Tsimshian Wil'naat'ał and Society: Historicising Tsimshian Social Organization

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Introduction

Not far from Gitxaała are the people who live inside the mists of the Skeena River. Connected to Gitxaała by the familial ties of kinship and chiefly designs, the eleven Aboriginal communities of the lower Skeena River also are part of the Tsimshian Nation.

The prevailing understanding of Tsimshian social organization has long been clouded in a fog of colonialism. The resulting interpretation of the indigenous property relations marches along with the new colonial order but is out of step with values expressed in the teachings of the *wilgagoosk* – the wise ones who archived their knowledge in the historical narratives called *adaawx* and other oral sources. This chapter reviews traditional and contemporary Tsimshian social structures to argue that the land owning House (Waap[1]) and Clan (Wil'naat'ał) have been demoted in importance in favour of the residential and political communities of the tribe (*galts'ap*). Central to my argument is a critical analysis of the social importance of the contemporary Indian Reserve villages that is the basis of much political, cultural, and economic activity today. The perceived centrality of these settlements and their associated tribes in Tsimshian social structure has become a historical canon accepted by missionaries, politicians, civil servants, historians, geographers, archaeologists, and many "armchair" anthropologists. This assumption is a convention that loosens the Aboriginal ties to the land and resources and is attractive for the colonial society. It is a belief that has been normalized within the colonized worldview as the basis for relationships in civil society.

The issue I raise in this chapter concerns the extent to which the prevailing

1 *Waap* is the Sm'algyax term used in Kitsumkalum. A dialect variant used elsewhere is *wilp* or *welp*.

interpretation of Tsimshian social life is a reflection of the traditional community structure. This chapter is not intended to be an enquiry into authenticity. Today, Tsimshian society relies both on traditional cultural values based on kinship and the land, and on contemporary practises based on the Indian Reserve policies and a globalizing political economy. In exploring the issue, an alternative interpretation of a historically constituted society is presented that comes from discussions with elders, archived interviews, the *adaawx* (teaching narratives), and older ethnographies. The alternative is that of a land holding and tightly integrated society. It is an alternative based in the time of sovereignty but with a strong continuity in the underlying cultural values. To make this point, I will start with a story from Axdii Anx Smax (Larry Derrick), a Ganhada (Raven phratry) Sm'oogyet (chief) from the Nisga'a town of Laxgalts'ap on the Lisims (Nass River).

One afternoon, Axdii Anx Smax visited me in my research office in the Kitsumkalum Village on the Kitsumkaylum[2] Indian Reserve, outside of Terrace, BC. We were talking about the structure of Tsimshian and Nisga'a scientific knowledge. There are Sm'algyax terms that describe basic principles, and we were discussing how important it is to provide these words with an explanation of their meaning in English, rather than simply presenting an English translation using apparent equivalents of the terms themselves. This discussion was about the adequacy of translating complicated terms but quickly slipped into a political lesson.

The Sm'oogyet asked me if I knew what the Sm'algyax phrase *Sayt-K'ilim-Goot* meant. I have heard this expression in Tsimshian communities such as Gitxaała and in meetings in all the other communities. I have also heard it in Gitxsan meetings and feasts. However, keeping in mind that he was a Nisga'a Sm'oogyet, I replied that I understood the expression meant "of one heart" and that the Nisga'a Lisims Government[3] uses it to promote the nationalist sentiment of "One heart, one path, one nation."

The Sm'oogyit nodded in agreement but then asked, but do you know what it really means? I deferred to him and he explained that, originally, there were the two rivers, the Nass and the Skeena, and the people were all one, just like Txaamsm and Lagabolla, the twin supernatural brothers. They lived separately on the two rivers but were so closely connected that they could sense **(***atix***)** what was happening to the other. This was before the great flood that covered the earth. At that time, no distinction was made between the K'ala'aks Lisims (Nass) or K'ala'aks Ksiyeen (Skeena) – modern terms that are used to give identity to the Nass Valley and Nisga'a Nation, and to distinguish them from the Skeena River and its people: the

2 Unlike the English spelling of the community and village, the official spelling of the Reserve has a letter 'y'. The Elders group said in 1999 that it preferred the popular spelling for their community over the modern form of Gitsmgeelm or Gitsmk'eelm. I currently reserve the Gitsmgeelm form as a collective term just for the families or *wuwaap* that had estates in the Kalum Valley.

3 http://www.nisgaalisims.ca/welcome

Tsimshian Nation and the Gitxsan. In the days of Txaamsm and Lagabolla, all the nations were one. There were no distinctions. All was *Sayt-K'ilim-Goot*. Only after the flood did the three nations separate into the Nisga'a, Gitxsan, and Tsimshian – the great triangle. Before that, the families intermarried and moved about the entire area, as one people; but, now, there are three First Nations with their own territories mapped for Treaty and economic partnerships. He concluded, simply, by saying the people today are not one.[4]

This conversation is my starting point because it situates the question in oral history and suggests that, today, we are working from an understanding of Tsimshian social structure that carries traditional values but is infused with a consciousness generated from colonial experience.

In this chapter, I will explore ways that the framework of current issues have been shaped by the colonial administration of the Indigenous people in BC. My argument is that the colonial situation on the Skeena River has shifted the focus of Tsimshian society from the land owning Houses and lineages of Tsimshian sovereignty to the government settlements of the colonial period. During Tsimshian sovereignty, the tribal communities were local associations of the corporate groups called Houses or Wuwaap.[5] The Indian Reserve system redefined ownership and shifted the corporate group from the Waap/House as recognized by Tsimshian *ayaawx* (common law) to the Indian Reserve villages as recognized under the BNA Act. This transformation conditions contemporary Tsimshian society. I will frame this argument by historicising the three communities of Kitsumkalum, Lax Kw'alaams, and Metlakatla, and by demonstrating their interconnectedness. I will then explore the idea that the House groups and not the tribes were the corporate land holding groups.

Decolonization

Decolonization in Canada, as elsewhere in the world, has meant a return to cultural traditions that form the heritage and identity of Indigenous peoples. These traditions and cultures create, once again, a collective consciousness to heal the traumas of colonization and re-build a civil society based on Indigenous values. Culture provides a vision of the future and a road map to get there.

This is not a simple task. The reproduction of a collective consciousness inevitably incudes not just the ideas people have but also their experiences. In earlier papers (McDonald 1990, 1994), I examined how Tsimshian traditions and rituals are used to build a moral community that can provide alternatives to the imposed colonial structures. Here, I wish to examine the residues of colonial assimilationist policy that still intrude on cultural consciousness to form new ideas that inform contemporary practices. The focus is on how the traditional social structure of the Tsimshian is interpreted today.

4 The story is used with the permission of Axdii Anx Smax.

5 Wuwaap is the plural form of waap.

In the Tsimshian Nation, the function of tradition and rituals in creating civil society was clearly expressed when the community of Kitsumkalum raised crest poles in a 1987 ceremonial exclamation that they were entering into a New Beginning, a new relationship with their neighbours in northwestern British Columbia, within the Canadian confederation of provinces and federal governments and, indeed, within the globalizing world. They called the turning point with the Sm'algyax name "*Su Sit Aatk*" and proudly claimed the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the new Canadian Constitution and Charter of Rights and Freedoms that had been adopted in 1982, only a few years earlier.

The colonial history of Kitsumkalum is unique in many ways, as is the path the community has taken since 1987; however, it is not alone within the Tsimshian Nation in relying on culture and tradition to provide a source of inspiration and strength. Tsimshian culture is alive and lively in all the communities. The particular histories of each community have resulted in various expressions of continuity between the past and the present, but always the continuity is there. The Tsimshian community of Kitselas, for example, has strengthened its Tsimshian values with the guidance of elders and artists, created a marvellous National Heritage Site, and raised an unprecedented number of crest poles on that site and in their residential areas. Another Tsimshian community, Lax Kw'alaams, has built economic projects to benefit the members of that community on the basis of traditional rights to inland resources.

The liberalization of Canadian legal attitudes towards Indigenous cultures no longer criminalizes the culture and has started to open space in Canadian civil society for Aboriginal communities to heal from the traumas and distortions caused by Canadian laws and institutions. Much of today's leadership in the Tsimshian communities was born after the potlatch law was dropped in 1951 and after the vote was extended to status Indians in 1949 for provincial elections in BC and 1960 for federal elections. Their experiences have been shaped by the emergence of Aboriginal Rights and treaties, a resurgence of political activism and struggle. Under these conditions, Indigenous corporate groups within the communities are reforming and asserting their identity. Feasting is the iconic symbol of Tsimshian society and governance and examples abound in the communities of feasting that celebrates the recovery of hidden heritage such as House names and the repatriation of community members. One highly significant example occurred when a house of the Gits'ilaasü Gisbutwada clan living at Kitsumkaylum Reserve[6] reclaimed its rights in 2009 by installing chiefly titles, bringing members home to receive names, and adopting relatives to strengthen the House. Another important example was the

6 There are variants in spelling this name. Kitsumkaylum is the spelling for the Indian Reserve; Kitsumkalum is the spelling for the community and village. The Elders group said in 1999 that it prefer the popular spelling for their community over the modern form of Gitsmgeelm or Gitsmk'eelm. I currently reserve the Gitsmgeelm form as a collective term just for the families or *wuwaap* that had estates in the Kalum Valley.

Laxgibuu feast in 1996 that re-established a House that has since made major cultural and social contributions to the Kitsumkalum community but also to the broader regional community centred in the City of Terrace, enriching the regional district and promoting better understanding between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. We are in a new time that is ripe with potential. The young generation that is coming into leadership in this environment was born in an era of cultural pride and assertion, and policies of reconciliation. Their questions are not directed simply towards "how to survive government and protect the community," but towards "what form of self-government to create for the Nation." Theirs is a vision of a different kind of relationship to Canadian society. The emergence of this vision of the future is challenged by the lingering effects of what I will call below the Skeena Clearances and other colonial policies of social control such as residential schools, Department of Indian Affairs, and the resource laws and regulations that are in the foundation of Canada and the provinces.

The Skeena Clearances

Historically constituted villages

Many changes have taken place in Tsimshian land since the first European ships arrived on the coast in the late 18th century. The fur trade came in the wake of those ships, first as a marine trade then as a land based trade with the establishment of the Hudson's Bay Company's Fort (later Port) Simpson in the 1830s. A mercantile village dominated by Tsimshian grew around the trading post and eventually became known as Lax Kw'alaams. This historically constituted village was originally established on the estate property (*laxyuup*) of the one chief, the Laxsgiik Sm'oogyit Ligeex (Legaic), and grew into a commercial site with residences that included an international melange of people from many Tsimshian communities, and various individuals from other nations such as the Haida. It also included Métis, French Canadian and other HBC employees who were living with or visiting members of the villages. Social relationships were not always friendly as illustrated by an account of a so called "war" between the Tsimshian and Haida (Swanton 1905) but the complexity of the living arrangements around the fort was a defining feature of the mercantile era.

Cultural change was a part of the trade relationship, with the British trying to assert control over the trade, to control the liquor trade that damaged HBC profits, and to suppress slavery in accordance with new social laws in the United Kingdom. A more aggressive form of assimilation came with the arrival of the youthful and idealistic missionary William Duncan from the Church Missionary Society. Duncan eventually lead a significant portion of the native Port Simpson population back to Venn Passage at the northwestern entrance to what we now call Prince Rupert Harbour and established the missionary village of Metlakatla.

An attraction of the harbour was that it had been the site of the coastal resi-

dences and winter villages of many Skeena River families or *wuwaap*. Franz Boas wrote that "each group inhabited its own village site" in the area (1916:483), a statement supported by others and by archaeological evidence. Originally, there were a series of winter settlements in the area and the name was not for a single, large winter village but for the geography of the area which is reflected in the Tsimshian name of the area: Salt Water Passage or Maxłaxaała.

The mission settlement took the place name but Duncan's Christian Metlakatla was a new type of residence, being modelled along European lines (Usher 1974), and being a concentration of many families from many *galts'ap* in one specific site rather than around the harbour (Usher 1974, Campbell 2005:28-30). In fact, Metlakatla was filled with "large numbers of different and hostile tribes" (Usher 1974:165) not simply those who once had winter residences in the harbour area. Not surprisingly, residence in this Victorian styled village involved more than accepting the foreign religion of Christianity; it also required agreement to abide by the laws Duncan made for Metlakatla. This requirement undoubtedly was important because of the demographics of the village and, indeed, was an attraction because of the dynamics of the fur trade at Port Simpson such as described by Swanton 1905.

Originally established with just 50 Tsimshian, these were followed by other "panic-filled Indians" fleeing the small pox epidemic of 1862 (Usher 1974:64). The Gitlaan came in June and shortly after another "small tribe" joined the settlement beginning the growth of the settlement. Many were people not attracted by religion so much as by protection. "One of the chief speakers said – we have fallen down and have no breath to answer you – do your will" (Duncan Journal, quoted in Usher 1974:64-65).

Significantly, the 1862 epidemic was only one in a series of disastrous epidemics and there were other reasons for House groups to move to the missionary village of Metlakatla. For example, anthropologist Homer Barnett was told in 1938 that the Gitlaan settled there in 1862 because of a deadly feud with their neighbours up the Skeena (1941: 166). Hostilities such as the so-called Haida War at Port Simpson in 1835 (Swanton 1905)[7] illustrate the new, dangerous environment that resulted from the fur trade. The "very strict and specific guidelines that were laid out as the first laws of the village" allowed some refuge but at the expense of Tsimshian traditional life.

> The evils of white [sic] society, such as liquor, were to be unavailable at Metlakatla. But this was no return to a traditional Tsimshian life, for the basic institutional structure of Tsimshian society contained in the potlatch was to be destroyed. In its stead were to be constructed the moral and social institutions of a small, pious Victorian village. [Swanton 1905:64]

7 An archival account of the war is in the Hudson's Bay Company journals (HBCA B.201/a/4 1838-40, pages 98d-106)

As Barnett has shown with his study of the strategic conversion of Ligeex in 1860 (Barnett 1942), the cultural changes were not all imposed on a docile Tsimshian population. The chiefs were actively deciding on the advantages and disadvantages of the new social environment which some embraced and from which others distanced themselves.

Another type of settlement grew at Spokeshute as the industrial era was ushered in with the establishment of the first canneries at Port Essington in the 1880s. This location was strongly influenced by the presence of a significant Tsimshian population available for employment by the canneries, in particular people of the Kitsumkalum and Kitselas Tsimshian. Although within the general territory of the Gitzaxłaał "tribe," Port Essington was situated on a fall campsite called Spokeshute. Kitsumkalum and Kitselas were recognized as the resident "Indians" and Robert Cunningham deeded them a Special Reserve alongside the cannery town site he was building. Other "Indians" also lived at Port Essington but the site was a special one for Kitsumkalum and Kitselas.

Yet another example comes from the history of how the Tsimshian of Gitga'a**t** followed Duncan up to Alaska to establish his Christian utopia of New Metlakatla and then returned to establish their own Indian Reserve village of Hartley Bay, at a distance from their original Douglas Channel settlement located in Kitkiata Inlet (Campbell 1984).

These comments historicize the main Indian Reserve villages; but, what is the social significance of people changing their residence? An answer can be found in the changes that came with the colonial forces, especially those policies that cleared people off their lands and away from their resources, alienating them from their Aboriginal livelihoods. Historian Jean Usher focused on the destruction of Tsimshian society contained in the potlatch but the potlatch grounded Tsimshian society in the way it governed the connections to the land and resources. A more destructive attack on that grounding came following the Act of Union. Like the famous Highland clearances of the Gaelic tribes in Scotland, Canadian policy towards the land and resources created and normalized a social transformation on the Skeena that favoured industrialization and imposed new relations to the land (McDonald 1985, 1987, 1994).

Suppression of Traditional Property

Landed property

During Tsimshian sovereignty, the Tsimshian *wuwaap* or matrilineal corporate groups were associated with a variety of types of landed property governed by the common law of the *ayaawx* (McDonald 1983). The most significant ones were the *laxyuup* or estates which were House territories. A single *waap* might have one or more than one *laxyuup*, some or all of which had different types of resources to be

appropriated at different times of the year. For example the Waapm Nishaywaas, a Gisbutwada (Killerwhale clan) lineage, had several named *laxyuup* in the watersheds of the Copper River and Kleanza Creek, south of Kitselas Canyon, as well as eastward in the Skeena watershed. Geographically less extensive forms of property than the estates were specific resource sites such as the one in the Zimacord watershed owned by the Gisbutwada of Robin Town (Kitsumkalum) on the west side of Kitsumkalum Mountain (McDonald 1983, 2003). Another type of property law governed coastal residences and the ownership of the beach in front of the residences (Garfield 1939:275). These are examples from a complex system of property ownership that was disrupted by the unilateral usurpation of Tsimshian common law (*ayaawx*) and the imposition of Canadian governance by the Act of Union in 1871. Although stiff protest was mounted by the Tsimshian, the earlier colonial regime had established military dominance and set the conditions for the change in governance structure.

The most significant changes to landed property were the result of the legislation that has become known, simply, as the Indian Act. This racist law controlled property and organized the Aboriginal people into Indian Bands with members listed on a government register in Ottawa and separated from the so-called "white man." The Indian Act has a central status in the suppression of the Indigenous people in Canada but associated with this were numerous other federal and provincial laws that appropriated resources out of the Tsimshian economy and transferred them into the emerging capitalist economy (McDonald 1984, 1985, 1987, 1994).

The Indian Reserve Commission established in 1876 to set up Indian Reserves in British Columbia did its work on the lower Skeena during the 1880s and 1890s. The allocation of reserves to the Kitsumkalum and Kitselas during the early 1890s legally cleared the Tsimshian people off their *laxyuup* and concentrated them in Indian Reserve villages where government services and control could be administered. Subsequent protest from Tsimshian leaders left an historical record indicating the societal damage inflicted by the clearances.

The Tsimshian people did not passively accept the Skeena Clearances. Indeed, the Sm'gyigyet struggled to have the new BNA governments recognize their homes and properties as these were distributed across the territory. In 1874, Port Essington First Nations (Kitsumkalum and Kitselas) stopped the land surveys (Department of Indian Affairs Reports 1874:282) but this type of direct action was dangerous. Military or other violent resistance had been suppressed by the 19th century expressions of gunboat diplomacy by the British navy and British supremacy was re-enforced by encampment of a military force at Port Essington in 1877 and again in 1888 that was sent to subdue the Gitxsan troubles (Large 1996:36; Department of Indian Affairs Reports 1889:lxxxi). The alternative was negotiation and the Sm'gyigyet found a forum in the McKenna-McBride Royal Commission. This Commission was set up to investigate the many problems with the establishment of Indian Reserves

in many locations throughout BC. For the Tsimshian, the Reserves under the new regime's laws provided protection for their *laxyuup* against the encroachment of the demands of industry and influx of settlers. Numerous applications were made to the Commission to have important locales identified as Indian Reserves.

The Commission's report in 1916 did not resolve the problems but the evidence revealed the extent to which the BNA governments cleared people from their estates. In fact, applications made to the Royal Commission for additional Reserve lands provide a detailed description of the traditional lands requested by Tsimshian leaders, and the specific reasons for each the request. A quick review can reveal both the nature of the Indigenous occupation of their territory during Tsimshian sovereignty and indicate the significance the clearances had for the Tsimshian way of life (British Columbia 1916 v3:571). Itemised are the very basis of the Indigenous economy and social geography: houses, cabins, graveyards, gardens, fishing stations, fish drying houses, trapping base, improved lands, and cockle beaches. These types of items were a part of productive properties that were the foundation of Tsimshian society.

For example, the settlement at Gitxondakł, a key residential site of the Kitsumkalum Ganhada and Laxgibuu families on Treston Lake in the Kitsumkalum Valley, was the subject of an application from the respected Ganhada leader, Charles Nelson. He reported that his family had two houses on the site and that the site was an important fishing station for his group. The Commissioners did not allow the application due to the presence of a Fire Warden's cabin. The decision read:

> Land applied for lies entirely within the boundaries of surveyed Perpetual Timber Limits Nos. 8686 and 8695, both in good standing; in addition the more northerly parcel appears to be entirely covered by a Forest Ranger's Station – land applied for is therefore not available. [British Columbia 1916 v3:568]

Forestry was a fledgling industry in the new settlement of Terrace when that settlement established in 1909. The Fire Warden's cabin could not have been there for very many years earlier, certainly not as long as the traditional residences of the Aboriginal owners, and was built without local consultation of the Kitsumkalum residents.

Not found in the applications are the intangible aspects of Waap property, the *adaawx* with their "true tellings" of Tsimshian history, the heritage values, the social relations embodied in the distribution of people and things. In the example just given, Treston Lake was the site of a special village where trout were fished according to specialized knowledge of the waters and currents, where there were nearby *laxyuup* with fruit bushes that were managed and maintained for their taste and nutritional values, and where significant events occurred that the oral histories recorded as part of the property laws and as evidence of the special connections and responsibilities the people had to the natural world.

All these cultural features are an integral and important component of the legal fabric that constituted Tsimshian real property but they were not comprehensible cross-culturally to the colonial system which sought evidence only of a physical presence and of a function relevant to colonial development. This official neglect is part and parcel of the suppression of Tsimshian governance, including the Tsimshian oral history. The fact that the suppression of oral history still occurs and was not fully rooted out by court cases such as Delgamuukw is of importance in understanding why a certain version of Tsimshian history has emerged. I would argue this version is "safe" in the sense that it is a diluted and, to some extent, distorted, version of Tsimshian governance and property laws. It is a safe history because it does not provide the strongest challenge to colonial structures.

Other property

The previous section discussed the clearances but the removal of people from their *laxyuup* was accompanied by the removal of their resources from the Tsimshian world and Tsimshian society into the industrial world and capitalist society. In an important thesis on changing landscapes, Brenda Guernsey documented the shift from a landscape as it appeared under the indigenous Tsimshian regime of resource management, to a colonial landscape that was first perceived as an untended wilderness, to a true wilderness vacant of residences and damaged by clear cut logging that was indiscriminate of other use values. Significantly, she showed how that "the rhetoric embedded in the culturally constructed concept of 'Wilderness' had the effect of dehumanizing and erasing an extant vibrant cultural Aboriginal landscape" (2008:ii).

The new resource management regime was established with a host of resource laws and regulations passed by the Canadian and provincial government in far away capitals. Many ambitious Tsimshian worked with the new opportunities, trying to make a life in the colonial period (McDonald 1984, 1985). Some prospered by adopting the new capitalist economy as business owners, merchants, and labourers; others worked with it syncretistically, merging their traditional practices with industry as petty commodity producers by trapping, freighting, hand logging, gill netting, or producing crafts (McDonald 1985). In the end, the loss of ownership left them dependent and set the conditions for Tsimshian underdevelopment.

It is important to bear in mind that the Indian Act and Indian Reserve system were only one policy area that cleared the Tsimshian from their lands. Various other pieces of resource legislation, such as the provincial Game Act or Forestry Act or the Dominion/Federal Fisheries Act, structured the new economy and conditioned the Tsimshian participation (McDonald 1985). As laws evolved to encourage and regulate the emerging capitalist economy, they redefined individual resources as having commercial significance, and expropriated the commercialized resources

out of Tsimshian control into the new economy (McDonald 1985), in the process marginalizing the Tsimshian ability to develop the resources (McDonald 1987), leading to Tsimshian underdevelopment (McDonald 1994).

The Sm'gyigyet (chiefs) and their representatives were not passive victims of the process. They mobilized important instances of political resistance to this loss of resources and transformation (McDonald 1984, 1985; McDonald and Joseph 2000) but the land had been cleared, government agents with the authority of the state were in place, and the corrosive effects of the new property relationships were eroding the ability for effective resistance and transforming Tsimshian society. New property relations were in effect and transforming the conditions supporting the basic institutional structure of Tsimshian society.

Creation of new property relationships during colonial rule

The clearing of the land through the Indian Reserve system cut off the corporate groups, the *wuwaap*, from their estates and other landed property. The resource legislation appropriated resources into the capitalist economy and redefined both the technology that could be used on those resources and the way labour could be applied. In the worst case, so-called "Indian" labour was excluded by the regulations; in other cases, the way it was able to engage was redefined with consequences to the functioning of Tsimshian society.

As an example, many Aboriginal groups used the provincial Game Law to protect their traditional territories by registering their traplines. Kitsumkalum people found they often had to contend with non-Indians taking advantage of the law and registering traplines in advance of the traditional owners, with a consequent loss of control over their *laxyuup* (McDonald 1984, 1985). Another, culturally significant challenge the registration system gave to the Tsimshian *ayaawx* was the patrilineal bias of the Game Law towards fathers and sons. This undermined the matrilineality of *laxyuup* ownership as defined by Tsimshian common law, affecting the continuity of trapline ownership over time, and affecting the integrity of the organization of the *Waap*.

New social relations were emerging in the Tsimshian productive economy as Canadian and provincial organizational structures for traplines, hand logging operations, commercial fishing, labour were normalized. In tandem with these changes within Tsimshian society, the Indigenous resources expropriated out of Tsimshian production by these resource laws were transformed into new resources defined commercially. Salmon were no longer a Tsimshian fish but became a cannery fish, a sport fish, and a food fish. The status of the cedar tree was reduced as a multipurpose and sacred plant in Tsimshian society and culture, to become a log for a global market harvested by hand loggers, later by power loggers, and later still by corporations clear cutting the forest for export to the USA and, more recently, to China.

As a result of the clearances and the appropriation of resources into the capitalist economy, the demographic patterns of the eleven Skeena River communities changed. With the loss of Waap corporate ownership of their properties and resources, the Tsimshian social organization lost a crucial force for integration. The *wuwaap* declined as the Skeena River families were concentrated into the new corporate groups that became the six Indian Reserve villages of Lax Kw'alaams, Metlakatla, Port Essington, Kitsumkalum, and Kitselas (Endudoon or Kulspai and Gitaus). Many relocated off reserve to urban centres, including Prince Rupert, Port Edward, Port Essington (off reserve), Terrace, New Kitselas, Vancouver, and Victoria. So long as they retained their Indian status and membership in one of the village corporate groups, they retained some control over their Aboriginal resources, albeit in a radically transformed way. Some choose to abandon their Indian status in favour of citizen status in Canada.

Social relations changed profoundly during the Indian Affairs era and were simplified with the loss of the important organization of the *wil'naat'ał*. The next section discusses these changes and the impacts they had on being Tsimshian.

Being Tsimshian

The classic literature on Tsimshian social organization describes five fundamental cultural categories of social being that are cultural axes along which the citizens of the First Nation align themselves: kinship (houses, lineages, clans, and phratries), marriage alliances, *galts'ap*, residence, and class. Each of these categories entitled an individual to a certain bundle of rights. For example, kinship groups owned property and productive resources, and marriage alliances gave the spouse extended rights of access and use to the property of the other spouse's kin group. The most important bundle of rights was the *Waap* or House group because this conferred an individual's main social identity as well as access to the means of livelihood. Through the matrilineal descent within the *Waap*, the individual inherited the basic social identity and placement as well as rights belonging to the *Waap*. The paternal side linked the individual to a larger group in the community, and provided services that marked and guided the individual through life's changes.

Tsimshian social integration

There often are three assumptions underlying presentations about the relationship between Tsimshian social groups and traditional land use. One assumption is the uncritical equating of today's reserve communities to specific traditional *galts'ap*. In other words, we tend to say, in a simplistic way, that there are nine tribes in the Lax Kw'alaams/Metlakatla group and one each in Kitsumkalum, Kitselas, Gitxaała, Hartley Bay, and Klemtu. This assumption lies at the heart of the dissonance between the Allied Tsimshian Tribes based in the Indian Reserve of Lax Kw'alaams and the

other reserve Tsimshian communities. The second assumption follows from the first and enables people to equate the nine tribes of the Lax Kw'alaams/Metlakatla group as populations distinct from the other communities, notably from Kitsumkalum and Kitselas on the Skeena River. The third assumption is that the tribes are the corporate groups rather than the lineages. These three assumptions have become so prevalent in discussions of the Tsimshian that they have the power of an orthodoxy guiding historians (Marsden 2002), archaeologists (Martindale 2006; Martindale and Marsden 2003), and sociologists (Matthews et al N.d.; DiFranscesco 2010). I argue that the assumptions come from a tendency, described by Michael Harkin, to "frame their arguments in terms of the ideology of settler colonialism (Harkin 2010:114)

The first assumption makes a correspondence between the modern reserve communities and the traditional ones. Is this true? Writing in 1917, Marius Barbeau described the villages as flexible in time, with old villages being abandoned and new ones established frequently:

> Essentially a local and accidental unit, occupying a definite expanse of territory, and consisting of various families considering each other as relatives or strangers, and tracing their origins to different localities and ancestors. [Barbeau 1917:403]

This is not to say the villages were not important but their stability is in contrast to the "greater stability of the kinship and social groups that integrated so many other aspects of Tsimshian society. The situation of instability must have conflicted with the economic importance of territorial integrity" (Marius Barbeau, paraphrased by Louis Allaire 1984:82). Significantly, Garfield was told in Lax Kw'alaams that "In ancient Tsimshian culture the loyalties of [tribal] members were, first to their own lineage and clan and second, to their tribe or village and its chief" (Garfield 1939:318). This passage further indicates the temporary nature of the tribe.

The community of Kitsumkalum exemplifies the flexibility of these relationships. Centred as it now is at Kitsumkaylum Reserve, the registered Kitsumkalum Band membership currently includes several lineages that the orthodoxy associates with the nine *galts'ap* of the villages of Lax Kw'alaams and Metlakatla. A particularly striking example is the important house of Waaps Niskimaas, the Ganhada group from the Giluts'aaw (the Killatsul or Lakelse tribe) which had its main *laxyuup* or estates in the Lakelse watershed. As a result of arranged marriage in the early 20th century, the Giluts'aaw Ganhada were linked with the Kitsumkalum Band and reserve community, sharing resources and lands along the Skeena and at coastal sites, supporting each other in the evolving global economy and political situation, and living together in the same camps and settlements along the Skeena and at coastal sites. Another example is a Gisbutwada *waap* which the orthodoxy associates with Kitselas; however a part of its *wil'naat'aɬ* resides in Kitsumkalum. The political

interests of traditional *wuwaap* like these two lineages living in Kitsumkalum are represented by the Kitsumkalum Band Council and Administration.

In addition to these groups, there are numerous individuals who the orthodoxy would classify with the tribes of Lax Kw'alaams and Kitselas but who are living in Kitsumkalum, often with a Kitsumkalum registration number for their Indian status. Some examples from the Kitsumkalum genealogy project include individuals associated with *wuwaap* of the Ginaxangiik, Gispaxlo'ots, the Gitzaxłaał, Gitlaan, Gitga'at, and the Gitwilgyoots.

The second assumption is that the nine tribes of Lax Kw'alaams and Metlakatla are somehow the sole members of the group that does not include the Kitsumkalum or Kitselas communities. Sometimes the term used in Lax Kw'alaams for the nine tribes is "Tsimshian" or "Coast Tsimshian." Marsden, who uses the term Northern Tsimshian for the nine tribes, claimed that although Kitsumkalum and Kitselas "have always been part of the Tsimshian, as they are now called, they do not fully accept the use of this term to describe their tribes and peoples" (2002:fn 4). In fact, Kitsumkalum warmly embraces the term Tsimshian. They do not accept efforts to exclude them and assert their common heritage with all the Tsimshian on the coast and their coastal settlements. Being Tsimshian is such a fundamental part of the existence of the Kitsumkalum people that to say otherwise is to deny them their identity. The geography of their inland territories in the broad valley was an environment with different opportunities from the narrow valleys further down the river but they still valued their sea food and coastal sites as much as their other Tsimshian relatives. People living in Kitsumkalum will point out that even the name Tsimshian[8] translates as "in the Skeena" and includes not only the people of Lax Kw'alaams and Metlakatla but equally those of Kitsumkalum and Kitselas. This more inclusive view is the common understanding in the oral histories of Kitsumkalum and is well represented in the *adaawx* told by Walter Wright of Kitselas and published by that Band. There is plenty of supporting archival and published evidence to substantiate the claim that the Skeena River people who are labelled "Coast Tsimshian" or "Tsimshian" includes the community of Kitsumkalum.

A better understanding of the relationship and role of the Reserve Villages – tribe – community is possible with a closer examination of what Boas, Garfield, Barbeau and others actually said about the tribes. In the following sections, I will present this information and address to the third assumption that the tribes are the land owning corporate groups.

8 This is spelled Ts'msyen in the new standards that are emerging (e.g., Sm'algyax Living Language Talking Dictionary http://smalgyax.unbc.ca/). Currently the Kitsumkalum Elders group has stated a preference for the established spellings of Tsimshian and Kitsumkalum.

Galts'ap

The traditional understanding of the 19th century Tsimshian social geography identifies 14 social groups or *galts'ap* concentrated along the Skeena River or in close proximity to the Skeena. These are variously labelled tribes, towns, or *galts'ap* (communities). Prior to the demographic changes associated with Tsimshian participation in the globalizing economy and suppression under colonial policies such as the Indian reserve system, the Tsimshian had numerous villages and town sites throughout their territories.

In the 19th century, the individual houses of these *galts'ap* lived on or near their properties to work the lineage resources but they also gathered and congregated in a number of town sites for a variety of reasons that included resource processing such as the labour intensive salmon fishing, winter ceremonies such as the feast and secret society functions, and defense against hostile groups.

The Gisbutwada historian, Walter Wright, described the creation of towns as the result of the resettlement of people, the expansion of towns as the result of the movement of families into new territories and being welcomed, the breakup of towns over time as the result of environmental pressures (Wright and Robinson 1962). This dynamic was also noted by anthropologists who recorded social information from Tsimshian leaders. Marius Barbeau, in his book *Totem Poles of the Gitksan* (1929), reported that the *galts'ap* are nothing but casual geographic units; an agglomeration that could come into existence and also dissolve through necessity or catastrophe (1929:152). Boas also wrote that

> some of the "tribes" are evidently the result of a breaking-up of older communities, made necessary by their increase in numbers. It is told that when a village became too large, the head chief would assign part of his people to his nephew, who would set out and found a new village, which would naturally embrace only members of his own exogamic group. [1916:486]

The process Boas describes is undoubtedly the birth of a new *waap* within the *wil'naat'aɬ* and the extension of the *wil'naat'aɬ* into new territory.

The colonial experiences lead to significant changes in this axis as described earlier but change itself was not new. With the establishment of the European presence and the beginning of the Tsimshian incorporation into the emerging global economy, some of these residential sites transformed into Port Simpson (now Lax Kw'alaams), Metlakatla, Port Essington, Kitsumkalum, and Kitselas' Endudoon, Queensway (now Kulspai) and Gitaus. In addition, some individuals and families moved into the new type of *galts'ap* – urban centres such as Victoria, Vancouver, Prince Rupert, and Terrace. These Indian Reserve settlements now take a central place in Tsimshian social structure. The next sections look at other structures conditioning Tsimshian social life: kinship structures as well as class structures.

Social class

The second axis was structured by the social classes of *Sm'oogyet* or chief, *k'algyigyet* or common people, and *gaxaa* or slaves. These terms[9] do not fully capture the intricacies of the class system but provide a basis for the following comments. For example, a more refined description of the chiefly class should also include, at least, the House leaders or *lik'agyigyet* and matriarchs or *Sigyidm hana'a*. It should be noted that women were of the same rank as men (Halpin and Sequin 1990:275). The Sm'gyigyet (plural form of Sm'oogyet) were centred in the lineage structure of the Houses but had strong common interests as stewards of the House properties and resources. For present purposes, I include all types of chiefs in the term 'Sm'oogyet' without expanding on the various levels and roles.

The common interests of the Sm'gyigyet were apparent in feasting, in the two secret societies that were exclusive to Sm'gyigyet, arranged marriages, in building political and military alliances, and in economic activities involving productivity, distribution, and trade. The discussions occurred in many situations where Sm'gyigyet from different groups gathered and where some class-consciousness could emerge. Garfield reported from Lax Kw'alaams that

> In ancient times inter-tribal matters were settled by a council of the chiefs of the tribes involved, and their decisions were final. There is still great respect for the opinions of the chiefs and where the council cannot agree on a course of action the matter is referred to the chiefs, who meet and hand down their decisions for the council to follow. [Garfield 1939:323]

Even today, these interests can be observed by watching the communication that occurs among the leadership seated in the feast hall at the Sm'oogyet Table. As Sm'gyigyet watch and witness the business that is conducted in the feast, they discuss among themselves the mutual concerns chiefs have concerning the business of the social groups that constitute the Tsimshian Nation.

Some social historians have argued that a new, more complex political organization, a "proto-state," was being created by the chiefs at Port Simpson (Robinson 1978) while others feel the evidence is incomplete (McDonald 1985:22). The basis of this was the ranking of the Sm'gyigyet within a *galts'ap*. As Garfield noted, "In most tribes there are several chiefs' lineages in separate, though related, houses, but one is always recognized as the head chief, while the others are subordinate to him" (Garfield 1939:182). Margaret Seguin (1985) described the process of acquiring the head chief position as it occurred in the 1980s in Hartley Bay.

The ranking of the *galts'ap* Sm'gyigyet touches on a significant difference within the Tsimshian Nation; the very highly ranked Kitsumkalum title-

9 In this paper, I follow the spelling standards set out in the *Sm'algyax Living Legacy Talking Dictionary*. (Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Authority and the Sm'algyax Committee of School District 52 2013). This linguistic reference also provides some helpful ethnographic insights.

holder Łagaax (Arthur Stevens) told Barbeau in 1926 that Kitsumkalum had no lik'agyigyet. Unlike the other Tsimshian, "the system [at Kitsumkalum] resembled the Gitksan in that each head of the group was recognized as chief of his own group. He recognizes himself the difference between the Tsimshian group and this" (Barbeau and Beynon B-F 49.2). Kitsumkalum did not have a *galts'ap* chief, a *mansm'ooygit* or *wii sm'ooygit*.

Today, a new factor has emerged in political practice. Leadership comes from the contemporary chiefs who may include the traditional titleholders as well as elected chiefs and councillors, and hired leaders. These leaders now sit not only at House feast tables to discuss the traditional topics but also at village feast tables, Band Council tables, and Board Room tables to discuss the business of the village.

The other classes had different interests and had less opportunity to develop those interests outside of the residential patterns. As a result, commoners were more focused on matters internal to the lineage structure. Slaves, like slaves generally, did not have the rights and freedoms necessary to develop an effectively significant class consciousness. Only the chiefs had an environment to nurture an effective class consciousness. One expression of this was the arranging of strategic marriages.

Kinship, Waap

During Tsimshian sovereignty, the Tsimshian lived in a kinship oriented society, the values of which continue to shape Tsimshian social life and cultural practices. The familial axis places the individual within three key matrilineal groups: the corporate group called the *Waap* or *Wilp*, the *wil'naat'ał*, and the *pteex*.

The term *waap* translates into English as House, implying the physical present of the group in the structure of an actual house build of massive cedar support poles and beams and split cedar planks used to clad the structure (Seguin 1984). These were impressive residential structures that placed families in town sites with other families who occupied their own houses. While the physical *waap*[10] consists of an extended family and attached individuals such as husbands, the Waap as a corporate group is a matrilineage (Garfield 1939:174; Durlach 1928:141; Seguin 1985; McDonald 2003).

The House Groups lived near the resource territories that they used, including their estates or *laxyuup* and other productive properties. Tsimshian common law recognized a complex assortment of property rights (McDonald 1983).

Marriages

Alliances created through marriage and other means linked the *wuwaap* and *wil'naat'ał* to each other and across *galts'ap* and *pteex*. Marriages within the same *pteex*, *wil'naat'ał*, and *waap* were forbidden (McDonald 2003) and efforts were made to create alliances of wealth and for peace. These marriages consolidated the wealth

10 In this paper, I follow the convention of capitalizing the term when it refers to a *Waap* or House as a corporate group but not when it refers to a house structure.

of the *wuwaap* over generations, extended social connections and privileges of the spouses and created for the next generation the obligations of the paternal side. John Cove provided a detailed analysis of the marriage strategy over generations (Cove 1976).

Pteex

Another important structure based on the principles of kinship is the *pteex*. In English the *pteex* is commonly called either clan or tribe, and in anthropological terminology it is a "phratry."

Traditionally, the literature ascribes to the Tsimshian four matrilineal, exogamous social divisions called *pteex* consisting of the Ganhada or Raven phratry / Raven clan, the Gisbutwada or Killerwhale phratry / Blackfish Clan, the Laxgibuu or Wolf phratry / Wolf Clan, and the Laxsgiik or Eagle phratry / Eagle Clan. The *pteex* are associations using the fictions of kinship so that members of each *pteex* feel a kindred that extends beyond their lineage and *galts'ap*. Viola Garfield stated they had "no important function other than the regulation of spouse selection" (1966:20). She goes on to call them "loose federations of clans, which were the named subdivisions of phratries" (1966:20). The subdivisions she identified are the *wil'naat'aɬ* as discussed in this chapter.

Something should be said about the English translations of the Sm'algyax terms. In English, the divisions are called either tribes or clans, which causes confusion because the term tribe is also sometimes applied to the Tsimshian as a group, sometimes to the individual *galts'ap* communities, and sometimes to the *pteex*; the term clan is sometimes applied to the *pteex* and sometimes to the *wil'naat'aɬ*. Technically, the *pteex* can be called phratries. The Tsimshian phratry is a fictive kinship group that integrates individual members within and between residential sites, and even beyond the social boundaries of the Tsimshian world into the neighbouring territories of the culturally close Nisga'a and Gitksan communities, as well as the similar but more distinct Haida and Haisla.

There is also confusion over the nature of the *Pteex*. The passage from Viola Garfield establishes two salient features about the *pteex*: they are federations of *wil'naat'aɬ*, and they have limited function in Tsimshian social organization. Garfield also reported the *pteex* to have an extremely complex composition of *wil'naat'aɬ* with diverse origins and histories. The member houses of a *pteex* were so dispersed that some *wil'naat'aɬ* did not know of related houses in distant *wil'naat'aɬ*. Nonetheless, as members of the same *pteex*, all *wil'naat'aɬ* shared a relationship. Although in today's society, that relationship seems paramount over the actual kinship of the *wil'naat'aɬ*, for Garfield, who conducted her research in the 1930s, the *wil'naat'aɬ* seemed paramount over the *pteex*. Barbeau was in accord with Garfield's description of *pteex* as federations:

> The phratries in their present form are not very ancient. They are more in the nature of a federation than the natural growth of kinships units, once small, into larger groups; their ramifications extend several nations. [Barbeau 1929:152]

In this passage, Barbeau saw some influence shaping the present form of the phratries but declined to elaborate. Marjorie Halpin and Margaret Seguin commented that the "four-clan structure appears to have been the case only in the post-contact villages of Port Simpson and Metlakatla" (1990:274). While this statement ignores the four-clan model found in Kitsumkalum and Kitselas, it does indicate a recognition that the perceptions of the phratries has changed, an observation that is important in the consideration of the role of the *wil'naat'ał* below. This is not to say the phratries themselves are recent. Both Boas (1916:485 ff) and Barbeau in his books on totem poles (1929, 1951) deal with the ancient origin of the phratries and *wil'naat'ał*.

More recently, Roth describes the fourfold division of Tsimshian society with the interesting statement that the *pteex* are

> a simplification, a kind of pidginization, of a more complex history. This pidginization enables regularity in feasting, marriage, and trading relations but does not erase history or memory [of the constituent parts such as the *wil'naat'ał*]. [Roth 2006:183]

Most pertinent to the present discussion is that Barbeau thought of the phratries as fictive kinship groups with political functions across nations and *galts'ap* (1929:153). Thus the *pteex* exist across and to some extent connect Tsimshian settlements. This marks the *pteex* / phratries as distinct from the *wil'naat'ał* with the *pteex* cross-cutting the other cultural axes and the *wil'naat'ał* being the extended lineage family.

Role of the Wil'naat'ał

To properly understand Tsimshian social organization and integration, it is important to distinguish between the phratry and the *wil'naat'ał* (McDonald 2003:73ff). Unfortunately, English usage of the term clan for both social structures has confounded our appreciation of the distinctiveness of these two important concepts and, possibly, hidden some of the importance of the *wil'naat'ał* from modern scholarship and popular social consciousness. As a result, scholars have paid a rather erratic attention to the *wil'naat'ał*. In some cases, the *wil'naat'ał* is treated as a significant component in Tsimshian social organization (Boas, Barbeau, Garfield). The elders of Kitsumkalum who guided and endorsed the writing of the People of the Robin

(McDonald 2003), a community based ethnography of Kitsumkalum, included a discussion of the importance of the *wil'naat'ał*. Similarly, the community based dictionary, the Sm'algyax Living Legacy Talking Dictionary**,** highlights the concept (Ts'msyen Sm'algyax Authority). In other cases, there is scant or no acknowledgement of the *wil'naat'ał*. This range of differences in treatment is difficult to reconcile.

Genealogist Chris Roth described the *wil'naat'ał* as a "web of heterogeneous macro-matrilineages" that form the "consensus of ethno-genealogical reality, which is of a multitude of matrilineages with distinct patrimonies and essences" (2006:178). In other words, the *wil'naat'ał* is a social group consisting of relatives and related *Wuwaap*/Houses, linked matrilineally back to a common ancestor. It is an important key to Tsimshian social organization. Like so many Tsimshian concepts, it is also important to note a limitation in discussing these concepts in the English language. In John Cove's study of the Gitxsan traditional concept of land ownership he found the term *wil'naat'ał* "appears to refer to a number of different kinds of collective; localized sub-clan being one" (1982:fn 4). Boas translated the term as "company, society" (1916:487) and did not limit its use to the clan (or sub-clan in Cove's usage).

Franz Boas (1916:483-488) dedicated several pages to the description of the 'subdivision" or *wil'naat'ał* (spelled as *wul-na-t!a'ł* 1916:488), concluding that

> it appears from these data that there are two intercrossing divisions among the Tsimshian tribes – one a tribal division based essentially on village communities consisting of clan fellows; another one a subdivision of the exogamic groups according to their provenience. [Boas1916:485]

He then went on to give examples of the *wil'naat'ał* as reported by Kitsumkalum people and others who he interviewed in Port Essington in 1888 (486), including the information of his collaborator Henry Tait.

This indicates the social importance he ascribed to the *wil'naat'ał* but, as he himself alluded, his ethnography was too preliminary and his field research too brief for him to fully develop his understanding of the *wil'naat'ał* and to be able to identify clearly the various groupings (1916:487).

Viola Garfield, on the other hand, who had more extensive experience with the Tsimshian communities of Lax Kw'alaams and Metlakatla described the *wil'naat'ał* in her published dissertation as a sub-clan or branch of a pteex that shared an origin 'myth' meaning an *adaawx* (1939:174-76). For her, "The lineage is the significant functioning unit" (174) that is key to understanding Tsimshian society. Unfortunately, as Chris Roth (2008) has pointed out, Garfield is inconsistent with her usage of the terms clan and lineage and does not always make clear which level of social organization she is using but a careful reading makes it clear that she understood the *wil'naat'ał* to be the important unit "for social control, ownership of houses and property, and the control of various spirit powers" (Eggan 1940:139).

Barbeau's wil'naat'ał

Among the anthropologists who document the *wil'naat'ał*, few come to grips with it as thoroughly as Barbeau who benefited from working with the Tsimshian ethnographer William Beynon. Barbeau was keenly aware of the role of the *wil'naat'ał* and provided important ethnographic information on the geographic placement and international linkages of the *wil'naat'ał*, based on his studies with the Gitxsan. A selection of one *wil'naat'ał* from each *pteex* reveals the importance of this information.

Barbeau's information for the phratries shows links to Kitsumkalum and other Tsimshian communities for each phratry. This is further indication of the importance of the *wil'naat'ał*.

The Ganhada wil'naat'ał

Barbeau recorded seven *wil'naat'ał* for the Ganhada. One of them is the group that came from Kitselas. Among the Gitxsan this *wil'naat'ał* was

> under the leadership of Hlengwah, of Kitwanga. It is a subdivision of a Tsimsyan clan, that of Qawm [K'oom], of Kitselas, and Neesyaranæt [Nisyaganaat], of the Gitsees tribe. Representatives of this clan, which originated among the Tlingit, are to be found among the Gitksan, the Hagwelget, the Tsimsyan, the Kitimat, and the Haida. It is one of the outstanding clans of the Larhsail-Ranhada [LaxSeel-Ganhada] phratry on the North West Coast. Halus [Haalus], of Kitwanga, and Mawlarhen, of Gitsegyukla, are descendants of one of the first Hlengwah among the Gitksan. Hlengwah's ancestors, when they migrated up the Skeena, were adopted by a family under the leadership of Yarhyaq. And that family later amalgamated with that of Arhkawt, of the Frog-woman clan, after he had migrated south from the Nass. [Barbeau 1929:153]

The Laxgibuu wil'naat'ał

Barbeau recorded five *wil'naat'ał* for the Laxgibuu distributed among other Nations:

> The Wolf phratry consists of five clans, all of which are genetically related: the Prairie clan, the Gitxondakł clan, the Wild-rice clan, the second Wild-rice clan and the Kaien Island clan. [1929:157]

One of these originated in the Kitsumkalum Valley and still is active in the Kitsumkalum community – the Gitxondakł. Barbeau identified seven Gitxondakł Houses, also distributed through four nations: the two Laxgibuu families in Kitsumkalum, four families in Gitwingax and two in Morristown.

> It is undoubtedly part of the southward migratory movements of the northern Wolves, like the Prairie-clan. But its members trace back their origin only to

> Gitrhangakhl [Gitxondakł], at the headwaters of Kalem [Kalum] River, near the Nass.[11] It consists of three branches on the Skeena; two families at Gitsemrælem [Kitsumkalum]; three, at Kitwanga; and one, at Hagwelget; and at least one on the Nass, that of Nees-yawet, at Gitlarhdamks. Arhteeh, Tenemgyet, and Hrpeelarhæ head this group of Kitwanga, and Waws, their relative, is the head of a family at Hagwelget. [1929: 156]

Today, Kitsumkalum Laxgibuu live on the Nass and in coastal communities in continuation of the distributed geographic pattern across many ecological zones and political environments. Today, members of this *wil'naat'ał* who have hereditary names are widely distributed, living in locations such as Kitsumkalum, Lax Kw'alaams, Gitwangak, Cedarvale, Ayiansh, Prince Rupert and Quesnel where they have access to traditional foods and other resources, as well as to wage labour.

Such a wide distribution implies much in terms of social strategies. Like the Gisbutwada case, the connections were maintained and provided each *Waap* with potential allies and support over a large area. Aside from published and archival sources, I have seen these relations continuing in ceremonial contexts such as the feast hall, in economic contexts of sharing traditional foods, and political contexts of sharing information and support.

The Laxsgiik wil'naat'ał

Barbeau recorded only one *wil'naat'ał* for the Gitksan Laxsgiik, but claimed it originated with the Kitsumkalum:

> Only one clan of this phratry exists among the Gitksan, under the leadership of Qawq, at Kitwanga. It may be designated as the Gitanræt[12] clan. It is part of the Na'a clan, which originated at Na'a, among the Tlingit, on the Alaskan coast, and migrated south after intratribal feuds with the Wolf clans. The Gitanræt sub-clan is a subdivision of the Kitsumkalum [Gitsemrælem] Eagle families, under one of the earliest Legyærh. Qawq now heads three Eagle families, of the same sub-clan, at Kitwanga, those of Qawq, Tewlalasu, and Sqayæn. [1929:156]

The Gisbutwada wil'naat'ał

The information about the Gisbutwada phratry is both informative about Tsimshian society and revealing about the greater depth of information that Barbeau recorded. Garfield wrote that there were two main branches of the Gisbutwada. Each has their own myth or *adaawx*, one from Temlaxham in the interior and the other from the coast:

> Those who possess the Gau-a myth and the myth of descent from Prairie Town (T'am-lax-am [Temlaxham]) in the interior form one branch; those who own the

11 Alternate spellings in brackets come from contemporary standards used by Gitxsan cartographers.

12 Gitanræt on the Skeena is now known under the name of Fiddlers Creek.

> Git-na-gun-a'ks myth of origin in the south form the other… a coastal origin for this branch, which probably constituted the original coast Blackfish clan members. [Garfield 1939:173-174]

Barbeau, on the other hand, recorded five *wil'naat'aɬ* for the Fireweed[13] phratry of the interior. Three are closely related branches of the Sky Clan, one of which is part of Kitsumkalum:

> The Sky clan is one of the most important among the Gitksan, the Tsimsyan, and the Nisga'a [Nisræ]; it is also represented among the Haidas of Queen Charlotte islands, and two Athapascan groups, the Babine and the Hagwelet, of the interior plateaux. Its origin is traced back to Temlaham, on the Skeena, and its remote ancestress was Skawah, the virgin whom Rays-of-the-Sun, a sky spirit, once took to wife, in mythic times. Its members among the Gitksan fall into three or four groups or sub-clans. Their differences are marked; and they consider each other as belonging to wholly different clans. The Gitksan families that belong to the Sky clan proper are: Gurhsan and Hanamuq, of Gitsegyukla; Gitludahl, Nurhs, and Wawsemlarhæ, of Kispayaks; Hatisran and Aret, of Gitenmaks (Hazleton); *'Wiidildal of Kitsumklaum* [Weedeldæl, of Gitsemrælem]; Tpee, of the Nass; and the several "royal" Gisbutwada [Gispewuwade] families among the Tsimsyan - Weesaiks, of the Ginaxangiik [Ginarhangyeek]; Nees-hlkemeek, of the Giluts'aaw [Gillodzar]; Neeswærhs, of the Ginadoiks [Ginahdawks], and Tseebesæ, of the [Gitrhahla]. [1929:154, emphasis added]

This is an especially relevant example of the linkages of the *wil'naat'aɬ* to several Tsimshian *galts'ap* (Kitsumkalum, Giluts'aaw, Ginaxangiik, Ginadoiks, and Gitxaała) as well as among the Nisga'a, Gitxsan, Haida, Babine, and Hagwelget. Unfortunately, Barbeau was confused on this piece of history. He either failed to record the connection this *wil'naat'aɬ* also had to two Gisbutwada groups at Kitselas canyon or misunderstood the connection. He wrote that "and Nees-tarhawk, of Kitsalas, among the Skeena River Tsimsyan" was from a clan called "Gitkeemelæ" that "traces its origin to the mythic village of Keemelæ, a short distance above Gitlarhdamks, on Nass River" (1929:154). However, the traditionally trained historian of this group, Walter Wright, who wore the title Nistaxo'ox (Nees-tarhawk in Barbeau's spelling), described the group as not separate from the other Sky Clan as described by Barbeau.

I have chosen examples that are most relevant to Kitsumkalum. There are many more that exist in the three nations. They all show the same integrative pattern of being in multiple nations yet maintaining the familial ties and providing assistance to one another when needed. They shared their history, their kinship, and their resources in people and property.

13 The Gitxsan use this English term for the Gisbutwada and Giskaast in their own language.

Wil'naat'ał of the Men of Medeek

A classic narrative of a *wil'naat'ał* is the history of the Waaps Nishaywaas as told by the traditionally and highly trained Tsimshian oral historian, Sm'oogyet Nistaxo'ox, Walter Wright, and recorded by the temporary Terrace resident Will Robinson (Wright and Robinson 1962). Several versions of the narrative from a dozen other knowledgeable people collaborate and extend the information in *Men of Medeek*. All their narratives form a compilation of *adaawx* recorded by Marius Barbeau and William Beynon over a period of 40 years[14] and organized by Barbeau into an unpublished collection on the history of the Gisbutwada (Barbeau, N.d).

The story of the *Men of Medeek* is the history of the movement of that one lineage from their ancestral homeland of Temlaxham, down the Skeena River to Kitselas canyon, and beyond. In the process of establishing themselves on the Skeena River, the family established new houses at Kitselas Canyon, Kitsumkalum River, Zimacord River, Lakelse River, Gitnadoix River, Exstew River, Skeena River sites, and Gitxaała. Other members of the clan are among the Nisga'a, Gitxsan, Haida, Wet'suwet'en at Hazelton, and Nat'oot'en at Lake Babine. This is a good example of how geographically dispersed a lineage can become and of how a *wil'naat'ał* can form.

Walter Wright's narrative relates how the chief of Gitxaała invited Ts'ibasaa (Che-Ve-Sar) and Saaks to stay and live in Gitxaała. Although Nishaywaas sang a funeral dirge to signify the loss of his brothers as chiefs of Kitselas, their separation did not end their relationship and they sang the war song before parting (Wright and Robinson 1962:52-54). This narrative illustrates how the extended family stayed as a unit that was a clan in the technical anthropological sense and a *wil'naat'ał* in the Tsimshian sense.

The Sm'oogyet, Walter Wright, spoke of the unity of the Totem of Medeek through all the villages and lands where the 'cadet' houses were established. Viola Garfield wrote that "in theory, all members of a clan [*wil'naat'ał*] were obligated to render mutual assistance and protection" (1939:326-327, 1966:22). Garfield's qualifier is the geographic dispersion of the members but that was an asset not a problem for mobile people. As Walter Wright related,

> for them there were reasons for trips of friendships. Ts'ibasaa (Che-Ve-Sar) and Saaks welcomed friendship. At Kitkatla they delighted in visits with their relatives, made them welcome. Neas Waias, whose home at Gitnidox was on the main route of river travel, saw much of the people who journeyed on the Skeena. Here was a convenient place to stop for the night. Here his relatives rested on their trips. So the bonds of blood and friendship were held taut. The federation of the scattered peoples of Medeek grew stronger with each succeeding generation.

14 The recording occurred during the years 1915, 1916, 1924, 1926, 1939, 1947-48, 1948-49, 1952, and 1954.

The federation supported and promoted economic exchange and trade labour assistance, ceremonial relations, as well as military support (Wright and Robinson 1962:77-78). Arranged marriages further united the *wil'naat'ał* with other communities, as was the case of the marriage into the Giluts'aaw of the Lakelse River.

So was another link forged in the lengthening chain of the federation of Medeek. A chain that stretched along the river banks into the Land of Ksan (Wright and Robinson 1962:80).

Being Tsimshian Today

Today, these social dynamics still operate, albeit under the restrictions of Canadian and Provincial law. Those restrictions have impacted all relationships to the land, disrupted the House groups, undermined the function of matrilineal ties and of marriage patterns that established alliances between kin based social groups. The Indian Reserve system and Indian laws have removed people from the land and limited their options for residence and residential mobility. Traditional values towards marriage have been attacked by the Church's prejudice towards heterodox forms of marriage. The school system preached against cultural forms and language, allowed racism and bullying towards Aboriginal students, and worse, as in the cases of residential school abuse.

One of the often-invisible results is the assimilation that has normalized many of these changes. Family names inherited through the father create patrilineal family groups that seem normal for a Tsimshian family. Inheritance tends to follow those lines. Living in extended families based around a nuclear family or a divorced/separated single parent seems more normal than living in the matrilineal corporate group of the House/Waap. Living in Reserve communities seems more natural than living in clusters of Houses residing in a *galts'ap*. And so on.

Today, the most common social identifiers are the place of residence with a civic address; membership in an Indian Band or, for people without status, familial ties to people with status who belong to an Indian Band; and, important for many but not all, is membership in one or more of the 14 'tribes.' The notion of a *galts'ap* community is now tied to the Indian Band, at least for many members. Each of these ties comes with their own bundle of rights; bundles that are separate but not unconnected.

Conclusions

A Tsimshian story tells how Txaamsm cheated his brother Lagabolla in an archery competition and how this separated the twins and lead to a distinction between the Nass and Skeena Rivers.[15] The colonial experience has recreated that story through

15 A printed version of this story is in Boas 1916:68. The Boas version adds to the story told by Axdii Anx Smax .

cheating the Tsimshian of their birthrights and promoting boundaries that are fixed in the European way rather than permeable in the way of *Sayt-K'ilim-Goot*.

My starting point was that our understanding of Tsimshian social structure is permeated with a consciousness generated from colonial experience. My argument reviewed the internal organization and operation of Tsimshian society to clarify some of the difficulties associated with the processes of decolonization and the path to self-government.

The current convention of equating the Indian Band structure with the *galts'ap* / tribes is not adequate for understanding the history of Kitsumkalum or its needs as a Tsimshian community. This equation is a consciousness focussed by the colonial experience that supresses the importance of the land owning corporate groups of the *Waap* and *wil'naat'at* under Tsimshian common law. Underlying this experience, however, is the Kitsumkalum vision of the land, river, and ocean as grounded by the values of the *adaawx* and the *ayaawx*. This is a vision inspired by spirits and myths that are natural and historical, by values that are ancient and new, by teachings that are traditional and adapted to current contexts.

Unlike the developers who see only with their economic plans, the Kitsumkalum people can see with their histories. Three or four generations of colonial rule have left a mark on both the *adaawx* and *ayaawx*, supressing their transmissions and criminalizing many of the central practices such as the potlatch or feast, but have failed to eradicate these phenomena or to terminate the memory of them. Like the famous twin stone masks of the Gitxaała (Halpin 1984), not all the Kitsumkalum people have their eyes open to this vision; but, when they enter the feast hall where the crests are worn for display and they see the heritage revealed, their eyes are woken. The civil heritage of the teachings and Tsimshian laws still exist and are active ingredients in community discussions of current issues and of visions for the future.

These discussions involve difficult conversations to remove the filters of the colonial experience, to work at a deeper social level than the surface features of Indian Band registrations, Indian Reserve villages, elected councils, government defined relations, or any of the features of the sovereign society that the colonial regime found/finds non-threatening and supports. These conversations seek to clarify and focus the Tsimshian vision.

For Kitsumkalum, it has been on a long journey to fulfill the spirit of *Su Sit Aatk* –the 1987 pole raisings when the community stood up publicly to herald a new beginning in civil society informed by Tsimshian values and culture. The wisdom of the Elders and the teachings in the *adaawx* are honoured for guidance in the process of reclaiming the people's heritage. Since *Su Sit Aatk*, the presence and authority of the Sm'gyigyet has grown and with it the need to look deeper into the *ayaawx* and oral histories for direction. That direction has included strengthening of the matrilines in the *Waap*, with a greater understanding of the importance of the

kinship between the *wuwaap* as defined by the blood ties of the *wil'naat'aɬ*, and of the ceremonial importance of the *pteex*.

The spirit of the ancestors comes alive in the feast hall, in community meetings, and in the lived experiences of the community members struggling to create a future that respects their Tsimshian norms and values as they were received and as they are integrated in a world dominated by other values and norms. Land management plans are germinated from the values of traditional Tsimshian common law governing resources; and grow into Treaty negotiations with more powerful provincial and federal governments, neighbouring First Nations and *galts'ap*, municipalities and corporations.

At this deeper level, social structures emerge out of the fog of colonial assimilation, the *Wuwaap* are stood up, and the relations of the *wil'naat'aɬ* are rekindled. The *Waap* grounds the families on their *laxyuup* territories, the *wil'naat'aɬ* connects them beyond their settlements to their broader histories, and the *pteex* is a blanket for the entire nation.

Indigenous structures may conflict with the legacies of the Indian Act and resource legislation but this conflict creates a dynamic that generates solutions that increasingly are in the realm of the Tsimshian vision (McDonald 1990, 1994). For the Tsimshian community of Kitsumkalum, the solutions point to the linking of the *adaawx*, *ayaawx*, and authority of the Sm'gyigyet with the developments occurring in the current form of globalization and political reform as represented by such processes as Treaty negotiations or agreements with economic development projects. The value of traditional solutions, once dismissed and despised, is gaining greater prominence. This is not to say the past will come alive again but that the basic cultural values of being Tsimshian still have meaning and will be a part of the future.

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