy I grew up in a very traditionally based family. We always harvested *sa'ak* and prepared *t'ilx* for trade in Terrace, Prince Rupert, the Hazeltons, and into Alaska. Along with the *t'ilx* (oolichan grease) we also traded *k'ayuukuis* (salmon

¹⁸ *Ya'a* is also the term that describes the month of August, when spring salmon traveled to our valley. For more information on the "Traditional Nisga'a Year", refer to *Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study*, Vol IV; chapter III. It goes into great detail about the seasonal cycle and corresponding Nisga'a activities.

¹⁹ Tomlinson and Young (1983), Raunet (1984/1996), and all of the *Ayuukhl Nisga'a* volumes (1995) discuss the Oolichan/Euluchon, in Nisga'a *Sa'ak*, as the salvation fish, the cornerstone of being Nisga'a, and our reason for being in the valley. Refer to these texts for more detailed information on the fish.

strips) for meat, materials and supplies, and monetary funds. This to me is our culture which includes the development and sustainability of all our relationships with all life forms so that we can survive. The knowledge that our ancestors shared with us was not only theoretical, it was practical and provided the connections that we require to succeed in the bountiful valley that we were privileged to live in.

If one is to ever examine testimonies by Elders in our neighboring Nations, you would find that we really are, and always have been, the people of the Nass River. During his testimony at the *Delgamuukw [Gisdaywa] v. the Queen* land claims court case, *Maxlalex* (the late Johnny David of the Wet'suwet'en Nation) describes trade between the Nisga'a and Wet'suwet'en as:

*They [the Nisga'a] did trade seaweed and oolichan grease for different animals that the Wet'suwet'en had such as martin or goat; goat meat and this is what they traded for... the **people of the Nass**. The swinak or seaweed, that was traded with the coast Indians and the cha or oolichan grease was traded with the **people of the Nass River area**. (Mills, Ed. 2005: 175 emphases added)*

I assisted Dr. Antonia Mills with her publication and reproduction of this testimony in her book, "Hang Onto These Words: Johnny David's *Delgamuukw* Evidence" where one can find this quotation. During my work with Dr. Mills, I was moved by the emotion and cultural relevance of the words coming from *Maxlalex*. It entirely related to my experiences of growing up and listening to words of my Elders and reinforced the necessity of a continued cultural transmission through works such as my thesis. This chapter was intended to encapsulate how our *ts'etsiks ang'oosgum* (soil/dirt) is the foundation of Nisga'a geography and culture and it makes us a part of the land that the people of the Nass River are born from.

Chapter Four: Social Organization and Language

Wila Loom' ii Wila Algaxam (The Way We Are and Our Language)

To initiate the discussion on social organization, I thought it prudent to share a story about the time I got my Nisga'a name, *GalksiGabin*. This was one of the most influential events in my life, for two reasons. The first I will explain in the story, as an example of *GalksiGabin* surfacing in the larger Nisga'a social system, and the second reason I will offer in an explanation of the conclusion to the story, about the impact of getting a Nisga'a name.

Receiving My Nisga'a Name: *GalksiGabin*

On the day that I got my name, we had just laid my grandfather, *Sim'oogit Niisyuus*, Eric Martin's head stone at his grave site in the *Laxgalts'ap* community cemetery. I was twelve years old at the time, just heading into high school, and thinking I knew everything about the world that I was a part of. Little did I know that when I entered into the community hall for the settlement feast that my life would be forever changed

Upon entering the hall, a carved paddle was handed to each and every one of us receiving names from *Wilp Niisyuus*. All of the paddles had killer whales painted on them and they were about four feet in length. We also received killer whale vests, with the same insignia on them. What angered me about the whole process was we were not allowed to be seated; we had to seat all of our guests, and ensure that we made them comfortable for a long night in the *Yukw* (feast) hall. After everybody came into the feast, approximately five hundred people, the *Simgigat* (Chiefs) of our *Wilp* (House) began to make speeches to the audience. All the speeches were focused on the family and our late grandfather, informing the participants about what would take place with the name he held, and the other names that would be provided to other *Niisyuus* members like me.

Once all of the business was taken care of with the payments and procedures, the senior names in our family were dealt with. Then it was my turn to stand in front of the hall and receive my name. When you get a Nisga'a name you are placed in front of the hall, and members of your father's family who have ranking names, come forth and call your name. Prior to this taking place, the highest ranking *Sigidimnak* (matriarch) tells the story of your name for all of the participants to bare witness to. My name, *GalksiGaban*, "To Surface Between Two Points," is a name connected to territory retained by my *Wilp*; known as *Xnamaas* (Kwinamass Bay). My name is derived from the two points that are located at the entrance to

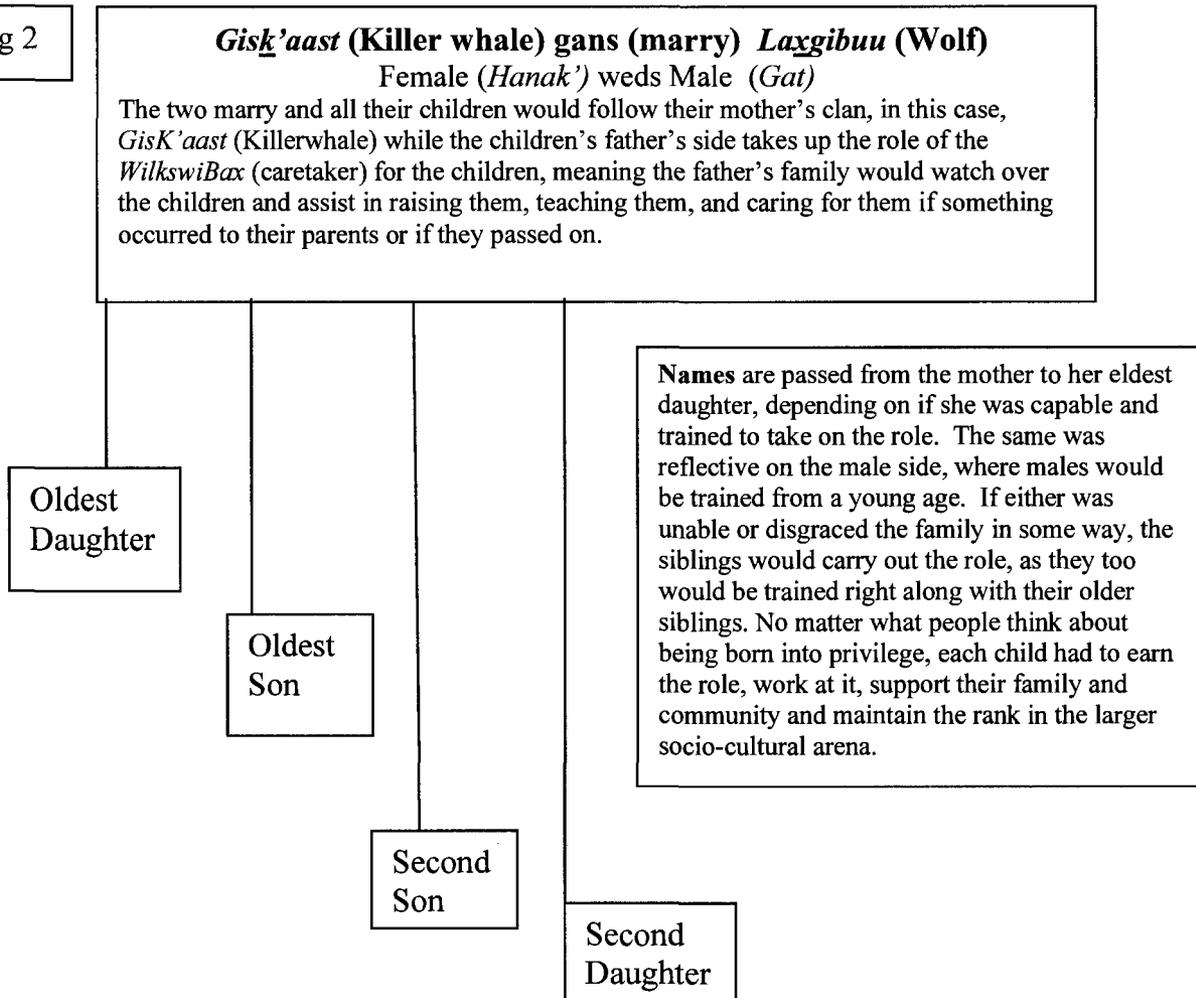
the bay, where our family used to have a traditional home. My name signifies my rank and my role as a protector and guide. The name refers to the tip of the killer whale's fin surfacing to see if it is safe for the rest of the pod between the two points inside of the bay. When my name was bestowed upon me, I stood firm in front of our Nation's membership, and knew that my journey was going to get real interesting. As I walked away from the microphone, I looked at my mother and aunts and saw them smile, as if they knew destiny was taking over.

The second point about this event in my life was the role that the social structure plays for Nisga'a citizens. From the time we are born, roles and responsibilities are laid out for you, no matter what you think at the beginning of life's journey. My role in surfacing and "looking out" provided me with an internal drive to break free of my home, in search of the many things that life held above the waters. The significance in this articulation for the contemporary society that I now live in is monumental. As children of two worlds, we are taught that we need to know the white man's ways, we need to learn his *Ayuukhl* (law), and fight for our Nation's land. After my naming ceremony, I began to participate more in a proactive and functional manner because I recognized my role within the bigger picture of Nisga'a social order and the importance of participation.

Nisga'a Social Organization

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Nisga'a Nation and all of its respective *HuWilps* (House groups) are all separated into their *Ango'oskw* (traditional territories). However, this is only a geographical separation, our Nation is united via the cultural activity that all of our membership participates in through the Nisga'a social structure. The structure is similar to an organizational system of municipalities where groups of people have a say in the larger group's affairs. I provide a chart showing the organization of my *Wilp*, and its connections to other respective *HuWilps* that are associated with us. This is not the way things really happen, since our social systems are not run by charts, however, this is a necessary and an important representation for this thesis (see Figure 2).

Fig 2



The Transmission Lines: A narrative of one's possible path

The two oldest siblings would be taught by their mother's side all the *Adawaak* (stories) and teachings handed down through the generations. This only applies if the mother of the children is the eldest and has been taught the skills and maintains these teachings in her daily practice. The eldest daughter is responsible for more of the stories and historical connections between the various house groups that associate her and her family. The eldest boy is normally taught first and foremost by his clan uncles who are the clan uncles (mother's brothers), and then by his father's side and their uncles, the *WilkswiBax*.

The only way names, stories, geographical names are passed down, is through proper internal communications, and community communications, all of which are carried out during the various *Yukw* (feasts), or, during specific ceremonies that our membership practiced to facilitate a time and or process along our journey. Transmission of oral knowledge through this method is the main reason the *Nisga'a* have maintained the cultural component of our Nation in this modern era.

The pride associated with holding a name and place within the larger social structure is of the utmost importance. If you were unable to handle or manage the teachings and duties that were bestowed upon you, members of the house can easily revoke them, until you're ready to stand in the feast and uphold the families name and conduct business properly. During the *Yukw*/feasts, all the communities *HuWilps* are present, and neighboring communities would also attend to support their tribal brothers and sisters.

As mentioned in my story, when you get a name, it is the start of your role in the social arena within the Nisga'a Nation. People recognize you more when entering the feast hall; they also recognize the social links that are attached to you via your name and how you act during the respective function. In our neighboring communities where there are other *Gisk'aast* (Killer whale) tribes, we are even asked to participate in their functions as their brothers and sisters. This is not just because you have a name; rather, it is so you can make your name heard, thus becoming more public for the larger social system to lay witness too, while providing support to the larger clan and making their function the most it can be with your contribution. It is also a reflection of the connections between clans from different villages along the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (Nass River). Many of the *Gisk'aast* (Killer whale clans) from the north and mid-*Lisims*, are all connected to us via age old supporting and advocating that historically occurred; we all show up and support each other during our respective *Yukw* (feasts) that we or they host.

A big part of the Nisga'a social system is the feasts that we all participate in. A Nisga'a person could have broken a law and is required by Nisga'a *Ayuukhl* to hold a *Ksiiskw* (retribution) feast for the shame/dishonor he/she committed. For example, during the testimony at the *Delgamuukw [Gisdaywa] v. the Queen* land claims court case, *Maxlalex* (the late Johnny David of the Wet'suwet'en Nation) recounted how peace had to be made between the Nisga'a and Wet'suwet'en people after a Wet'suwet'en man was killed by Nisga'a people for turning over a Nisga'a grave marker (Mills, Ed. 2005: 25). Antonia Mills describes, "this incident brought a Nisga'a feast name, *Samaxsam*, into the Witsuwit'en potlatch" (Mills, Ed. 2005: 25). *Maxlalex* (Johnny David) explains:

...the name Samaxsam... the name came from the Nass River... [i]t was during the time when Old Tiljoe was alive. Old Tiljoe and Jimmy Michel went to the

Kitsegukla... Old Tiljoe's brother was killed in the Nass and Old Tiljoe went to avenge the death of his brother. This is when he was given the name. Jimmy Michel ran through the village on a pair of snowshoes and Samaxsam was notified that Jimmy Michel was in town to avenge... Old Tiljoe's brother's death. When Samaxsam found out that Old Tiljoe and Jimmy Michel were in town [they] called a feast, and Old Tiljoe and Jimmy Michel were also invited, where a song and a head-dress were given to Old Tiljoe... The song he sung is Samaxsam and that was given to Old Tiljoe along with the name. (Mills, Ed. 2005: 95)

As such, this Nisga'a name has entered the feast system of the Wet'suwet'en and continues to be representative of this traditional system of social organization, all according to the *Ayuukhl* (Nisga'a laws). Although I am aware of the Nisga'a story related to the late *Maxlalex's* testimony, I do not have the rights to share that. It is not ours (*Wilp Niisyuus*) to use, because it belongs to Nisga'a *HuWilps* in the North.

We have many different *Yukw* (feasts) and ceremonies. The vast majority of the *Yukw* (feasts) are large ceremonies that deal with the passing of a clan member, the passing on of names, or a marriage. All of our social systems and activities are connected to the *Yukw* (feast) through the transmission of laws and oral history that each respective *Wilp* adheres to in the *Yukw*, and through our *Ayuukhl* (laws) that we transmit in the *Yukw*. The cultural practices of our membership in *Yukw* ceremonies are extravagant, and focused on insuring that respect is always paid to the people that participate to ensure that the larger social system is aware about the changes and adjustments that could have been made in the *Yukw* (feast). Jim McDonald writes about the importance of feasting in northern First Nations Communities and, the influences of the modern era on the systems and practice;

Their current revival matrix is discussed and structured in terms of many analogous areas, including art, ceremonialism, self-government, land claims, economic development, and education. The effect is that dispositions and competences generated by feasting also engender further feasting aspirations and practice. The practical logic of feasting is such that feasting practices tend both to

develop a compatibility with the social conditions that are appropriate for feasting and to respond to the stimulus of those social conditions. (McDonald, 2004, 137).

In a modern context during a *Yukw* major adjustments or shifts of chiefly titles of the respective *Wilp* must be presented to the larger social organization of the Nisga'a Nation through the *Yukw*, thus making all the *Wilps* aware of your adjustments internally. The adjustments could be brought forth by any form of public display or interaction that a *Wilp* member could bring forth. Acknowledgement of the adjustment needs to be heard and approved of through the *Yukw*, there is no other platform in the Nisga'a social system to make such adjustments, other than the *Yukw*.

In all of our public events, it was very important that names and the circumstances of the feast are recognized, and that the adjustments made within the *Wilp* (House) are recognized and communicated with the respective *Huwilps* (House groups) that make up the membership. Sometimes this was done solely in the *Yukw* (feast) hall, however, on numerous other occasions, more traditionally; it was carried out via our artistic practices of our people. In Raunet's text he discusses in detail the residence of *Wilps*, and their art displayed outside of their homes, where many of these historic *Yukw* took place:

Depending on the number of relatives, a *Wilp* could own one or several buildings in front of which the prominent families often raised totem poles. These poles, with their intricately carved figures or mythical men and animals, did not represent idols, as many missionaries assumed; they were simply the crest of the *Wilp*, not unlike the coat of arms of European aristocrat houses. The various *Wilps* were grouped into four distinct clans. (Raunet 1996: 29)

In the statement above, Raunet describes the *Wilp* system as one that was dependant on the number of members. This is a very true statement, because not all *Wilps* were able to facilitate the construction of such large articulations of crests and mythical connections that families should have present if they were a respective and traditional *Wilp* that is the

reason there were such strong bonds with trade and inter-marriage. From a Nisga'a perspective the idea that Raunet discusses here needs a great deal more detail, especially in regards to the poles he was describing. Poles were not just symbols of clans/crests; they are depictions of clan stories, associations with their respective crests, and associations with the mythical and non-mythical beings that make up parts of our family. *Pt'saan* (totem poles, as westerners call them) are not simple carvings that just depict crests. A *Pt'saan* to a Nisga'a is a reflection of a clan's *Adaawak* (oral history) and their *Ayuukhl* (laws), and symbolizes the connections between the *Huwilp* (House groups) and the groups showcasing their works in front of their home at a specific moment in time; it was up to the *Wilp* to maintain the symbols. Marius Barbeau (1988) collected numerous Nisga'a *Pt'saan* (totem poles) along the Nass River in the early 1900's. A couple of these poles are poles that belong to my family, and speak about one of the *Sim'oogit* (Chiefs) in our *Wilp* (House), and a social battle that took place in the old village site of *Gitiks/Ankida* (our old village sites). Both sites are located within walking distance of my community of *Laxgalts'ap* (Greenville).

One such story from the old village sites is the story of *Siisbaguut*, and the battle to build the tallest *Pt'saan* (totem pole) that the Nisga'a Nation had ever seen. The story was about our *Sim'oogit* (Chief) and another *Laxsgiik Sim'oogit, Sagawen* (Eagle Chief, *Sagawen*). The present day holder of the name *Siisbaguut* is my grandfather Harold Watts, from the community of *Gingolx* (Kincolith). In the past, our *Wilp* has had the name *Siisbaguut* as the head name, and *Niisyuus* as a secondary chief. Nisga'a names are ranked according to the stature of the person holding the names; in a more functional

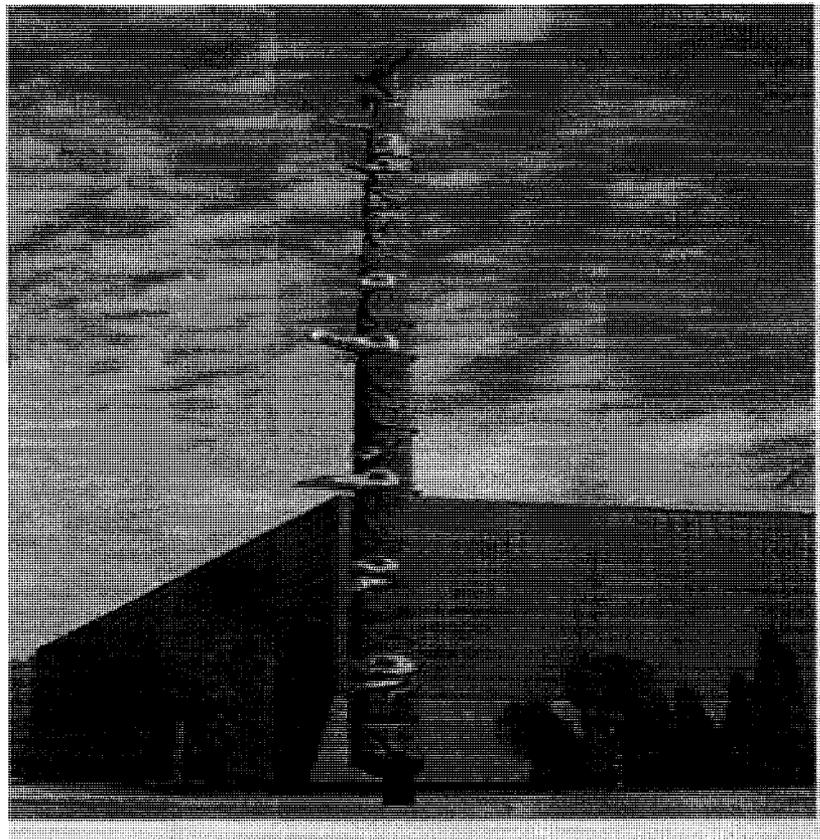
populated *Wilp* (House), the highest name is always given preferential treatment and support in the *Yukw* (feast) by all other *Wilp* members to boost their family in the *Yukw*.

Currently, along the *Lisims* we have a pole erected in each community that focuses on the intentions of “crest” presentation as mentioned by Raunet. However, there is a pole outside of Nisga’a Elementary Secondary School that signifies unity amongst the Nisga’a Nation. A picture of the *Pt’saan* (totem pole) is provided in Figure 2 (next page). It shows the *Pt’saan* that is located in front of Nisga’a Elementary Secondary School, located in New Aiyansh, British Columbia and was carved by the late *Sim’oogit Hle’ek* (Eli Gosnell).

Stephen McNeary (1976), writes an elaborate rendition of the Nisga’a social and economic way of life entitled “Where Fire Came Down.” In this dissertation, McNeary immerses himself within the Nisga’a social organization by living with the Nisga’a people in the upper Nass Valley for almost one full year. In his stay, he established friendly relationships with many significant Nisga’a *Simgigat* (Chiefs) to learn about what it means to be Nisga’a. Initially, McNeary entered the Nass Valley with much to learn about the magnitude and depth of Nisga’a people. In the beginning, he wanted to have his research in the Nass Valley be focused on music. He thought that studying music with Nisga’a people from the “Aiyansh Silver Harmonic Band” would be appealing to a wide audience because they were playing tunes from the Benny Goodman era and that, “should bring back memories to some of our folks” (McNeary 1976: 1). For me, this statement is something that resembles the imaginary Indian contextualized and cinematized on the silver screen, and only demonstrated a lack of knowledge and understanding of my culture. I now know that McNeary became a dedicated and curious

person to enter the lives of the Nisga'a people. Undoubtedly, his preconceptions prior to his arrival were changed through experiencing and accepting Nisga'a ways of being.

Figure 3



The pole represented in the picture is in front of *Nisga'a* Elementary Secondary School in New Aiyansh, B.C. The pole has all of the four crests and four sub crests of the *Nisga'a* Nation, and has a figure of *Txeemsim*, holding the rainbow, which signifies unity between all below. It is a powerful pole that came out of the late 1970's, when the *Nisga'a* people got a high school; the Calder Case was changing attitudes across Canada.

One of the most profound statements in McNeary's work is the acknowledgements section where McNeary recalls a conversation with one of my community members, the late *Axdii Wil Luu Godaa* (Bertram McKay). McNeary says, "Bert McKay often reminded me, a stranger can never completely know the Nisga'a way of living and thinking, and can only learn a little in a year, so this book can not be considered final and complete" (McNeary 1976: Acknowledgements). Bert McKay and his brother Alvin McKay both participated in this study with McNeary, on behalf of the Nisga'a School District #92. Alvin McKay actually provides a "comment" section that was added to the dissertation upon its completion and details the perspective of a Nisga'a Tribal Council representative during the post-Calder era when this work was completed. Alvin's comments are interesting and focus on the land associations with the Nisga'a people, and McNeary's obvious lack of understanding about this.

Chapters one and two of McNeary's work focuses on the Nisga'a traditional life and post contact history, focusing on the Church Missionary papers. McNeary has some interesting points about social organization throughout his work, and details the living conditions, Nisga'a material culture, subsistence, and most prominently, social organization. The focus of McNeary's work is on the *Wilp* (House) which McNeary describes as, "an exogamous corporate group whose membership is determined by matrilineal descent" (McNeary 1976: 14). This is very true of the Nisga'a people and our lineage. However, the expression of ownership and status needs more clarification within the context of McNeary's words.

Alvin McKay states that McNeary in "contrasting to other Indian Bands leads reader's interpretation astray" (McKay *in* McNeary 1976: Comments) in his comments

on the work completed by McNeary. From my perspective, Alvin is commenting on a habit of categorizing all Indians together and creating an imaginary perspective on the reality of life that we lead. Throughout the sections on Nisga'a people McNeary states the obvious to the Nisga'a reader, nonetheless, the materials are reminiscent of the talks I participated in within a smokehouse, and beside the hot stoves with my grandparents where I learned of the stories and laws of our Nation.

Our Roles Within our Nation, Our Families and to Ourselves

In order to function within the larger social unit from a Nation and *Wilp* (House) perspective, each Nisga'a person is required to know their individual place in the larger social picture. In discussing *Pt'saan* (totem poles), it is important to recognize that these were symbols of a *Wilps* power and understanding of their respective *Adaawak* and the Nation's *Ayuukhl*. If a *Wilp* was too poor and could not host a strong *Yukw* (feast), they would communicate this with another one of their family groups (another tribal affiliate) in the region to request support for the *Yukw*. In a more modern context, clan members participate more in their fellow clan's feasts than in outside clan feasts. This is so people understand their support network, and who they need to support because one day they may require the same assistance. The idea here is that communications are very direct and focused on internal support through the *Wilp* first, second the clan, third the community, and fourth the Nation. All of these steps are a part of Nisga'a society which work together to facilitate the support that *Wilps* require. Through the support of each other within this framework of communication, our membership traditionally and currently is able to ensure that our structures, laws, and processes were/are not ignored in the midst of the land claims resolution and understanding.

In 1982 there was an excavation that took place in the community of *Laxgalts'ap*, which I recall as a young man. I remember my grandmother telling us to stay away from the men digging up bones because *Luulak* (ghosts) would give us bad dreams, or make us succumb to an early death. I remember the excavation well, because gossip and small reserves are one and the same. The reason I bring up the excavation of a Nisga'a burial site is due to the fact that our people knew the village where Alfred Green began his tenure as a missionary had always been a burial site. Many of our ancient homes were across the river from present day *Laxgalts'ap*, which is located on the west side of the *Lisims*. When they built new houses under Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, my grandfather was one of the men operating a machine, and recalls seeing an arm bone, and numerous other burial features during the developmental phase of the construction.²⁰

When discussing social organization and communications, it is clear to me that through this exercise of excavating our ancestor's remains that the province did not listen to, nor did they note our ancestor's concerns when establishing the community for us to live in. There are many narratives of *Laxgalts'ap* being a ghost town, because our ancestors have never got to rest properly, because we are always building on top of them. *Laxgalts'ap* (Greenville) was a burial site. The work carried out and documented by Cybulski is interesting because it dates the oldest remains in the area to be over five thousand years old, and another level at the same site to be over one thousand years in

²⁰ My Grandfather, *Gwiix Maaw* (John Robinson) worked for the *Laxgalts'ap* Band Council (Treaty name: *Laxgalts'ap* Village Government) as back hoe operator during the early 1980's. On another occasion they found more remains at another site located near our community hall. These were the remains of a young woman, and they were buried about seven feet down. That is the extent of the recollection from my grandfather, who mentioned white men came and took the remains with the permission of the Village Administration or band office.

age.²¹ I remember people telling us that they were all women, and that was the way our people did things in the past and the same evidence is reflected in Cybulski's work.

When discussing communications through an example like the one mentioned above, our social structure facilitates quick and transparent communications between peoples and their respective position in the social order. All of our community members knew we lived on a burial ground; they also made other people aware of this factor when we moved there. It is imperative that there is an understanding that Nisga'a people are focused on cycles, or better yet, have a cyclical structure. George Sioui discusses the powers of secular social groups in detail, which in turn, from a Nisga'a perspective, facilitates the understanding of the power of the plural and singular:

I have based this book both on an extended study of the principle Euroamerican documentary sources and on personal and family experience of an uninterrupted Amerindian tradition. It rejects the Euroamerican idea that the linear concept of rigid and exclusive nationalism is applicable to Amerindians. Circle societies instinctively recognize the fundamental and sacred unity of all things created, and they cannot logically conceive of a human society as divisible or subject to segregation (Sioui 1999: 113).

Sioui makes a very important social point here about worldview of the Wendat/Huron people, in stating that their social systems and structures were based on a completely different approach than the westerners. The approach is circular rather than linear, thus focusing on learning about events and sharing them so the circle becomes stronger, not writing them down as historical fact and recalling them whenever it seems justifiable to do so. Sioui describes:

²¹ Jerome S. Cybulski wrote a detailed text entitled "A Greenville Burial Ground: Human Remains and Mortuary Elements in British Columbia Coast Prehistory," Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, 1992. The text is very technical and focused on the exhuming of the remains in the site behind Earl Stephen's home in our community. I recall this man being in our community and having people work with him from our village. I was only five/six years of age when this began. My great grandmother and other elders in our community were consulted when the process began, and the "Band Office" handled the affairs of the activity on behalf of our community, and the Nisga'a Nation, represented at the time, by the Nisga'a Tribal Council.

The Amerindian world vision is circular, as opposed to European-based, linear world vision; Circle peoples see the phenomenon of life as the work of many creators, in contrast to the Christian religious and monotheistic conception. (Sioui 1999: 44)

Sioui also mentions the nature of his study as “documentary, personal, and family” based, thus providing a conceptual idea that is similar to the individual, family and Nationhood obligations we have as Indigenous people: this is also true for Nisga’a.

Atleo also discusses the concepts of individual and group rights within his text Tsawalk (2004), where he focuses on an expression of modern Canadian ideas of individual rights, and the context of Nuu-chan-nulth traditional perspective and practices on marriage:

In contradistinction, when two extended families form a union, there is greater latitude for individual uniqueness since the make-up of an extended family is more diverse than that of a nuclear family. When problems of marriage arise, in the context of an extended family, the experience of older members can offer solutions that have proven practical. Support is built into extended family groupings. (Atleo 2004: 58)

Atleo provides the core of what Sioui writes about in regards to singular and plural discussion. If I was to reference these same concepts in Nisga’a society, it could be described as this: there is the singular *person*, and the singular acts in a manner that facilitates the plural *Wilp* members. It is the responsibility of the singular *Wilp* member to recognize that the obligations within the context of the plural social constitution are far more important for the survival and development of the singular members of the *Wilp* that make up the larger social group. The western world confuses the concepts within the context of the individual good over the greater social intentions that many First Nations peoples focus on. While we are growing, our families take care of us and provide for us in whatever capacity they are able. When those family members have aged, it is our turn as young people to now take care of them.

After contact with missionaries, Nisga'a social "re-organization" and concentration focused on the singular (a person) rather than the plural (the Nation), for two distinct reasons. First, the land that we had control over was now slipping into the hands of the newcomers. Second, the concepts and social systems that we knew were also being snubbed and disregarded as heathenness. Patterson discusses this situation best:

The generation born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the western provinces, including British Columbia, produced many of the earliest leaders of organized movements of protest and for change among Indians. Out of the reserve and Indian Administration environment Indian communities organized themselves into larger cultural units of tribe, region, province, and inter-provincial. Most of these people were mission-educated, insofar as they were formally educated in the European sense. (Patterson 1982: 133)

What Patterson is bringing forth is not so much a complete cultural re-organization; rather it is a shift in attention of the social organization to address a new situation. Once our ancestors recognized the circumstances, it was only practical to make subtle adjustments to the social connections/systems in order to achieve the goals set out by the new relationship. As young boys in our community we were told through stories that the westerners ways and education was the only way to free ourselves. Through the connections with the church/organized religion, Nisga'a people were able to recognize and adapt to the social changes that were happening all around them. Through the missionaries and their sense of understanding, Nisga'a people were able to articulate our customs, practices, and social structures into the church.

When you listen to *Simgigat* (Chiefs) today within the Nisga'a lands, many, if not all, refer to "Jesus" or, "the heavenly father" when speaking Nisga'a during a ceremony. To me this is not so much assimilation; it is incorporation into the context of Nisga'a

being. The focus of the church and organized religion was to replace the Nisga'a heathen ways with "Christian practices."²² From a Nisga'a perspective this is an extension of the plural during the banning of the potlatch by the Canadian Government from 1884 to 1951, where the dominate "western government" banned something that they deemed as different and supportive of a group's identity. Our ancestors understood the complexities of the relationship they were now in, and decided that working with an organization like the Church could promote their aspirations for recognition of our rights as Nisga'a people. In discussing the singular and plural in this context, the singular is the membership of the Nisga'a Nation that adapted to organized Christian religion. The plural is represented by the utilization of plural religious structures, the Church and the Nisga'a *Wilp* structure, to facilitate a means to address the objectives of the Nation within the context of colonialism. The entire time this was taking place, our Nation was still communicating in the Nisga'a language, *Sim'algaḡ*, and changing the church through our language. Our system of *Simgigat* (chiefs), or the *Wilp* (House) of different clans still provides the structure of our plural life.

Communication: An Expression of Language and Knowledge

Sim'algaḡ is the Nisga'a word for talking and our language, since there is no term within our language for writing. When you hear Nisga'a being spoken, it is a beautiful and meaningful language that I still strive to speak and completely understand. My

²² There are many authors that discuss Missionary work in the Northwest coast. The best titles for our region are, Mary Ellen Kelm's *Colonizing Bodies* (1998), Murray's *The Devil and Mr. Duncan* (1985); Patterson's *Mission of the Nass*(1982); Tomlinson and Young's *Challenge the Wilderness* (1983); *Contact and Conflict* (Fisher 1992); *Without Surrender Without Consent* (Raunet 1996). Each of the texts listed provide excellent resources from the Church Missionary Society papers and the Federal and Provincial archives.

grandparents spoke more Nisga'a than English around me when I was a young boy and I believe it is for that reason that I have the retention of *Sim'algaḡ* (Nisga'a language) that I have. Ironically, due to my detachment from my family and home after the age of seventeen, I have not been able to learn my language after grade twelve; nor have I been able to work with my mother and aunts who teach immersion within Nisga'a schools.²³

Tom Molloy, in "*The World Is Our Witness*," describes the language in conjunction with the societal basis of sharing noting this is also comparable to other First Nations people.

Sharing is an essential principle of Nisga'a society, a principle reflected not only in *Ayuukhl* Nisga'a and in the manner in which they have represented themselves to the courts and governments over the years, but in the very structure of their language. Like the Inuit to the north who have elevated the descriptions of weather and hunting conditions to a fine art, and the Navajo to the south who have evolved an elaborate vocabulary to describe the intricate interconnections and relationships among clans, the Nisga'a have developed words and phrases to describe sharing in ways that would likely never occur to a speaker of English or French (Molloy 2000, 142).

What Molloy is talking about here is how the Nisga'a words expressed in the *Sim'algaḡ* language reflect our culture and our ability to facilitate our respective connections with the environment. In Nisga'a culture our environment was tough at times, and required a close relationship to other *Wilps* that fostered survival-based trading and sharing. Our people focused on the conceptual framework within our language of *Sayt K'ilim Goot* (one heart), and practiced everything based on those ideologies. Thus, it is not overwhelming to comprehend the diversity in *Sim'algaḡ*, nor is it unyielding in its ability to flex in the midst of controversy and colonialism as exhibited in its adaptation to the English language utilized by the majority of Nisga'a people today.

²³ My mother, Noreen Cross, and my aunt, Dianna Ria, both teach in the *Laxgalts'ap* Elementary School in the primary divisions. Both also teach immersion within their classrooms. For more information on the Nisga'a primary immersion program, contact the Nisga'a School District #92 in New Aiyansh, British Columbia. There are also post-secondary language courses offered at WWNI, the Nisga'a House of Wisdom. UNBC's satellite campus, *Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a* (WWNI) is located in New Aiyansh.

At *Wilp Wilxo 'oskwhl Nisga'a* Institute (WWNI), the Nisga'a House of Wisdom, there are entire courses at the University level dedicated to the transmission and protection of the Nisga'a language in modern times. However, in a modern context, *Sim'algaḡ* (Nisga'a language) is succumbing to the dominance of English in our society, as are many other Native languages in Canada. One of the most fundamental parts of being Nisga'a is our ability to communicate ideas through the terminology that our ancestors utilized to communicate their actions and reactions to the world around them. Currently, many Nisga'a people in my generation can speak and use our language on an "as needed" basis (like during a *Yukw*, or when speaking with Elders). Nonetheless, our governing structures and systems do not facilitate a complete incorporation of Nisga'a language into their day-to-day activities. Within the *Wilp Siayuukhl Nisga'a* (Nisga'a House of Representatives), *Sim'algaḡ* is only utilized to open discussions, or to address *Simgigat* (chiefs) when they are speaking during a session of the governing body.

From my perspective language and communication are one and the same. However, from a modern Nisga'a person living within two worlds, our communication is something that we require through our governing systems and structures, which does not facilitate the total incorporation of the language into the day-to-day activities. On a more positive note, all the primary parts of Nisga'a *Yukw* (feasts) are carried out in our language, and translated into English for the younger generation to understand. As one of the younger generation of Nisga'a people, it is imperative that our Nation's membership become aware that the only way our language survives is through our utilization of it for our day-to-day activities at all levels of Nisga'a social, economic, and political actions within our modern and traditional realms.

Chapter Five: Nisga'a Governance

Ayuukhl Nisga'a

Governance, better yet, *Ayuukhl*, is part of being Nisga'a in an historical and contemporary context. As a product of a generation brought up in the post-Calder era, I was a child of land claims negotiations, a product of generations of Nisga'a ancestry that fought to have our rights recognized as the rightful owners of the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (Nass River), as the people of *K'amligii hahl ha* (Creator). In providing this next narrative, I am laying a foundation for the battle that I was about to prepare for, as a soldier in the intellectual war to get our land back via the Nisga'a Treaty Negotiations.

The University of Victoria and the Nisga'a Treaty: The Meeting of Two Worlds

While attending Malaspina University College in Nanaimo, I took spring and summer classes at the University of Victoria in 1998 to complete my Bachelors of Arts Degree in First Nations Studies. During my journey to complete two upper level history classes at UVIC, I had the opportunity to participate in the joyous occasion of hearing that the Nisga'a Treaty was about to be Initialed in New Aiyansh between the Governments of Canada, British Columbia, and the Nisga'a Tribal Council.

My mother called me in the morning on my cell phone to tell me the great news, and to watch on TV because they were going to wave at me. I was shocked and proud that the day had finally come where we got what was rightfully ours. In my happiness, I had a brief shower, talked to my friends from Quebec who enjoyed learning about "Indians," and my favorite Iranian neighbor, who asked me why I was so happy. I told her that we were getting our land back from the government, and that justice was finally here. She smiled and commented that she was happy to be a part of something that was long overdue.

On my journey to my first class with another friend from Victoria, we saw a medium size group of people with large signs near the library building at UVIC.

Since my class in Canadian History was along the way, I had the opportunity to walk closer and closer to the display. Once I arrived and saw the signage, I glanced at my friend, and saw her eyes open up as if she knew a battle was about to be waged.

The protestors were all middle aged non-native people, gathered in a group of ten to fifteen, holding signs like “The Nisga’a Treaty is Wrong for Canadians,” “Third Order Of Government,” “Our Tax \$\$\$ at work,” and a couple others that I cannot recall. I walked up to them and said “It is great to live in a democracy, isn’t it?” One of the men looked at me and smiled, and commented, “It’s Canada.”

At this point in time, I took off my gloves and asked them what democracy meant to them...I then went into examples of the Nisga’a Nation under the colonial government of British Columbia and Canada, and informed them all that they were lucky our people even sat at the same table with the thieves. I asked them if democracy was only for the privileged that clouded justice for other Canadians. One lady commented that “It was not their doing, and they just knew the treaty was not good for Canada.” I retaliated with, “Are reserves good for Canada? Is living a lie good for Canada?”

At this point in time one of the protesters told me that they had every right to express themselves. I informed him that I had every right to make sure all of them were aware that they were living and making a living off of stolen lands and resources. I asked him what was free about that...he said nothing and continued on his march. At this point in time I knew that I could not get across to people whose minds were so engrained with historical bias, racially prejudiced information perpetuated by their ancestors and government. My friend looked at me and said, “You win some you loose some...you won!”

The reason I provided the narrative for the context of the governance chapter is because as a Nisga’a I cannot walk idly by as guests on our lands inform me that we did not deserve self-government, the right to make decisions for ourselves, and rights to establish something that was reflective of our ways of doing business. In my battle to make the protestors aware of Nisga’a rights, and that we have been recognized as Nisga’a Canadians, included in this country, and not as Indians, they did not pause in their artificial march. Nor did I back down from protesting their inability to understand that a minimal form of justice was served by Canada and British Columbia to the Nisga’a

Nation. The Nisga'a Treaty offered a compromise between the rightful land owners, the Nisga'a people, and the foreign bodies that failed to address the situation of land theft that occurred even when western law stated in the *Delgamuukw* decision of 1997 that Indians had rights to the Land.

In many of my discussions within the “Ivory Towers” at the University of Victoria and Malaspina University-College I fought the intellectual battle on many fronts with westerners stating that our Nation did not deserve the rights to self-government through the Nisga'a Treaty. On another front, our brothers and sisters (other First Nations) and some Nisga'a hesitated at the door step, wondering if it was safe to support such a sacrifice of the Nisga'a land represented in Figure 1. As a Nisga'a, I was so angry that my family's lands, my *Wilp* lands, were not in Category “A” lands, and the remainder of the territory outside was no longer a part of recognized Nisga'a lands.²⁴ Many western academics understand, better yet, write about the colonial situation and the evident complacency of the oppressed. However, if you have not lived it, it is very hard to remove oneself from the western worldview and understand our Nisga'a vantage point. In understanding the situations that the oppressed are a part of, it becomes clear that it is the oppressed's obligation to resolve the situations as best we can to open up the minds and institutional frameworks that shaped the understandings of us, which were developed and redefined by the dominant culture.

The Journey and the Goal

When I talk about Governance with the terms “journey and goal,” I am referring directly to the land claims negotiations that went on between British Columbia, Canada,

²⁴ Category “A” lands are Nisga'a Lands as decided by the Nisga'a Treaty. www.nisgaalisms.ca is an excellent resource for reviewing the maps and categories of Nisga'a Lands within the Nisga'a Final Agreement.

and the Nisga'a Nation. Our journey as a Nation began in 1887 when our ancestors took paddles and canoed to Victoria, to demand that British Columbia address our rights on our lands, and negotiate a treaty with us. However, this was only the start of this journey.

Alex Rose notes:

Nisga'a leaders traveled in 1906 and 1909 to London to present their demands to King Edward VII, but he refused to meet with them. In 1910 and again in 1911 they traveled to Ottawa to meet with Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier, who considered federal action to bring BC's provincial government to court for its failure to acknowledge Aboriginal land claims. (Rose 2000: 76)

Little did our ancestors know that the journeys they took would end one day over one-hundred years later. The goal I speak about is the recognition of Nisga'a rights to Nisga'a lands. Our ancestors wanted the land to be Nisga'a lands, and Nisga'a lands alone.

The journey is one that I grew up learning about, and praying that I could be one of the Nisga'a negotiators working towards our goal. However, I would never sit in the canoe, I now travel in front as a watchman, breaking the surface to make sure our canoe is safe as it carries our people forward in the Nisga'a Lisims Government. As a product of a land claims society, I recall all of the events told to us about the Nisga'a Land Committee, established in 1890, where many of the participants on the committee were from the community of *Laxgalts'ap*, birth place of the land question, and products of Alfred Green's tenacity to have our people recognized as humans.

One of the most devastating events that hindered Nisga'a people were the epidemics that swept through our Nation and decimated our population. Alex Rose explains, "[w]hile exact figures are impossible to prove, the Nisga'a estimate that between 1835 and 1906 diseases reduced their population by 50 percent" (Rose 2000:

56). I have been made aware that a large number of our population succumbed to small pox within the southern and northern reaches of the *Lisims* during this time frame. In my home community there is a creek named Boney Creek. It is in this location that the survivors of the epidemic in the villages of *Laxgalts'ap*, *Gitiks*, and *Ankidaa* probably buried their family members. During my research I realized that there is scant material available on the actual number of people that passed away from small pox in the Nass Valley, but even though there is little documented evidence available this does not reduce the devastation the disease has had on Nisga'a people and our respective systems.

The inclusion of small pox to the governance portion is based on three reasons. First, the population was decimated by the disease and could not focus on the traditional practices of the medicine men. Second, the impact of the massive population loss would facilitate the breach that westerners were looking for. Third, it disrupted the Hereditary names and compromised the leadership and *HuWilp* (House groups). These three points are influential in understanding about governance, since the impact was demoralizing to the culture and social configuration of the Nisga'a Nation. Therefore, the impact of small pox depreciated the strength that our Nation could have put forth in the battle for recognition of Nisga'a title. Missionaries claimed that the small pox decimation was the wrath of God, at the practice of Nisga'a medicine men and women. Many of the medicine people were accused of witchcraft under the ever watchful eye of the colonizer (Mills, 1994).

Nonetheless, the Nisga'a survivors pressed on, and practiced our traditional ceremonies to facilitate the discussion about Nisga'a rights in the wake of the diseases, the traders, westerners and missionaries' ways. In 1884, the Indian Act banned the

gathering of Indians, and potlatching (*Yukw* in Nisga'a), thereby banning the fundamental system in place for Indians to gather and discuss governance in their traditional arena. By the 1880's, the Chief Commissioner of Land and Works for the Colony of British Columbia disregarded the Federal government's Royal Proclamation of 1763, and began dividing the province up for western settlers. Alex Rose explains that in the "Royal Proclamation of 1763 the British Crown explicitly recognized the existence and continuation of Aboriginal title in British North America and, implicitly acknowledged the existence and continuity of Aboriginal self-government" (Rose 2000: 69). So when the Chief Commissioner ignored this, the Nisga'a Nation got very angry and we have many oral stories of Israel *Sgatin* (Chief Mountain) telling the British Columbia surveyors that the land was not theirs to show Nisga'a where to live. By 1905 the first Nisga'a Land Committee was established to address the situation of our land being stolen by the newly established province.

Then the famous Nisga'a 1913 Petition was sent to the British Privy Council, requesting that the Crown in London address the land claims situation of the Indians who wanted to negotiate. The 1913 Petition received little action, but it did spur on the 1913-1915 McKenna-McBride Commission which allotted larger reserves to the Nisga'a people after consulting with them. Still the situation was grim and did not facilitate the negotiations that the Nisga'a people wanted to take place: our membership was seeking recognition of our rights to the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (Nass River).

In the 1960's, the Nisga'a Nation was mounting a front to fight the Canadian Government and Province of British Columbia in their courts. In 1969, Frank Calder launched his first case expressing that the "Nisga'a never lost title" with the legal

expertise of Thomas Berger. Our Nation lost this round on the provincial level, but four years later, in 1973, the famous and important split decision came down in the federal court of appeal, which is now celebrated as the Calder Case between Canada and the Nisga'a Nation. After this process the real negotiations began between the government of Canada and the Nisga'a Nation, being initiated on January 12, 1976.²⁵

On March 20, 1991, in my home community of *Laxgalts'ap*, the Province of British Columbia and Canada signed a Framework Agreement with the Nisga'a Nation, to begin formal negotiations. I recall this day very well, seeing all of these well dressed government men get off of helicopters, to sign a paper in our community hall, and then they were whisked away without hesitation. I remember a great deal of discussion between my generation and the leaders at the time like the late *Sim'oogit Daxhaan* (Alvin McKay), and their focus on our education for our nation when the treaty came into being. I was very proud on this day, because it was about time that the government of British Columbia recognized that they needed to negotiate with the Nisga'a people.

However, in 1997 the British Columbia government imposed difficult requirements that only designated eight percent of the territory to the Nisga'a Nation, thus redirecting our attentions to the "common bowl" directive, rather than focusing on our traditional systems of representation through *Wilp* organization. Mills (2005) discusses the pressure the Nisga'a received to accept the eight percent allotment, but ultimately the choice to do so became ours in the end.

The Agreement in Principle, and the Nisga'a Treaty all happened after ten years of intense negotiations between all three parties, the Nisga'a Nation, the Government of

²⁵ Information on this date is available in Daniel Raunet (1984/1996) "Without Surrender Without Consent," Tom Molloy's "The World Is Our Witness" (2000) and on two web sites, www.nisgaalisims.ca and www.schoolnet.ca/nisgaa.

Canada, and the Province of British Columbia. The Agreement in Principle was a result of the Federal Government, the Province of British Columbia and the Nisga'a Nation tripartite negotiations for the settlement of the Nisga'a land claims question, noting that all parties must sit down and negotiate in good faith. The Nisga'a Treaty enacted the negotiations that stemmed from the negotiations after signing the Agreement in Principle. In stating these two events in this manner I am addressing the fact that this work is not a discussion about the contents of the Nisga'a Treaty and all of its components. Rather, the discussion here is based on the experiences of *GalksiGabin* in the context of the Nisga'a Treaty.

Treaty Realities

This Nisga'a Treaty is the first Treaty or land claims agreement to provide certainty in respect of a First Nation's section 35 right to self-government and to include all self-government provisions. (Nisga'a Annual Report, 2001, Gingolx, B.C. Nisga'a Lisims Government: 15).

From this statement, the Nisga'a Nation barreled forward in their quest to enact a self-governing model "that was similar to Western European/North America government, with a component that facilitated Nisga'a language and culture enrichment (Nisga'a Annual Report 2001: 13). From this perspective our membership granted the Nisga'a Tribal Council the authority to develop a plan for the day when the treaty came to fruition. On May 11, 2001, the effective date, the Nisga'a Treaty became the most influential document that exists within our Nation. To me as a Nisga'a person, it was hard to grasp the fact that our self-government meant adapting to western systems and structures that would facilitate "self-government."

As a Nisga'a person first, and second as a member of a Nisga'a *Wilp*, it removed the authority from our respective house groups to facilitate our traditional knowledge in

the pursuit of self-governance. As a product of the Calder era, I thought that self-government was going to mean our *Simgigat* and *Sigidimhanak* (Chiefs and Matriarchs) would be establishing forms of governance that reflected our traditional authority on the lands that made up the Nisga'a Treaty lands. Little did I know that our authority would be eroded for a more modern take on delegated communal and national responsibilities. As a newly western educated Nisga'a in a post-secondary institution, I found this approach to be offensive to our ancestors and not reflective of the language and culture the Nisga'a Treaty was supposed to uphold. In my discussions with my family and community members, I found through the first Nisga'a election held on November 8, 2001, that our systems of representation (e.g. *Wilp Siayuukhl Nisga'a*) would place their foot in the door of the self-governing model known as Nisga'a *Lisims* Government.

The Nisga'a communities were the first to see election results come from the November race. In all four of our homeland communities, *Gingolx*, *Laxgalts'ap*, *Gitwin ksilkw*, and *Aiyansh*, there were representatives elected that all held prestigious names as *Simgigat* (Chiefs) within the Nisga'a Nation. On the outskirts of Nisga'a land, in our three urban locals in Terrace, Prince Rupert/Port Edward, and Vancouver, the same results were reflected in the election. On a personal note, my mother, Noreen Cross, along with a couple other Nisga'a *Sigidimhanak* (matriarchs) were elected into Village Government roles. The point here is that no matter what our Nation thought in the early 1970's and 1990's about the adoption of western forms as mentioned above, our families and communities provided for the setting of a very unique delegation of Nisga'a *Simgigat* and *Sigidimhanak*, for the first sitting of the *Wilp Siayuukhl Nisga'a* (Nisga'a House of

Representatives). Approximately fifty members of the Nisga'a Nation sit on *Wilp Siayuukhl Nisga'a*, from the four villages and the three urban locals.

As a student still pursuing my education I thought that this was a very positive step for our self-governing Nation to take. The traditional systems of Governance have always been a part of, and is an essential component of our *Yukw* (feast) process and structure. When you address Nisga'a people and ask us about what is important, the *Yukw* is the primary focus of all our intentions. As a Nisga'a, it is not surprising at all that the first election results were reflective of our traditional forms of representation of our *Simigiat* and *Sigidimhanak* of our *Wilp* and *HuWilp*.

As a Nisga'a person who is attuned to Nisga'a culture, when you are in a Nisga'a community it is very simple to see that the most powerful *Wilp* runs the community, based on pure numbers or on affiliation with other *Wilp* through marriage and our ancient ties. For an untrained eye, the recognition would be hard to make due to the fact that people just seemed to be voted into positions in a western democratic process. This is far from the reality, because many privileged Nisga'a who have a rank within the social system also have the opportunities to facilitate the broadening of their horizons through western education and traditional Nisga'a knowledge. As a product of an ancient chiefly system, the incorporation of a western democratic form of representation is accommodating our cultural prerequisite in the political realm.

In terms of communications through the above-mentioned representation system, people in the communities always had connections to the larger Nisga'a *Lisims* Government. Personal and communal objectives always make their way to the table of *Wilp Siayuukhl Nisga'a*, and facilitate the questions and concerns brought forth by the

membership within the four Nisga'a communities and the three urban locals. Being Nisga'a and practicing our respective *Yukw* has smoothed the progression and melding of Nisga'a traditional forms of representation along side a western structure and process as outlined in Chapter Eleven of the Nisga'a Treaty. The following description is provided on the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government web site:

Chapter 11 sec 9 part (I and K). Section I refers to the roles and responsibilities of the Nisga'a *Simgigat* and *Sigidimhanak* in their role to uphold Nisga'a culture and language, along with the primary, the *Ayuukhl* (Nisga'a Laws). Section K, deals with the implementation of a democratic election process where every Nisga'a person over a set age gets a vote. This process is laid out as a Nisga'a Act, referred to as the Nisga'a Elections Act, 2001. (Available: www.nisgaalisims.ca, under the tab "Treaty and Legislation")

This unique adaptation was manifested in the first Nisga'a election, and facilitated my personal desire to see our traditional forms of representation persist in the modern government, known as Nisga'a *Lisims* Government.

Working for our Nation: A Journey

In 2004, I was hired by Nisga'a *Lisims* Government as the interim-manager for the *Ayuukhl* Nisga'a Department. I worked on many projects for our Nation, and had the opportunity to work with the Council of Elders under the Chairman of the Council of Elders, *Sim'oogit Hlyim Wil* (Chester Moore). I also got to learn from the first Nisga'a President, (Hon.) *Sim'oogit Hle'ek* (Dr. Joseph Gosnell), and his leadership had a profound effect on my perspective of the treaty and the Nation.

As a Nisga'a I was proud to be within the walls of Nisga'a *Lisims* Government; I felt that my journey was being fulfilled in some peculiar manner. I had the opportunity to begin the process with the Council of Elders of beautifying the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government Building with Nisga'a art, and Nisga'a history. In my role in the department

I was guided by a phenomenal staff member, Nita Morvan, who provided a living history to me, all of which is accessible to our Nations membership via the *Ayuukhl Nisga'a* Archives. When I first entered this fire proof room, I was awestruck by the history that laid within its walls. Our elders' work and the projects done under the Direction of the Nisga'a Land Committees and Nisga'a Tribal Council are all accessible there. Due to the sensitive nature of the materials, I will not discuss the contents further, since the material does not belong to me, as it is entrusted to the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government as caretakers for the Nisga'a people.

One of the most important points of including this information in this thesis is to inform people that in my role at Nisga'a *Lisims* Government I recognized the potential of our government with all the animate and inanimate resources available within the walls as well as within the hearts and minds of the Nisga'a Nation's membership. In working with all of the elders from the respective communities, and participating in the Executive Meetings, and *Wilp Si'ayuukhl Nisga'a* meetings, it was a pleasure to learn from all the people around me about the reality of self-government. There was so much involved in the administration of 'Programs and Services,' 'Lands and Resources,' 'Fish and Wildlife,' 'Finance,' and the basic day-to-day operations of a governing body. I was amazed at the inclusion of traditional knowledge in all of the programs and projects that our Nation participated in.²⁶ I witnessed first hand the freedom that Nisga'a citizens had in accessing the materials, and having the opportunity to participate in the decision

²⁶ All requests for development are handled by the Nisga'a Land and Resources Department, where an application process is enacted where applicants must give notice to development and alteration for a period of time. Another example is requests for information, where people must submit formal applications to Nisga'a *Lisims* Government *Ayuukhl Nisga'a* Department, where the *Wilp* where applicable would be contacted about the request, and their proposed action. All of this is within the framework of the Programs and Services Act, the previous example is handled through the Lands and Resource Act, all of which are under the framework of the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government Act.

making process. In all of the meetings I took part in, members of the Nisga'a Nation could participate and provide comments during specific periods. *Wilps* were consulted in regards to requests submitted to the government about their names and respective territory. On the other hand, the government facilitated the flow of information to the *Wilps* when activities were planned for their lands in a form of modern/cultural consultation on our Traditional Territories, categorized as Category B Lands within the Nisga'a Treaty. Therefore, plans for the lands outside of core lands, like my family's traditional territory (*Xnamass*), would be disclosed to our family for their response to the Council of Elders and Nisga'a Lisims Government. The reason for all of this activity is directly reflective of the roles and responsibilities of the Council of Elders, which is made up of Nisga'a Elders who were *Simgigat* or *Sigidimhanak* within their respective *Wilp* or community. The Council of Elders always forwards materials onto the respective *Sim'oogit* or *Sigidimnak* (Chief or Matriarch) of a *Wilp* if there is any request pertaining to the specified *Wilp*. This process insures that the traditional *Ayuukhl* (law) of the Nisga'a Nation are upheld within the context of a modern Nisga'a *Lisims* Government.

The weakest aspect of Nisga'a Lisims Government, from my perspective, is the lack of "intra-nation" integration, participation, and communications. I use the word integration in terms of the participation of the Nisga'a membership during *Wilp Siayuukhl Nisga'a* meetings, and in the executive meetings that take place in the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government building. I think there must be some form of transportation or technological capacity already at the governance level, to facilitate a broadcast of the activities for Nisga'a citizens who are unable to attend the functions. In the past our membership was always involved in these types of events and in my role with Nisga'a *Lisims* Government

I saw only a couple of residents of New Aiyansh come out and “watch” the proceedings. Through the process of integration, Nisga’a *Lisims* Government can facilitate a procedure for the membership to access Village Government transportation to attend the meetings. The days of only coming out for the Annual Convention are long gone, and our membership needs to take responsibility for the direction that our government is heading. Only through integration and participation will the Nisga’a voice be heard. Although things are forwarded onto our respective elected membership it does not hold the same weight as an active oral participation, such as in the governance activities of our *Yukw*.

The second point, about communications, holds the most significance. During the last election I was privy to many different things within our Nation, especially within my community. In *Laxgalts’ap* there was a bi-election held in 2005, after a complaint was launched by an unsuccessful candidate about the process under the Nisga’a *Lisims* Government Act when a ballot box was lost or went missing. Once the community of *Laxgalts’ap* was informed about the elections flaw, the Nisga’a *Lisims* Government’s Council of Elders called for a meeting of all the respected *Simgigat* and *Sigidimhanak* of *Laxgalts’ap* to discuss a respectful process to deal with the matter. The meeting that took place was a platform for all leaders of our traditional *HuWilps* to express their perspectives on what needed to occur for the people of their community. During the meeting only the elders were permitted to speak about what process would take place within the context of the traditional *Ayuuk* (*Nisga’a* Laws) and the legislation of the Nisga’a *Lisims* Government Act. There were angry people wishing to voice their opinion, but the traditional system prevailed in the endeavor to provide respectful discussion and guidance to the process that needed to take place. Our community was

angered at the process that facilitated the loss of a ballot box, and expressed their concerns during the consultation period prior to the bi-election. After the bi-election, our Village Government Chief, (who happens to be my late grandmother Marion's brother and clan *Sim'oogit*), Willard Martin (*Sim'oogit Niisyuus*), won the election as he did during the first ballot. A couple of Councilors lost their seats, and the same group from the previous administration took the reigns again. I was proud to be a part of this process, but I recognized that most of our membership is not prepared for the reality of what governance means in the treaty era.

Governance from my perspective, which is based on my Nisga'a lived experience, is formed around communications. Our great *Sigidimhanak* and *Simgigat* were great communicators as individuals, family and *Wilp* members, and in the larger national arena. Modern politicians are hoisted up by family groups and political affiliations within our communities based on traditional values, most of the time it is not based on their understanding of the relationship between the greater good for the people and their personal gain. From my perspective there are two tiers of educational teachings that can begin to address and evaluate the objectives of the Treaty for the Nisga'a People. Elected members need to understand that the National objectives and communal objectives are difficult to balance and finding common grounds sometimes means that you will have to communicate negative news to your respective electorate. The same applies for the membership in understanding that the goals and objectives for the Nation are always there for them to review.

The point of this argument is that our membership must communicate with the Nisga'a government in order to educate themselves on the reality of the governance

process, practices, and unfolding activities. Our political representatives elected and nominated, need to think their role over very carefully, since this is not just a job; rather it is a way of life. On a couple of occasions I had people approach me about what our government was up to on the “HILL.” I responded to my community member(s) that it was up to them to go to the office(s) and see for themselves. This is what self-governance means, participation and communication with our fellow Nisga’a for the betterment of our Nation with real information about the procedures (governance) that takes place, and about how this is done through our perspective, which is the self within the *Wilp* and *HuWilp*.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Si' Aam Wilin: Be Diligent in your ways

I turned to narrative as a mode of inquiry because I was persuaded that social science texts needed to construct a different relationship between researcher and subjects and between authors and readers. I wanted a more personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship, one that centered on the question of how human experience is endowed with meaning and on the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain and changing world. (Ellis and Bochner, 1999, 743-744)

In providing this material for my Masters thesis, I found this exercise to be very trying on my personality and being, thus my selection of auto-ethnography for the approach to the changing environment that I, better yet, we, all live within. In western institutions you learn through the pursuit of knowledge that freedom and justice are defined within the walls of western academia, and in the context of the Colonizer. Personally, Nisga'a knowledge is not something that needs a yard stick to check its validity, nor is it something that requires some privileged westerner to disseminate. We know our associations, obligations, and affiliations within the world that we actively live within as described by Ellis and Bochner in the above quote.

From my personal perspective, Nisga'a ways of being and knowing are embedded in each and every one of us that grow up in a *Wilp*, or in one of our communities. Our ways and history are only reflected in the works of McNeary (1976), Tomlinson and Young, (1983), or Raunet (1984/1996), who walked half a mile in our shoes, and talked to our grandparents for a short period of time to prepare their respective works.

Sharing and Evaluation

It is the life of being a member of our ancestral community that grants so many of us young Indigenous scholars the ability and opportunity to flex our mental muscles within the academic walls that I criticize. Without our predecessors accessing western systems and negotiating a place for us within Canada, we would still be fighting the battle to be recognized as human beings trying to tell our side of the story. The onus lays with our generation to write our histories, based on the living knowledge of our ancestors passed down through oral stories and modern texts like the *Ayuukhl Nisga'a* Readers. Howard Adams also states the importance of Aboriginal inclusion in a contemporary Canadian context.

Ideally, Aboriginals, not Euro-Canadian academics, should research Native cultures. Indigenous institutions must be staffed by scientists who grew up in Native societies and, therefore, identify themselves with the future well being of Native nations. This, however is no small task; Canada is imbued with semi-apartheid philosophies that make it difficult to develop a counter-consciousness. Aboriginals have to dispel the pervasive stereotypes and destroy all encrustations of colonial mentality that repress them. This must occur before they can develop a non-Eurocentric interpretation of Indigenous history. It demands a critical analysis that emphasizes Native consciousness, life experience, and resistance struggle. (Adams, 51)

As a Nisga'a brought up in the Calder era, it is hard not to reflect on the nationalistic pride that our Nations' membership instilled within all of us, teaching an acceptance of the duality that we all must live within and balance. From a young age I witnessed the pride of our people, based on countless generations of our peoples expressing their knowledge for us to persevere together, and supporting each other in our

intellectual war with the western intruders. First, we had to fight the battle to get our land back in some manner to facilitate the essence of being Nisga'a. This was prior to waging the intellectual battle in implementing our ways of being and knowing within the systems that the treaty has provided to us as Nisga'a people.

Within the context of the Nisga'a Treaty, our territory is something that we still hold in the utmost of respect whenever we're in *Yukw*, on a hunt, or just fishing along one of the many rivers we visit. The land is our spirit; there is no "was" in this dialogue. When discussing the dislocation of traditional lands from the Nisga'a Treaty, people must understand that WE the Nisga'a are more than aware of this. It is not something that we just forgot when 90% of our lands were not included within the Core Lands. Nevertheless, the land is something that we hold as indispensable in a cultural arena. Our names are connected to the lands; our families still utilize and articulate their controls over their lands today. At this time, westerners are not rushing out to claim, or access, remote and rugged areas of the Pacific Northwest coast (my homeland) to develop lands that our Nation's membership still accesses, and still knows as their home.

What the Nisga'a Treaty did for the Nisga'a people is provide some land with the proper Nisga'a names. By placing the proper names on the locations, and having this recognized within Canada and British Columbia, the Nisga'a Nation is facilitating the ultimate goal of naming the lands accordingly, (spatially and ideologically), thus reclaiming them. No matter what people state about the allotment of Nisga'a lands within the Nisga'a Treaty, the decision was ours. We may have lost the lands on paper, however, our government is still consulted, and therefore, our respective *HuWilps* (Houses) are consulted about possible developments that could harm or endanger species

that inhabit the area. In no way shape or form in the minds of *Wilps* like mine, have our lands been removed from our connections. The land is still there and our people have always been accessing the territories, therefore, it is still our home(s) and the land contains our associations which we describe in the *Yukw* (feasts).

In the social sphere, I found it very daunting to address the situations that we all lived with as Nisga'a through the phases of Nisga'a life that I mention in this thesis. I wander away from the negative discussion that impacts so many First Nations communities, specifically, residential schools, Indian Day Schools, alcoholism and drug abuse, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and the list goes on. All of these impacts are reflective of our Nations relationship with the colonial power under the control of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, and our segregation onto reservations. Now self-governance offers the Nisga'a people an opportunity to harness our own inner strength to facilitate a true understanding and practice of *Sayt K'ilim Goot* for the Nation's membership and healing.

Our unemployment rate is still reflective of pre-treaty numbers. We have a large migratory population that works in other locations to facilitate the financial well-being of their respective families. The major employer is the Nisga'a Lisims Government, or one of the four Village Governments, all of which access our treaty funds through a Fiscal Financing Agreement to facilitate the development of self-governing programs and services for the Nisga'a Membership.

We continue to harvest our forests and salmon for economic gain. Based on the environmental issues that we all face as human beings, our Nation must rethink our short and long term goals to facilitate the survival of our culture, which is based on our natural

resources. Without these we would not have the bounty of the *Lisims* to turn to in times of hardship, as our ancestors have since time immemorial. If we do not advocate for alternative forms of social and economic prospects, we are doing as much damage as the westerners whom we have sought to collect our land from. Without proper planning based on our culture, history, and wisdom the social aspect of being Nisga'a will encounter other traumatic events. The loss of our salmon stocks, oolichan, and forest resources would be devastating to our Nation. In reflecting on the global picture and addressing our government to rethink their goals and objectives with all of the Nisga'a membership, we can begin to exercise our self-governing capacity, thus developing on our history and resilience as a unique west coast Nation.

In contemporary Nisga'a communities, our *Yukw* (feasts) are in full swing. There is another text been compiled by the Council of Elders and Nisga'a *Lisims* Government about the *Yukw* that will be coming out soon for the benefit of the Nisga'a Nation. The text outlines all of our *Yukw* (feast), and the procedures that are utilized within each of the respective processes for future generations. The reason for the text is because there have been many complaints about how *Yukw* are run, and how people have been compensated, and how they participate, in a modern context. Ultimately, it is up to each respective *Wilp* to determine how their *Yukw* will unfold, no one else can decide this. However, this does not dismiss the larger social obligation that each respective *Wilp* has to the Nation, in upholding the practices and procedures that Nisga'a people have utilized for thousands of years. The text is not just for the benefit of the children and future generations; it is capable of so much more teaching within the context of the governance of Nisga'a *Lisims* Government.

Governance is something that Nisga'a people have become very good at, at least in our ability to have strong political leaders like the members of the first Nisga'a Land Committee: the late *Sim'oogit Wii Lisims* (Frank Calder), the late *Sim'oogit Hle'ek* (James Gosnell), the late *Sim'oogit Daxhaan* (Alvin McKay), the current *Sim'oogit Hle'ek* (Joseph Gosnell), and our present-day President of Nisga'a *Lisims* Government, *Sim'oogit Axlawals*, (Nelson Leeson). All of these respective spokesmen for the Nisga'a Nation were/are surrounded by Nisga'a men and women who assisted them in their role as leaders. In terms of treaty negotiations, these leaders solidified our united position in our objective of obtaining a treaty with Canada and British Columbia. Besides treaty negotiations, these leaders also united the membership of the Nisga'a Nation in their respective communities, and ensured that they were/are aware about the proceedings of the government at any point in time.

The reality of the treaty from my perspective is that not many of our people are really aware of the ramifications of our voting the Nisga'a Final Agreement into effect. People must familiarize themselves with what is going on in their respective communities, and the governing roles and responsibilities of the elected members that we place in these political positions. They must ask, what are they doing for us, and how are they making this a better place for all of us to live within, or to come back to.

As a product of the Calder era, my goal and objective in life is to see what systems and procedures are in place in the western world that could facilitate the recognition that our people have deserved for over one hundred years. Prior to the intrusion by the colonial powers that came to our territory, the Nisga'a Nation participated with the living land to facilitate a relationship that stretched from the west

coast of the Pacific Ocean, into the inland areas of present day British Columbia. These relationships were not just social events; serious business was conducted and cultural practices were abided by during meetings or transactions. There are many stories that connect the Nisga'a Nation to all of our neighbors, and explain overlap when trying to define territory. From a Nisga'a perspective, our traditional boundaries were set in stone, but flex in the midst of cultural and environmental pressures that *HuWilps* endured or succumbed to. Our relationship with the land and our neighbors was exceptionally complex; not only facilitating the variations in our cultural differences with our neighbors, the culture also lived through economic and political activities. Some authors have expressed in writing Gitksan concerns over the Nisga'a Treaty settlement towards Nisga'a laws that determined land occupancy and thus ownership, by placing their interpretation onto maps and saying their chief's interpretation is the correct one.²⁷ Nisga'a cultural systems and practices facilitated a melding of nationalism that projected itself up and down the west coast of British Columbia, and the east coast of Alaska. No matter what people state about the boundaries, Nisga'a Land has flexed as theirs did in the wake of time. Our utilization of western models for borders is a failure, but the past is something that we all cannot return to, rather, it is something that we all hope to reclaim and harness in this modern era. People always ask me what I think about the overlap issues, and I always state that the land is ours and will forever be ours. Other Nations' dealings are theirs and theirs alone. Our leaders in the Northern parts of Nisga'a Lands have not and will not tolerate any types of claims or assertions that the land is not ours.

²⁷ Sterritt, Neil, Susan Marsden, Robert Galois, Peter Grant, Richard Overstall. *Tribal Boundaries of the Nass Watershed*. Vancouver, UBC Press: 1998; the text is written by Gitksan members, about their perspective on the Nass Watershed boundaries in the Northern part of the Nass Valley.

When utilizing terms like *Sayt K'ilim Goot*, westerners can truly understand and grasp the complexities of First Nations relations within the Nisga'a social, geographical, economic, and political spheres, and in their relationships with all around them. In western institutions students are typically taught that linear deduction is the key to understanding the intricate workings of natural activities, in that the reduced item can reveal far more from its most minute part, rather than looking at its involvement within the greater scheme of things. *Sayt K'ilim Goot* is the power that lives in all life, and facilitates the understanding that First Nations people like the Nisga'a Nation have harnessed for thousands and thousands of years. Through joining oral historical evidence and western scientific practices, the history of this land can be provided in a more fruitful manner for First Nations and Canadians.

Nisga'a Government: The Golden Chariot

In terms of the big issue, 'Self Governance,' the Nisga'a Nation is moving forward in a proactive and inclusive manner. In the 2006 Nisga'a Nation Special Assembly, our Central (Nisga'a *Lisims* Government), Village and Urban Governments provided materials to the Nisga'a Nation membership about their activities and strategic goals and objectives for the upcoming year. One of the most interesting bodies within our central government is the 'Communications and Intergovernmental Relations' department. This body is mandated to ensure that the Village Governments, Urban Offices, and the membership are aware of the activities and actions of the Nisga'a *Lisims* Government in the political realm.

As Nisga'a, everything we do is based on proper communications and sharing accurate information with one another. First Nations oral history continues to provide the

backbone for effective and efficient communications. Through the Nisga'a *Lisims* Governments' current objectives and initiatives like the creation of the 'Communications and Intergovernmental Relations' department, the Nisga'a membership will be better informed about all of our activities, and our struggles. In the briefing provided by the 'Communications and Intergovernmental Relations' department, the prime objective was to ensure that people were aware of the complex issues in front of the elected officials, and their struggles to meet the objectives of the Nisga'a Final Agreement for our Nation's membership:

Even though the transformation process seems slow for many and progress on program and governance reforms is seen as being too little, major efforts are being made. Much of this view takes place when some of the Nations citizens (and many public servants) are unaware of what the NLG or the Nation is doing in terms of the progress with the Treaty Agreement and how much work continues with the Federal and Provincial systems. (Nisga'a *Lisims* Government, Special Assembly of the Nisga'a Nation 2006: 30)

In this statement alone, my participation as a member of the Nisga'a Nation is one that needs to be evaluated. As a citizen of our government it is our obligation to make an effort to participate and understand the complexities of having self-governance. I honestly think that our people thought that things would get easier once we had received control over the land that we got back, and our own systems of governance would fall into place. This does not deter from the fact that this is our government, our responsibility, and our obligation to fulfill our ancestor's wishes to continue on within the *K'alii aksim Lisims* (Nass River). Nisga'a *Lisims* Government is attempting to meld political systems and practices that are foreign to our lands.

As a young child I recall many events where our elders provided us with the objective to go out and learn the white mans systems and ways of knowing. The goal

behind this was to insure that we as Nisga'a people were able to function within the two worlds that we live within. At no point in time did our people think they could take a time machine back and stop the invasion, rather, we participated and functioned to the best of our abilities within the context of the events and occurrences that plagued our people. Only through the understanding that our systems and culture would live on were our people able to understand that the bridging required for our survival would be tremendous in its construction. Now, this Nisga'a Final Agreement (Our Bridge) needs to facilitate a form of representation that our ancestors sought for two hundred years. We are all aware that our lands and resources have been stripped within the context of the Nisga'a Final Agreement in some shape or form within the context of traditional Nisga'a living. Therefore, our objectives and mandate for survival within our territories is somewhat diminished by the reality of our Treaty, but we have lives and generations coming in front of us.

In our current role within Canada and British Columbia, the Nisga'a Nation has the opportunity to ensure that our voice is heard, and our rules and governing practices are recognized within the context of the lands we inhabit. The treaty offers our membership the opportunity to participate and communicate their understandings of the past, present, and future in an active manner. Through self-governance our objectives to represent and provide for our membership are our obligations now. No longer can we blame anybody for their actions or reactions to our situations, rather it is our responsibility to facilitate solutions to remedy the problems that we had in the past, present, and will have in the future of our lives as Nisga'a people.

Many academic scholars discuss this notion of understanding the other (colonial power) in some manner. Edward Said (1978, 2005) is one such author who states the reasons for knowing the “other” as being primary for our existence within the colonial context. Even within treaties such as the Nisga’a Final Agreement there are options for the Nisga’a people to hold the governments of Canada and British Columbia (colonial powers) accountable for their role in our past, present, and future. Through the treaty there are goals that each side needs to meet to facilitate the transfers of power in the self-governing model that we voted for. Only through our participation and understanding of the western world can we ensure that our systems are functioning and facilitating our culture and history as Nisga’a people, while meeting the requirements that we must facilitate for the SELF in self governance to work. People must therefore understand that this is our turn at the plate. We have been practicing western systems for a long time now, therefore, we must address and see where our treaty can facilitate the incorporation and solidification of our history, our knowledge, and our systems within the framework of *Sayt K’ílim Goot* (Of One Heart).

Final Thoughts

Sayt K’ílim Goot (Of One Heart) is a way of being that can facilitate all of these events and occurrences that we encounter as Nisga’a people within the framework of Canada and our global environment. By focusing on the complex relationships that exist within the world, the Nisga’a Nation can facilitate a self-governing system that is living with the Nisga’a membership, the Nisga’a lands, and our neighbors that surround us, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. In order to address the situations that we encounter within the treaty, our membership must make an effort to understand and participate

within the contemporary setting that we chose. Through the understanding that we as Nisga'a people made a decision to support our leadership that brought us to this phase in our existence, we can introduce the more participatory role that we must all play to better ourselves as Nisga'a people, better our extended families, better our communities, and strengthen our Nation. By utilizing our interpretations of our history and documenting it, the Nisga'a path towards the future is bright and filled with potential. In the midst of change our ancestors struggled and our numbers were drastically reduced, but we live on. Through the Nisga'a Final Agreement and our participation within the larger western world, the understandings about history, our current events and activities, and future, are forms of knowledge that need to be shared for all to lay witness to. By providing our history as individuals within the narrative context, our history is being re-written, and western scholars are reevaluating their stance on our relationship as human beings within the social systems that facilitate our existence. By understanding that *Sayt K'ilim Goot* is universal and constant, people can begin to recognize that western institutions and practices need to be called to task. On the other hand, the Nisga'a Nation needs to understand that participation in the self-governing process is something that is a constant, always occurring, and never ending. By bringing forth our concepts and oral history to the contemporary models that we as Nisga'a people have to live with, we can make the best of our situation, as our ancestors did to ensure their survival. Now, we must do the same to ensure the survival of our culture, lands, and resources for the future generations of Nisga'a. Our common bowl is not overflowing as it once did in the past. *Si' Aam Wilin*, we must be diligent in our ways and focus our attention on concepts like *Sayt K'ilim Goot*, since our ways of perceiving and knowing must always be holistic.

As a Nisga'a citizen it is my duty to insure that we are on the right path, and voice my opinion about it. If my voice is not heard, I am not speaking loud enough.

In times of distress and challenge, our great leaders called to all of our people and made them aware that this is our land, not the "white man's land." Now that the Treaty is in place, let us make the best of the situation and bring forth Nisga'a Knowledge in the development of Nisga'a *Lisims* Government in a more inclusive manner. By providing our perspectives into the treaty Government, our traditional systems can influence, enable, and enrich our future in the self-governing process. The future is based on our decisions. Let us focus on the strengths that the two worlds provide to us, and facilitate a relationship that would be reflective of a Nation forging on, attempting to bring forth justice and truth within all the institutions and systems that it encounters. That is *Sayt K'ilim Goot*, focusing on the understanding that without one, there is no other. We are all in this together. Let us sit down and share the truths together. This is a model that can be used by Canada, and the many academic institutions that inform students, who in turn will recognize that behind all the narratives that they provide are real people, real cultures, real history, and a people yearning to show that they have the rights to self-determination. That is our challenge as people today, living within our environments to facilitate our unique goals and objectives that form lasting relationships with each other and our animate and inanimate environments.

T'yooyak'siy nisim (Thank you)

Gabihl Hiya (I am Finished)

References:

Adams, Howard. 'Challenging Eurocentric History', In "Expressions in Canadian Native Studies. Ed: Ron F. Lalibert'e, Priscilla Settee, James B. Waldram, Rob Innis, Brenda Macdougall, Lesley McBain, F. Laurie Barron. Saskatoon, University Extension Press, 2000.

Atleo, E. Richard (Umeek). Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview. Vancouver: UBC, Press, 2004.

Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study: Nisga'a Origins "In the Beginning." Vol. I. Nisga'a Tribal Council. Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 1995.

Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study: Nisga'a Clan Histories. Vol. II. Nisga'a Tribal Council. Printed by Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 1995.

Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study: Nisga'a Society. Vol. III. Nisga'a Tribal Council. Printed by Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 1995.

Ayuukhl Nisga'a Study: The Land and Resources: Traditional Nisga'a Systems of Land Use and Ownership. Vol. IV. Nisga'a Tribal Council. Printed by Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a, 1995.

Basso, Keith. Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.

Bhabha, Homi K. Nation and Narration. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Barbeau, Marius. Photographic Collection: The Nass River. Ed. Linda Riley. National Museum of Canada. Canadian Museum of Civilization. Mercury Series. Canadian Ethnology Service Paper No. 109. 1988.

Creswell, John W. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1998.

Currie, Mark. Postmodern Narrative Theory. New York: St. Martins Press. 1998.

Cybulski, Jerome S. A Greenville Burial Ground: Human Remains and Mortuary Elements in British Columbia Coast Prehistory," Canadian Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, 1992

Deloria, Vine. Spirit and Reason: The Vine Deloria Jr. Reader. Edited by: Barbara Deloria, Kristen Foehner, Sam Scinta. Golden Colorado: Fulerum Publishers, 1999.

Ellis, Carolyn and Bochner, Arthur P. Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Research as subject. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp 733-768). Thousand Oaks California, Sage Publications, 2000.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin, 1979.

Fanon, Frantz. *Fanon: a Critical Reader*. Eds. Gordon, Lewis R., Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean and White, Renee T. Cambridge Mass: Blackwell, 1996.

Fisher, Robin. *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992.

Foucault, Micheal. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon, 1972.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 1969.

Hazlitt, William. *Selected Writings*. Edited by Ronald Blyth. Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1970.

Heidegger, Matrin. *The Basic Problems with Phenomenology*. Bloomington Indian, Indian University Press, 1977.

Holt, Nicholas L. Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(1). Article 2: 2003. Retrieved January 30, 2008 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_1final/html/holt.html.

Ignatiaf, Michael. Massey Lecture: CBC Raido: Massey Lecture, 2006.

Kelm, Mary Ellen. *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998.

King, Thomas. "Massey Lectures." CBC Radio: Massy lectures, 2004.

Kulchyski, Peter. What is Native Studies. 2000. *In Expressions in Canadian Native Studies*. University Extension Press, Saskatoon, Sask. 2000.

McDonald, James, A. Building a Moral Community: Tsimshian Potlatching, Implicit Knowledge and Everyday Experiences. *Cultural Studies Journal*, 2004.

McDonald, James A. Social Change and the creation of the underdevelopment: a Northwest Coast Case. *American Ethnologist* 21(1): 152-175. American Anthropological Association, 1994.

- McNeary, Stephen A. *Where Fire Came Down: Social and Economic Life of Niska*. Bryn Mawr College Unpublished PhD Thesis 1976.
- Mills, Antonia. *Eagle Down Is Our Law: We'tsuwe'ten Law, Feasts and Land Claims*. Vancouver, UBC Press, 1994.
- Mills, Antonia, Ed. "*Hang Onto These Words*": *Johnny David's Delgamuukw Evidence*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Molloy, Tom. *The World is Our Witness: The Historic Journey of the Nisga'a into Canada*. Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 2000.
- Mugerauer, R. & Seamon, Eds. *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Towards a Phenomenology of Person and World*. New York: 1985.
- Murray, Peter. *The Devil and Mr. Duncan*. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1985.
- Nisga'a Annual Report. Gingolx, B.C. Nisga'a Lisims Government, 2001.
- Nisga'a Lisims Government. *Special Assembly of the Nisga'a Nation*. 2006.
- Nisga'a Tribal Council. *Citizens Plus: The Nisga'a people of the Nass River Valley in Northwestern British Columbia*. Revised Edition. Brampton Ontario, 1980.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*. London, New York: Routledge, 1982.
- Patterson, E. Palmer. *Mission on the Nass*. Waterloo, Ont., Eulachon Press: 1982.
- Raunet, Daniel. *Without Surrender Without Consent: A History of the Nisga'a Land Claims*. Second Edition. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre: 1984/1996.
- Rose, Alex. *Spirit Dance at Meziadin: Chief Joseph Gosnell and the Nisga'a Treaty*. Northwest Coast Books: 2000.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York, Vintage Books: 1978.
- Said, Edward. *Continuing the Conversation*. Ed Homi K. Bhabha, W.J.T. Mitchell. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 2005.
- Sioui, George E. *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle*. Vancouver, UBC Press: 1999.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London, Zed Books: 1999.

Sterritt, Neil, Susan Marsden, Robert Galois, Peter Grant, Richard Overstall. *Tribal Boundaries of the Nass Watershed*. Vancouver, UBC Press: 1998.

Stevens, Maurice "*Public (Re) Memory, Vindicating Narratives, and Troubling Beginnings: Towards a Critical Postcolonial Psychoanalytical Theory*"; in Fanon, Frantz. *Fanon: a Critical Reader*. Eds. Gordon. Lewis R., Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean and White, Renee T. Cambridge: Mass. Blackwell, 1996.

Tomlinson, George and Judith Young. *Challenge the Wilderness: A Family Saga of Robert and Alice Tomlinson Pioneer Medical Missionaries*. Seattle Washington. Northwest Wilderness Books, 1983.

Victoria Times Colonist. August 21, 1883, p. 2

http://cccm.nrcan.gc.ca/english/comprehensive_claims_e.asp Accessed January 31, 2008.

www.gingolx.ca. Accessed January 30, 2007.

www.gov.bc.ca. Accessed April 4, 2007.

www.inac.gc.ca. Accessed April 4, 2007.

www.nisgaalisims.ca. Accessed April 4, 2007.

www.rbcm.bc.ca. Accessed April 4, 2007.

www.schoolnet.ca/nisgaa. Accessed April 4, 2007.

<http://wwni.bc.ca>. Accessed January 20, 2007.

Appendix I

Glossary of Terms

- Aamt'ugwax*: Clara's *Sigidimnak* Name in Wilp Niisyu'us.
Adaawak: stories/history
Aluugigat: Nisga'a people in their natural form, open to the public to see "naked"
Amagat: my late great-grandfathers house (Wilp) Andrew Robinson.
Amgoodiy: To Recall
Ango'oskw: traditional lands/family trap line
Ankida: Historic Village
Axdii Wil Luu Gooda: Frog chief –*Sim'oogit* Name currently held by Wallace Clark.
Axlawals: *Sitting President Nisga'a Lisims Government* Nelson Leeson, *Sim'oogit* Name
Ayuukhl: Nisga'a Laws
Daxhaan: late Alvin McKay, *Sim'oogit* Name frog clan
Dim Sit'ama'ay Lits'xkw: I Am Going to Tell You This First
Du'uk: *Sim'oogit* Name and *Wilp* Name Wolf clan.
Gabihl Hi: To finish
Gadee'libim Hayatskw: *Sim'oogit* Name eagle clan.
GalksiGabin: to surface between two points, currently my name, Wilp Niisyuus.
Ganada: Frog clan
Ganwilaak'ils/Ganwilxo'oskw: translated into Knowledge and Wisdom
Gat: term for man
Giits: Term for grandmother, also great-grandmother
Gisk'aast: Killer whale clan
Gitiks: Historic Village
Gitlaxt'aamiks: place of the ponds/Aiyansh
Git win ksilkw: Canyon City
Gingolx: Nisga'a Community, also known as Kincolith
Gwiix Maaw: John Robinson's *Sim'oogit* Name
Haymaas: *Sim'oogit* Name, Frog Chief, currently held by Chester Moore
Hle'ek: Eagle Chief, *Sim'oogit* Name, currently held by Joe Gosnell
Hlyim Wil: Frog Chief, *Sim'oogit* Name, held by Chester Moore, Haymaas
HuWilp: many houses (plural)
K'alii aksim Lisims: the people of the Nass River
K'amligii hahl ha: Creator
Kamsiiwaa: ghosts or "white people"
K'ayuukuis: Salmon strips
Keexkw: Wolf Chief, *Sim'oogit* Name, currently held by Herbert Morven.
Ksiiskw: Retribution Feast, a form of "potlatch"
Laxgalts'ap: Greenville meaning, "Place built upon dwelling place".
Laxgibuu: Wolf clan
Laxsgiik: Eagle clan
Lisims: the Nass River
Luulak: Ghosts

Nihl Adagwiy T'gun: here is the, to give something to someone.
Niisyuus: Our Families House *Wilp* name, *Sim'oogit Niisyuus*, Willard Martin.
Nits'iits': grandmothers, including great-grandmothers
Pdeek: tribes/clan crest
Pt'saan: Totem pole
Sa'ak: oolichans
Sagaween: Eagle Clan, Harry Nyce, *Sim'oogit* Name
Samaxsam: Feast Name in Frog Clan
Sayt K'ilim Goot: of one heart
Sgat'in: *Wolf Chief*, *Sim'oogit* Name, meaning Chief Mountain
Si'Aam Wilin: Be Diligent in your ways
Sigidimnak: Particular matriarch
Sigidimhanak: plural for matriarch
Siisbaguut: Harold Watts, *Sim'oogit* Name Killerwhale Clan *Niisyuus*
Sim'alga: Nisga'a language
Simgigat: plural for chiefs
Sim'oogit: Chief
T'ilx: oolichan grease
Ts'etsiks Ang'oosgum: Soil and Dirt or, The land Nisga'a People exist on.
Ts'im K'ohl Da oots'ip: Fishery Bay, Largest Nisga'a community at contact
Txeemsim: Nisga'a Messenger from the Creator.
T'yooyak'siy niin: Thank you (singular)
T'yooyak'siy nisim: Thank you (plural)
Wila Loom'ii Wila Algaxam: The way we are/and our Language.
Wilksibakws and *wilksilaks*: are used interchangeably, with the same meaning.
 They refer to the paternal relatives, especially the immediate family member on the father's side.
We'e: *Sigidimnak* Name, Killerwhale Clan *Niisyuus*, held by Noreen Cross (Mother)
Wii Lisims: *Sim'oogit* Name of the late Frank Calder, Killerwhale Clan, this name was given to Frank by all the Chiefs *Simgigat* of the *K'alii Aksim Lisims* (Chiefs of the Nass River)
Wila Loom'ii/Wila Algaxam: the way we are/and our language
Wilp: House group or family association following the mother's family
Wilp Wilxo'oskwhl Nisga'a Institute: WWNI, Nisga'a House of Wisdom
Wilp Siayuukhl Nisga'a: WSN, Nisga'a Elected Assembly (House of Representatives) under the Nisga'a Treaty, and Nisga'a Lisims Government.
Xnamass: present day Kwinamass Bay, along the Northwest Coast of BC.
Xts'init: Location south or present day Kitsault, B.C.
Ya'a: Spring salmon, also term for month of August.
Ye'e: Grandpa and grandfathers
Yukw: Feast