

CULTURAL CONTRAST

*The British Columbia Court's Evaluation of the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en and Their Own Sense of Self-Worth as Revealed in Cases of Reported Reincarnation**

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ANTHROPOLOGISTS OVER THE PAST two hundred years have come to appreciate that culture plays an important part in determining how its members define their sense of identity and self-worth (Carrithers, Collins & Lukes 1985; de Laguna 1954; Druke 1980; Hallowell 1955; Mauss 1938/1985; Rosaldo 1984; Shweder & Bourne 1984). Over the same period of time, the natives of the Northwest Coast of North America have come to appreciate that their own sense of self-worth (which Ruth Benedict [1934] has portrayed as full of self-importance to the point of megalomania) is not validated by the evaluation of the European immigrants. The recent decision of the Supreme Court of British Columbia regarding the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en land claims court case once again draws attention to the stark contrast between the evaluation of these native cultures by the colonial-now-judicial powers and the natives' own sense of self-worth. In this paper I would like to portray the role that belief in reincarnation plays in the Gitksan sense of identity and self-worth and contrast that with Judge McEachern's evaluation.

* This paper includes material originally presented by the author in "New Buds on the Golden Bough: An Assessment of the Progress of Anthropology in Understanding Non-Western Spiritual Beliefs Since Fraser," prepared for the Fifth International Conference on Hunter-Gathering Societies, Darwin, Australia August 1988, and later reworked into a paper presented at the Canadian Anthropology Society/Société d'anthropologie canadienne at London, Ontario May, 1991. The paper also includes quotes from the transcripts of tapes made by the BBC in the summer of 1990 under the direction of Jeffrey Iverson, director of the BBC "Aspects of Survival After Bodily Death" project, for which I give thanks. I am grateful for suggestions from James G. Matlock, some of which I have incorporated in this version. My thanks go also and especially to the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people who have so graciously participated in this project.

JUDGE MCEACHERN'S EVALUATION OF THE GITKSAN

On 8 March 1991, Chief Justice McEachern handed down his decision on the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en land claims court case, *Delgamuukw v. B.C.* Lasting 374 days, this court case was one of the longest in court history, and certainly the longest land claims action on record. Through the court case the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en were asking for recognition of their ownership and jurisdiction over 55,000 square kilometers (22,000 square miles) of the territory now considered Crown Land in north-central British Columbia. In his decision, Chief Justice McEachern says, "I have been brutal" (1991: 3). He exemplifies this by declaring that the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (which stated that the Crown needed to address the native sovereignty over their land) does not apply to British Columbia and by concluding that aboriginal title can be and has been unilaterally extinguished by the Crown (1991:254).

In addition to dismissing the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en and all other potential native land claim cases in British Columbia, Judge McEachern comes close to dismissing the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en cultures. He states that they were hardly organized societies at the time of contact and concludes in his *Reasons for Judgment* that "it would not be accurate to assume that even pre-contact existence in the territory was idyllic. The plaintiffs' ancestors had no written language, no horses or wheeled vehicles, slavery and starvation was not uncommon, and there is no doubt, to quote Hobbes, that aboriginal life in the territory was 'nasty, brutish and short'" (1991: 13).

Such an appraisal cannot but be felt as an insult by the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples, although they were aware that in presenting their respective cultures to a foreign court, they would not be treated with respect. As an anthropologist who gave testimony on behalf of the plaintiffs, I observed the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en chiefs' concern about bringing their case before a court unable to appreciate what they had to say. However, their concern was mixed with hope that in taking the time to explain themselves and their culture to a judge he would be educable and would come to appreciate that they continue to have their own culture, and that that culture entails their own system of rights to territories through the stewardship of the head chiefs of their matrilineal Houses. This is the premise on which their legal plea for their land is based (see *BC Studies* 1992, Gisday Wa & Delgam Uukw 1989, Mills 1994b).

PRESENTATION OF BELIEF IN REINCARNATION
TO THE COURT

Belief in reincarnation has been noted for numerous Northwest Coast cultures from Boas' time to the present.¹ Seguin (1984) has suggested that the purpose of the potlatch, the quintessential Northwest Coast ceremony, was and is to ensure that salmon, humans, and animals are properly reincarnated. Therefore it is not surprising that one of the aspects of their discrete but related cultures that the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en described to Chief Justice McEachern was their belief in reincarnation. It was important to them to convey to Judge McEachern their belief in reincarnation because their sense of self-worth, identity and identification with the land is intimately connected to their perception of themselves as the ancestors (those people without a written language, horses, or wheeled vehicles) who are reborn. In the interest of brevity, I will confine myself to a discussion

¹ Native belief in reincarnation of humans has been reported more extensively for the Northwest Coast, the Sub-Arctic and the Arctic parts of North America (Stevenson 1966, 1974a, Matlock and Mills 1994). To date the following references are among those found by Matlock and Mills (1994) regarding belief in reincarnation on the Northwest Coast: for the Eyak (de Laguna 1990: 194, Birket-Smith & de Laguna 1938: 171, Rubel & Rosman (1983: 10); for the Tlingit (Bancroft 1875b: 517), Boas (1890: 844-5), Dall (1870: 422-3), de Laguna (1952: 5, 7), Drucker (1950: 230), Featherman (1889: 392), Fourth Report (1889: 241-2), Holmberg (1985: 63-5), L. Jones (1914), Kamenskii (1906/1985: 72-73, 103n.96), Kan (1986), Kan (1987), Kan (1989: 109-111), Knapp & Childe (1896: 160), Krause (1956: 192-3), Pinart (1972), Stevenson (1966), Stevenson (1970), Stevenson (1974b: 216-69), Swanton (1908: 463), Veniaminov (1840); for the Inland Tlingit, de Laguna (1954), de Laguna (1972, 2: 757-790), McClellan (1975: 376-99), McClellan (1981a: 477); for the Bella Bella, Harkin (1990: 91); for the Haisla, Hamori-Tarok (1990: 310), Olson (1940: 181-2), Olson (1954: 226); for the Kitimat, Lopatin (1945: 61-63); for the Bella Coola, Boas (1900: 27-8), Drucker (1950: 230), McLlwraith (1948); for the Haida, Blackman (1989: 78, 104-5, 145-6; 1990: 254-5), Chamberlain (n.d.: 472-3), Collison (1915: 204), Dawson (1880), Drucker (1950: 230), Fourth Report (1889: 241-2), Harrison (1925: 113), Krause (1956), MacKenzie (1892: 59), Murdock (1934: 249), Seguin (1984), Swanton (1905: 34-37; 1909: 117), Stevenson (1975a); for the Tsimshian, Barbeau (1916: 13), Boas (1916: 455), Campbell (1975), Drucker (1950: 230), Halpin (1984), Halpin & Sequin (1990: 279), Mills (1988b: 44), Sequin (1984: 120-3), Sequin (1985), Suttles & Jonaitis (1990: 86); for the Gitksan, Adams (1973: 26-31), Cove (1982: 7), Kasakoff (1984: 82, 84), Mills (1988a; 1988b), for the Kwakiutl, Boas (1891: 611,4; 1890: 847-8; 1896: 579; 1921: 712-3; 1925: 17-8, 51; 1930: 288; 1932: 202), Ford (1941: passim), Goldman (1975), Matlock (1990), Mills (1988b: 44, Muller (1969: 209-220), Spradley (1969: 188); for the Nootka, Bancroft (1875a: 202, 206; 1875b: 514), Mayne (1862: 181), Sproat (1868: 212); for the Makah, Colson 1953: 276); for the Northwest Salish, Barnett (1939: 265), Mills (1988b: 44), Suttles (1990: 467); for the Comox, Barnett (1939: 265); for the Klahuse, Barnett (1939: 265); for the Pentlatch, Barnett (1939: 265); for the Squamish, Barnett (1939: 265); for the Straits or Lku'ngen, Boas (1891: 580); for the Klamath, Gatschet (1890: 129-30), Spier (1930: 101); for the Puget Sound, Castle (1985), Suttles and Lane (1990: 496), for the Twana, Eells (1985), Elmendorf (1960: 512-21), Suttles & Lane (1990: 496); for the Upper Skagit, Collins (1974); for the Yurok, L. Thompson (1916: 74); for the Northwest Coast, Wike (1952: 101-2). Belief in human reincarnation is also reported for the other culture areas in North America. See Matlock & Mills' (1994) Index of Amerindian and Inuit reincarnation sources.

of the Gitksan belief in reincarnation in this paper, and leave the Wet'suwet'en material for another time.²

The following three examples of reincarnation, taken from the transcripts of the court case, were presented to the court to demonstrate how reincarnation ties together kinship, personality, individual traits and rights and titles. In the first example, the head chief of her House explains how she knew that her eldest daughter was her late mother-in-law reborn. This is a rare case of the rebirth of an elder into a different matriline from his or her own.³ Because this is part of the court record, the names have not been changed.

TABLE I
Reincarnation into the same matriline or house

TLINGIT	WET'SUWET'EN	GITKSAN
N = 43	N = 48	N = 64
30	41	58
70%	85%	90%

Source: Tlingit from Stevenson (1966). Wet'suwet'en: Mills studies. Gitksan: Mills studies plus seven unpublished cases studied by Stevenson (n.d.).

Example 1

CHIEF GYOLUGYET My husband's mother is Cathleen Risdale and she has a problem of being lame on one leg. Now, when I had my first child, I had my first daughter and shetoo was lame, she still is today, so we believe that she has come back to us again.

² The Wet'suwet'en chiefs also gave testimony about their belief in reincarnation, citing specific examples. See particularly the Commissioned Evidence of John David and Emma Michell and Mills (1988b, 1994b).

³ Mills (1988b) has reported that the type of kinship system seems to affect the way in which the subject and the previous personality are related. For example, among the matrilineal societies in the Northwest Coast, the cases cited indicate that a person is in the same House as the previous personality in 85 per cent of Wet'suwet'en cases and in 91 per cent of the Gitksan cases. See Table 1.

The percentage of Wet'suwet'en cases in the same House has decreased since my last report (Mills 1988b) in part because of some new anomalous cases. In one, an elderly chief is said to have entered into the body of a great-grandchild (his daughter's daughter's son) after his death, when the baby was about two months old. In another case reported previously (Mills 1988b) the speculation about whether another elderly chief had entered into his grandson (daughter's son) before the chief died has been settled in favour of this interpretation. When I first questioned the chief's widow she said she thought not, that her husband would eventually return to his own clan. Since then she has decided that her husband has returned in her daughter's son. Both these young boys are in the presumed previous personality's wife's house. In a third anomalous case, a new baby girl born shortly after the death of her mother's close friend (of a different clan and House) is thought to be the friend returned.

LAWYER FOR THE GITKSAN-WET'SUWET'EN And which daughter is this you're referring to?

CHIEF GYOLUGYET Pearl Trombley.

LAWYER FOR THE GITKSAN-WET'SUWET'EN Did you speak to your own grandmother about Pearl being lame when she was small?

CHIEF GYOLUGYET Well, she did know of it even before I had Pearl because she's one of the halait and they foresee these things and even before Pearl was born she told me. She said, 'Your husband's mother is coming back to you.' She said, 'And don't be alarmed.' It's like she knew what she was handicapped on. She said, 'Your child will be the same.' So I expected that and I accepted it.

LAWYER FOR THE GITKSAN-WET'SUWET'EN Did your husband's mother ever say anything about this before she died?

CHIEF GYOLUGYET No, because she died before I married Ben so I didn't get to know her very well.

(Delgamuukw v. B.C. 1987: 388-389)

Example 2

In the second example the same chief describes how her son was recognized as being a particular chief returned, and how the recognition of who he was, and the presentation to the babe of the hat that belonged to "him" in his previous life made him healthy and content.

LAWYER FOR THE GITKSAN-WET'SUWET'EN What about your grandchildren? Are any of your grandchildren reincarnated?

CHIEF GYOLUGYET Yes. And there's another instance I remember about that. When my son Benny was born he was all right in the first two months, he hardly cried, but after that, day and night he would cry and gurgle up sounds. So when my grandmother saw him and heard him she said, 'We better take Benny up to Kispiox. There's a lady up there that when you take babies up to her she can interpret what these children, these infants, are saying in the gurgling sound that comes out from the child.' So I — we all couldn't sleep — so I was willing to get the problem solved, I said. So we took Benny up to Kispiox to Gunuu, that's her chiefly name.

I took him to her and she started talking to the baby just in our language and here the baby started gurgling and hands were going, feet were going, and she said, 'All right. All right. Calm down.' She said, 'I'll get you what you want.' She turned around to me and said, 'You know, this boy,' she said, 'is my first husband Johnny Angus.' And she said, 'I have a cowboy hat that belongs to him, it's

upstairs, and that's what he wants. He wants to wear that cowboy hat again. 'So she went upstairs, she brought the hat down to me and said, 'Here, hang it up.' I said, 'Where?' 'In the top of the cradle or wherever you put him into bed. 'So I did. The crying stopped, everything went normal again.

Example 3

The third example, also presented by Mary MacKenzie, Chief Gyolugyet, revolves around the recognition of her daughter Pearl Trombley's baby as "reincarnated from" a chief in an allied House in the Wolf Clan. In this case the presentation of the ceremonial button blanket of the deceased chief to the baby was necessary to make him healthy and content.

. . . the same way with my grandchild Ian Trombley. He always wanted a blanket that belonged to Kwamoon [a chief's name] and again we had to take him to Kispiox and the first lady died, but we were fortunate we had Lucy Tait still alive in Kispiox so I took my grandson to her place and when I we walked in I knocked at the door. She said, 'Come in.' She was on her bed. She said, 'I was expecting you people this morning.' It was afternoon when we went. She said, 'I saw you. You walked into the house with the baby. So she knew what I wanted and she talked to my grandson. My grandson told her what he wanted — one of the button blankets that I had, 'a real old one, and you have it,' Lucy Tait told me. 'You have that blanket in your trunk. She said, 'Get it out and drape it around him when he sleeps tonight. Do it for three nights and then,' she said, 'the baby will be calm. She said, 'You won't have any more problems with it.'

So I took the child home, I dug out the blanket and I draped it for him so everything was normal in the house. . . . [The blanket] belonged to Kwamoon, Peter Robinson, and he was Ian, my grandson. He was the one that wanted the blanket because he was reincarnated like [as] the late Peter Robinson.

(Delgamuukw v. B.C. 1987:389-390).

In this case, Ian Trombley's mother Pearl has been initiated as Chief Kwamoon, head chief of a House which was dying out. Pearl's son Ian is thus in line to succeed his mother as the holder of the title which belonged to the person from whom he is thought to have reincarnated.

ADDITIONAL CASES OF REINCARNATION REPORTED
BY THE GITKSAN

To date I have gathered information on more than fifty-six cases of reported reincarnation among the Gitksan Indians of north-central British Columbia, and have notes on an additional eleven unpublished cases studied by Ian Stevenson. Here I would like to present data from a series of cases I am currently investigating which give poignant examples of the pride the Gitksan take in being their ancestors reborn. All these examples belong to one matriline or House.⁴ Reported cases abound in all the Gitksan clans and Houses. I have used pseudonyms for the names and feast names of all the people involved.

On 2 April 1988, I went to interview Matilda Malcolm, Chief Hamowx, an elderly and highly respected matron, about the four cases of reincarnation her youngest son had cited in her House or matriline. She spoke about three of the cases and told me of two others. Of her ten children, she is sure of the previous identity of two.

Matilda said, "I listen to my grandmother, what she says about reincarnation. The old people believe in it, talk about it often. I really believe it now. They don't allow the parents to be rough with the kids because they are the old people come back. The old people don't allow that. . . . One thing my grandmother [Josephine] told me was that there was an old lady in Kitwancool who could understand what the babies want when they cried. She could find out who they were [or had been in their previous life] and what they want."

Case 1: Robert Malcolm.

Matilda said of her eldest son, Robert, "Way before Bobby was born, Mrs. Robert Franklin was down at the cannery [in Prince Rupert] and she dreamed about her husband. He was telling her he was going to stay with us in Kitwanga. Robert Franklin was saying this to her in her dream. That's the reason she wanted my son's name to be Robert, for Robert Franklin. He was my great-uncle. He died in a gall bladder operation a long time before that. He was not old, he was still fishing."

When Matilda's son Robert Malcolm was born, he had a birthmark which resembled a scar from an operation on his left abdomen, which went away as he grew older. I asked if her son Robert was similar to Robert Franklin in any way. Matilda said, "Oh yeah, that's

⁴ In addition to the cases presented here, I have begun an investigation of four additional cases in this same matriline in which the subjects are less closely related to Matilda's family. One of these four cases involves a pierced-ear birthmark.

why he was a heavy drinker; taking after Robert Franklin. He's still drinking. It's his own habit. Nobody can stop him." Robert Malcolm is recovering from a stroke he suffered recently in the hospital in Vancouver. I have not talked to him.

Comment on the case: This case was not one that Matilda chose to mention when I interviewed her about the reported cases of reincarnation for a BBC film in the summer of 1990. Unlike his two sisters whose cases are described below, Robert has not been considered as a candidate for the position of head chief of his House. The persistence of the habit of drinking intoxicating beverages is doubtless part of the reason. However, it would be misleading to think that either Robert Franklin or Robert Malcolm are evaluated in the same way by their family members as they would be by a Judge McEachern. Both Roberts were or are respected as important family members and relatives.

Case 2: Anne Webster

The second case Matilda knows of among her own children is her daughter, Anne Webster, her fourth child and second daughter. "My daughter Anne is my grandmother Josephine Wilson," Matilda said. Josephine Wilson held the head chief's name, Maliskol, in the House of Maliskol. Josephine had raised Matilda after Matilda's mother (Josephine's daughter) had died when Matilda was three years old, so Matilda knew Josephine well and called her "Mother."

No one dreamed before Anne was born. Anne was recognized as Josephine returned because of a birthmark. "They say when there is a scar, they recognize the person from it. Anne was born with the thumb nail like that. My grandmother had a split in her thumb nail. She had hurt her thumb [Matilda mimed an ax hitting the thumb] and it never healed. When Anne was born her thumb nail was like that [split]."

Was Anne like your grandmother? "Oh yes. My grandmother was strong. Anne is the same way, never change."

Did Anne talk like your grandmother? "Yes, yes. my grandmother always said the name, old name for Kitsegukla, *liwaywegetumstep*. It means 'old Kitsegukla village.' Anne called it the same way."

"I talked to Anne. I called her 'Grandmother.' So we gave her grandmother's child's name, *Minatso*, as her child's name and she was quite happy." Did she recognize the places Josephine had been? "Yes. We are supposed to take her the places Josephine had been. We always took her to my grandmother's smoke house, one mile up the river on

the other side, every summer. My uncle [Josephine's son] who lived there always kept Anne. Henry Wilson kept her." Did she recognize him? "Always. She called him son rather than uncle. Josephine died in 1934. Anne was born in 1939."

I had asked Anne if I could talk to her about reincarnation a few days before, when I only knew her son and two grandsons were said to be cases. She had said she would rather I talk to her mother first. She said it was a very personal subject and she had never talked to anyone outside the family about it. After I had talked to Matilda, Anne agreed to talk.

The early memories her mother says she had Anne no longer remembers, as is typical of cases in which children have strong childhood recollections of having been someone else (cf. Stevenson 1974a, 1975b, 1977a, 1980, 1983a, 1983c, 1986, 1987). "I don't remember many of the things I said when I was little. I don't know if my grandson Jeremy will [the subject of another case described in Mills 1994a]. They talked about the fishing sites and other spots I'd never been before that I recognized. I never thought about it [being reincarnated] until the last few years. Now with my grandchildren being other people come back, I think of it more."

Anne went on to say, "I notice that my life has been very easy. When I have changed directions in my life — from business management for big logging outfits to counselling — it was always very easy."

She recalled, "Henry Wilson, Josephine's son and his wife raised me a lot. A lot of my relations with my mother were not easy — we were too much alike. I lived with Henry Wilson and his wife for months at a time. Summers. He was Chief Maliskol [the head chief of the House of Maliskol after his mother Josephine died]. He was sure I was his mother. We were in close contact until he died. He never doubted it. He taught me a lot. He made my life very easy. He gave me a lot of courage and a lot of honesty. He told me to be very sure. It was my choice never to drink. Never to abuse the body. And to make commitments. The choices I began making at the age of eight years of age were so clear to me. . . . Sometimes I asked Henry Wilson, 'Why are you so sure [I am your mother]?' He would say, 'Because my mom's thumb was like that. You are her. I'm sure you are her.'"

Anne showed me her thumb nail. It still has deep ridges on it but she files them down so it looks, now, quite normal. That it is filed down, however, is noticeable on close inspection. No other members of the family have a thumb nail like that.

Anne said, “Henry wanted me to be chief [Maliskol, when he died]. At that time it would not have been a good choice. I had four kids and my commitment was to my marriage. I wasn’t living here.” Anne had married a Tsimshian man. Henry Wilson said it was a good union although there would be problems. At the time of Henry’s death Anne and her husband lived outside of Vancouver.

Anne said that recently she has read what William Beynon, a native assistant to Marius Barbeau, had written about Josephine Wilson. Josephine was noted for being a halait or shaman. Anne said she had asked her mother about Josephine being a halait and she was reluctant to talk about that.⁵

In 1988 Anne said twice that things have always been “very easy” for her, in response to my asking her about being the reincarnation of Josephine. This is reminiscent of Lévi-Strauss’ noting that according to the Coast Salish myths “everything seems to come easy to those who have the mask” (1982: 23). Only those who are related to the original protagonists in the myths that describe the origin of the mask are entitled to possess it and to use it. Their succession to the right to wear the mask is itself a supernatural power which makes things “seem to come easy.” Similarly, Anne implies that the ease with which she has been able to accomplish major tasks and learn new skills is a legacy of being Josephine reborn.

In the summer of 1990 Anne and her mother and elder sister consented to being filmed by the BBC as I interviewed them further about reincarnation. Since I had talked to Anne in 1988 she had taken over the directorship of the new *Wilps Se Wiksx*, the House of Healing or alcohol treatment center at Kitwangax. She had also been very active and involved in the establishing and manning of the road blocks which the Gitksan put up on Highway 16 in the summer of 1990. These events formed the background for my question about the meaning of being Josephine — a former head chief of her House — reborn.

Anne said, “There’s also different things that have happened to me in my lifetime and one of them was always being in a leadership role and Virginia was just reminding me that I’ve only been back in this area two years and probably I have done most of the blockades here and people expect it of you and not very many women are really visible

⁵ Anne’s eldest son had described his and his son’s past reincarnation cases to me years before. In so doing he had mentioned an experience his mother had had, in which she was attacked by an apparition while lying in bed. It was an experience that he had later had himself. He said his mother had handled the attack correctly, using the power of her mind to overcome the lethal threat to her.

in leading blockades but I sure have been and it's something that Josephine has done, had done a great deal. She led the Skeena Rebellion. So in my lifetime this is being repeated. So as I live here I learn more and more of the qualities that she had and what people expect of her, so it's really interesting for me because the thirty, the thirty years that I spent away from here and I'm coming back and seeing it through totally different eyes than when I left. So it has been really a growing experience for me and very interesting."

I asked her, "To what extent do you feel that it's just intuitively part of you? You're not doing it in conscious imitation of Josephine, are you?"

Anne answered, "No, the leadership role is just created for you and you step into it and you're expected to do it. And also the interesting part of it too is being in the healing field, like I'm the executive director of *Wilps Se Wiksx*, and the things that are taught there are holistic healing, a lot to do with the traditions of our people so that's a big part of my life. Like Virginia, I have studied psychology and then compared it to the teachings I got before I left this area and it's really amazing. All the things, the knowledge that's in our native laws and our ways of living, it's really interesting: there is a real parallel there."⁶

Case 3: Virginia Malcolm

After I had interviewed Matilda Malcolm in 1988, I received a letter in the mail from Virginia Malcolm, Matilda's eldest daughter and Anne's elder sister. Virginia Malcolm is the current Chief Maliskol, the head of the House of Maliskol, a role she fulfils expertly. In 1988 Virginia was living in Prince Rupert, where she taught school. The letter says,

Virginia Malcolm,

- born with a row of scars across the middle of the back.
- no record of serious injuries in the past, during this life time.
- experienced a lot of pain with no physical basis for the pain. Many tests were performed to determine the cause of this pain but none was established.
- Grandmother, Sheila Smith, explained to Mother, Matilda Malcolm, that one of our Great, great Grandmothers, had an accident and injured her back, was healed with devil's club, pitch or gum and

⁶ Both of Anne's sons have birthmarks. There is speculation about who they were in past lives but no sense of certainty about their previous identity. However, one of Anne's sons and one of her daughters each have a son with birthmarks which have clearly been identified as particular relatives reborn.

inner bark of balsam trees. The balsam bark was used to suck out infection. Her name was explained as, 'Mother of Impatience.' Mother did not know about this nor did Sheila Smith but Sheila's mother knew about it. She healed people after she became ill.

In 1990 Virginia's mother told about this case as well. She said, "My grandmother, great-grandmother, I haven't seen her but my grandmother was telling me what happened to her. I guess they were trying to cut the tree down and the tree fell on her and she damaged the bone in her back. I didn't see her but my grandmother used to tell me. My older girl, I didn't see [any mark on her] as a baby, until she had trouble and the doctor found out what happened to her, there's a scar on her back. That's Virginia. She's the chief of the House now, Maliskol, but she's also holding the name of my great-grandmother Gitsky."

In 1990 Virginia herself said, "Intuition plays a very important role in our spiritual beliefs. When you look at our history you find answers and information received from our spiritual guides and our spiritual leaders. Intuition is recognized as an important part of our development: to be able to pay attention to the intuitive messages that are given to you from the spirit level. Our people did not have universities a long time ago and yet when you look very closely at the kinds of information that they received for their survival you can't help but be impressed at the type of knowledge that they received for their survival on this planet. And when you document it you can see parallels to what science courses are telling us, to many of the other courses at the university level and in high school as well. That knowledge is on par. . . . That's part of how it works, you have your foundation of knowledge from the spirit level before you return as the reincarnated person and you build on that knowledge, you're expected to build on that knowledge as you live your life on this planet, and everyone around you is supposed to give you the opportunity to build up those skills. You will know from your own analysis which areas you need to develop while you're on this earth. It could be your mind, if you're not an academic kind of person before. It could be your spiritual level if you did not appear, or at least did not pay attention to spiritual values before. Then, when you return to this earth, it will be up to you to spend as much time as possible to develop those values, or it could be the physical skills which you need to develop. If you were not a handy person when you were here before then this time around, if you are back on this planet, then it would be up to you to build up those

skills." Virginia added that Patience was something both she and her predecessor "Mother of Impatience" were trying to develop.

I asked Virginia whether she felt there was any parallel between "Mother of Impatience" becoming a healer after her injury and her own involvement in healing which was becoming manifest in this period of her life. Virginia answered, "It fits the pattern very definitely. We don't have any records of when her accident occurred but yes it does fit very well and it's something for me to pay attention to because I am just not sure where this healing component of my life will lead me to, because I feel I'm just becoming more aware of the spiritual powers that you require as a healer and because of my limited experience with other people, one of the things that is happening is that I ignore it when I receive information that I need to use in this field."

I asked Virginia to translate the meaning of the name of the House of which she is head chief. Virginia replied, "One of the translations we have is "Sensitive Ears." The other meaning that we have is the kind of position that Maliskol played in the Gitksan society: he was a messenger and if you have sensitive ears it means that you have to pick up as much information as possible in order for you to, to deliver it. So the name in a sense indicates the kind of role that you play in Gitksan society. So if you parallel this with other political systems, Maliskol would play the same kind of role as the Speaker of the House of Parliament."

Summary and Conclusion

In the Gitksan view, an individual's subconscious contains the memories of past lives, ultimately reaching back to the time of the origin myths which situate the ancestors on the land. To the Gitksan, reincarnation means the ancestors are themselves. In childhood the ancient memories are re-awakened by the stimulus of returning to the same places and seeing the same people. The land, passed on through the matriline, contains all these memories. The Gitksan expect that new experiences at the old sites and with the familiar people will eventually eclipse the initial experience of remembering them from a previous life, but that the characteristics of the previous person will persist even after the memories have faded. As Matilda said, they "never change." Even when the childhood memories have faded, as Anne's case shows, the Gitksan expect that the "individual's" development will follow from the qualities of the deceased relative they were before.

The cases of Pearl, her brother Benny, and her son Ian, and of Anne, Virginia, and their brother Robert demonstrate the complex relationship between membership in a lineage, accession to titles, and the experience of the individual persona in the present-day context. These people are strong and capable individuals. They have achieved a great deal by Western standards. Their cases show that when these people add Western skills, their achieved status is integrated into a perception of a person which is quite different from the Western concept of the individual. In the Western view the individual is a unique product of his or her environment and genetic inheritance. In the Gitksan view an "individual" is a manifestation of possibilities of the person or people he or she was in previous lives who have come back from the spirit realm "to this planet." None of the ancestors that these people see themselves as returning from had wheeled vehicles or were literate or knew English, but they are valued as strong and capable people and healers who were in important positions of leadership.

To Chief Justice McEachern, the Gitksan chiefs' portrayal of their belief in reincarnation apparently meant very little. One wonders if, rather than construing it as evidence for the continuity of their culture, he saw it as evidence that they have retained a "primitive" society. McEachern's decision demonstrates that he falls into the category (Shweder & Bourne 1984:159-172) of the evolutionist, who sees Western culture as higher on an evolutionary rung than the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en.

However, the strength of the Gitksan conviction that they are their ancestors returned from spiritual realms to this planet, and the strength of their conviction that their ancestors are strong and proud people who had and continue to have their own intuitive ways of knowing which gave and continues to give them knowledge parallel to that of the Euro-Canadian immigrants will undoubtedly sustain them despite the brutal appraisal of them that Chief Justice McEachern's decision represents.

How do anthropologists evaluate such cases? As Shweder and Bourne point out (1984), modern anthropologists tend to view cultures and individuals in terms of either a universalist or a relativist perspective. The universalist perspective interprets such cases as asking and answering universal questions about life after death. The relativist position notes the internal consistency of different cultural systems and notes how cultural definition alters the parameters of what constitutes an individual (de Laguna 1954) and how these concepts affect

how children are treated. The relativist position notes that cases of reported reincarnation are projections of culturally defined wishes onto the infants involved.

There is no doubt that cultural construction plays a part in such cases. Henry Wilson derived much pleasure from believing that his mother had returned as Anne Malcolm, and Anne found it gratifying to have another household where she could live for months at a time, given that her relations with her own mother were not always easy. There is no doubt that Virginia takes pride in being reborn from a healer who lived before her mother's memory. Pearl finds an explanation for the worsening of the lameness which afflicted the relative from whom she was said to be reborn. The question is: is there more to the cases than cultural construction?

It has taken a psychiatrist, Ian Stevenson, to address this question. Stevenson has pioneered serious research into the evidence reincarnation cases present (1966, 1970, 1974a, 1975, 1977, 1983b, 1984a, 1985, 1987). He notes, and I have found also (Mills 1988a, 1988b, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1994) that in some instances the child says things from the point of view of the previous personality which could not have been told him or her by his or parents or associates. In some cases such children apparently have skills which they have not learned in their present life. In addition, in some of these cases, the child bears birthmarks which bear striking resemblance to wounds, often fatal, on the previous personality.

Stevenson has in press four volumes examining the relation of birthmarks and birth defects in reported cases of reincarnation to the injuries sustained by the previous personality. Some of these cases suggest that physical trauma which causes the person's death can lead to a physical impression on a subsequently born individual. Some of the cases Stevenson describes are from the Northwest Coast and from the Gitksan Indians.

Gitksan Indians learn from Euro-Canadian universities. If "Chief" Justice Allan McEachern cannot learn from the Gitksan chiefs, perhaps Western scholars can learn from the Gitksan more about their sense of self, how it relates to their concepts of reincarnation, and whether the reported cases of reincarnation present evidence suggesting that that phenomenon does indeed take place. Such scholars may be able to accord the Gitksan the respect Chief Justice McEachern could not, by looking at the evidence the reported cases of reincarnation present with an open mind, and by examining whether there is any scientifically demonstrable basis for the culturally constructed belief in reincarnation.

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