

"THE NAMES SPREAD IN ALL DIRECTIONS":

Hereditary Titles in Tsimshian Social and Political Life

CHRISTOPHER F. ROTH

A Tsimshian once said to me: "People are nothing. They're not important at all. It's the names that are really real." While human bodies with their prosaic English names – inscribed on birth certificates and gravestones – are mortal, transient things, the hereditary "Indian names" that Tsimshian bodies wear are immortal, perduring social personages. As Jay Miller (1997, 129) has succinctly put it (and despite his use of the past tense it remains true today): "For the Tsimshian, human descendants circulated through a series of fixed identities, based in a household, whose pedigrees and characteristics were described in hereditary chronicles where these names engaged in specific tasks at specific locations." Names link members of a Tsimshian lineage to the past and to the land upon which that past unfolded. A Tsimshian name holder shares his or her name with a succession of matrilineally related predecessors, stretching back to the ancient historical events that describe the origins of the name and the house lineage and the lineage's rights to territories and resources.

The connection to land is especially significant today as British Columbia's First Nations engage with the colonial governments in Victoria and Ottawa in defence of their territories, which have never been ceded. For example, the Tsimshian community of Kitsumkalum, which is the focus of my research, is negotiating with the provincial and federal governments under the auspices of the British Columbia Treaty Commission. Along with other communities among the North Coast peoples, Kitsumkalum draws its strength at the negotiating table from the traditional land-tenure system that has operated in Kitsumkalum territory since, as the overworked but apt phrase has it, time immemorial. The anchor of that land-tenure system is the potlatch feast (which Kitsumkalum people call *yaawk* in Sm'algyax,

the Tsimshian language, and *feast* in English), where hereditary name-titles are bequeathed from one generation to the next.

The wider world learned about North Coast name-titles in the late 1980s when the hereditary chiefs of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en – whose territories begin just a few miles up the Skeena River from Kitsumkalum – brought a suit for recognition of land title against the government of British Columbia. In that case, *Delgamuukw v. the Queen*, a hereditary name rather than an individual was the key plaintiff. Just as the principal defendant was “Her Majesty the Queen in Right of the Province of British Columbia” – that is, a set of politically sovereign institutions temporarily embodied in a biological individual named Queen Elizabeth the Second – so was the principal plaintiff, representing the other Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en chiefs, “DELGAMUUKW, also known as KEN MULDOE, suing on his own behalf and on behalf of all other members of the HOUSE OF DELGAMUUKW.” But, as Ardythe Wilson (Skanu'u) said at the conclusion of the original case in 1990:

Albert Tait was the Delgamuukw who walked into the court registry, Statement of Claim in hand, in 1984. Ken Muldoe, nephew to Albert, was the Delgamuukw who delivered the opening statement in 1987. Earl Muldoe, brother to Ken, is the Delgamuukw who stands to make the closing statement on behalf of the Gitksan Chiefs in June, 1990. There have been generations of Delgamuukws, just as there will be generations more of Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en people who will embrace and nurture every hereditary name that exists in our Houses. (Monet and Wilson 1992, 170)

A chiefly name, then – much in the manner of a royal crown or sceptre – is not so much an appellation as a mandate to authority and a deed of sovereign land title. A Tsimshian or Gitksan name marks membership in a strictly bounded unilineal descent group, which as a collectivity, owns a specific territory and its resources, which its chief manages and holds authority over. This ownership is renewed and recognized by successive generations at feasts, and the lineage's historical relationship to the land is remembered and recounted in the lineage's chronicles, called, in Sm'algyax, *adawx*. The Canadian Supreme Court's 1997 ruling on *Delgamuukw v. the Queen* has supported the admissibility of oral histories (in the case before the court, these were Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en histories) as evidence for land title. Kitsumkalum and other BC First Nations communities

are still grappling with the full implications of the *Delgamuukw* ruling (see McDonald 1998), but one thing is clear: since *adawx* connect corporate descent groups to territories as owners, and since hereditary names connect individuals to corporate descent groups, Tsimshian names, as the key to traditional Tsimshian property law, have a potentially pivotal role in the wider politics of Aboriginal rights.

Traditional Tsimshian personhood is constructed on radically different premises than is personhood in the surrounding Euro-North-American society, and these premises can be discerned from how names are inhabited, bequeathed, and validated in Tsimshian society today. This realization has guided my exploration of the reproduction of social personages through names in Tsimshian society.¹ This is not to say that contemporary Tsimshian are immersed in subjectivities imponderably alien to non-First Nations understandings. In fact, contemporary Tsimshian – if only by having English names as well as Tsimshian ones (but in other ways too) – also participate, from birth, in modes of personhood that reverberate from non-First Nations society. Rather, I argue here that, although Tsimshian who existed 200 years ago must have unmitigatedly inhabited utterly Tsimshian subjectivities, postcontact Tsimshian personhood emerges

¹ The original material in this article is based on my research with, for, and in the Tsimshian community of Kitsumkalum, British Columbia. My work for them is ongoing, but most of the field research presented here was carried out in 1996 and funded by a scholarship from the Fulbright Foundation, administered through affiliation with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), Prince George. The research was conducted under the aegis of the Kitsumkalum Tribal Claims Office, which also funded some aspects of later phases of the research. I am indebted to the Fulbright Foundation and to Antonia Mills and William Morrison of UNBC as well as to James McDonald, whose research provided a foundation for my work in Kitsumkalum. Above all, however, acknowledgment is due to the generosity, hospitality, and knowledge of the Kitsumkalum people. I wish to thank in particular the staff of the Kitsumkalum Tribal Claims Office – Alex Bolton, Allan Bolton, and Diane Collins (now chief councillor). However, I also owe a great debt to other members of the greater Kitsumkalum community, including but not limited to: Annette Bolton, Benjamin Bolton, Ruby Brown, Pearl Campbell, Sandra Christiansen, Arthur Collins, Irene Collins, Charles Henry, the late Vera Henry, Dorothy Horner, Verna Inkster, Melodie Johnson, Frank Miller, Richard Miller, Roy Nelson, Mildred Roberts, Adeline Ryan, Laura Talbot, Gerald Wesley, and Winnie Wesley. I only hope that my interpretations have been faithful to what they have tried to teach me. Thanks to Susan Marsden, Jay Miller, Angela Sorby, and Gerald Wesley for reading versions of this paper and giving many helpful comments. My insights into Tsimshian society have also benefited from discussions with Margaret Seguin Anderson, Marjorie Halpin, Bruce Rigsby, and others, including Tsimshian from other communities and institutions. I thank Charles Menzies and Cole Harris for their help in seeing this piece to publication, and I am also grateful to Douglas Brown and John Dunn of UNBC in Prince Rupert and to Robert Hill and the Tsimshian Tribal Council. Unless otherwise indicated, all of the specifics in this article, other than those already in the public record, derive solely from my work for Kitsumkalum.

from competing but ultimately coexistent structures of personages – mutually foreign social structures whose irreducible primary units are not necessarily mutually mappable. Nonetheless, to participate in the ceremonial life of one’s matrilineage and in the maintenance and distribution of hereditary names is, for the Tsimshian, a way of experiencing a second Tsimshian subjectivity of which their non-First Nations neighbours may be only dimly aware. It is this second – or, in many cases, first – Tsimshian subjectivity that is the anchor of the Tsimshian cosmos and the engine of their system of political authority and land tenure.

Among the Tsimshian – whose territory is roughly the northern one-third of British Columbia’s coast, including the lower Skeena and Nass watersheds and the Cities of Prince Rupert and Terrace – the system of hereditary names and the institution of feasting that maintains it are, above all, information systems. Tsimshian names give information about the past and about the present, about distant places as well as about the name holder’s local allegiances. A hereditary name codes both where one’s ancestors are from and where one is now, proclaiming both migratory origins and an unassailable territorial situatedness. The sacred² oral histories of the Tsimshian, the *adawx*, which structure Tsimshian discourses about place and history, are the charter for the Tsimshian social order. In this way, Tsimshian names are embedded in, and refer to, a specific social, historical, and cultural context. Understanding this context is necessary for understanding what it means to be given a Tsimshian name and, thereby, to assume a Tsimshian identity.

Each Tsimshian name and each Tsimshian person is a member of a matrilineage called a “house” in English and a *waap*, or *walp* (this is also the term for building, or dwelling), in Sm’algyax. Each house belongs to one of the four exogamous phratries, called *p’teex* in Sm’algyax and usually “clan” in English: Gispwudwada (Killer Whale or Blackfish), Ganhada (Raven), Laxgibuu (Wolf), and Laxsgiik

² Most Tsimshian are formally Christian, and no Tsimshian, to my knowledge, practise the traditional religious systems described by Boas (1916, 543–64) and Garfield (1939, 293–316). Nevertheless, the *adawx* – which can be remembered, retold, and treasured irrespective of faith – could be called “sacred” in several respects: they connect individuals to transcendent, ancient, even “supernatural” processes and events; their social context is one of strictly observed taboos concerning who can tell which *adawx*; and they are regarded as unassailably true in ways that, to outsiders, resemble faith but which, within the Tsimshian cultural context, constitute the highest form of knowledge. For summarized understandings of what *adawx* are and do, see Duff (1959), Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw (1989), Marsden (1991), and Sterritt et al. (1998).

(Eagle). Most of the fourteen Tsimshian tribes (*galts'its'ap*, literally “villages”) contain at least one house from each clan (despite recent assertions to the contrary [e.g., Dunn 1984, 37], as my own and Viola Garfield’s [1939] research, along with Marius Barbeau’s hundreds of pages of fieldnotes, amply attest). Some tribes have as many as a dozen houses or more. Kitsumkalum, for example, has from five to eight houses, depending on how one groups them; these are today amalgamated into four or five, with each clan represented. Names are among the array of exclusive possessions and prerogatives that belong to a house. When different houses of the same clan share a name, it is usually regarded as a residue of shared ancestry; they can also be expected to share crests, episodes from their *adawx*, and other prerogatives. An occurrence of a name within a single house is, however, a unique entity, like a person. Only one person may assume this identity at a time. Tsimshian oral histories tell of the movement of names along migration routes, borne along by their wearers, who are ancestors of namesakes distributed along the migration path.

For example, according to the ancient migration chronicle of a Gispwudwada house of the Gispaxlo’ots tribe, as told to the Tsimshian ethnographer William Beynon by Lagax’niits in the 1910s, a traveller journeying from one territory to another once stopped at an island and climbed a tree to get his bearings by looking in all directions. One of his companions then told him, “We have found a name for you; as you resemble the eagle looking to all sides, we will call you Lagax’niits, ‘Looking to All Directions’” (B-F-24.6;³ Garfield 1939, 225). Lagax’niits is still a name among the Gispaxlo’ots in Lax Kw’alaams, among the Gidestsu tribe of Tsimshian in Klemtu, and among the Gits’ilaasü Tsimshian at the Skeena canyon. The geographical distribution of the name traces routes of migration of the original Lagax’niits and his successors – a route along which different related Gispwudwada houses were established. This name has travelled and multiplied itself, then, over the centuries. The various Lagax’niitses’ right to tell this history of movement undergirds their rights, respectively, to the various currently held territories of the dispersed incarnations of the name.

Multiple occurrences of “the same name,” then, affirm historical (and ultimately genealogical) relatedness between houses within a clan. Ceremonial, political, and economic relations among villages

³ For the Barbeau Northwest Coast Files (Barbeau n.d.), I use the numbering system in Cove (1985).

throughout northwestern British Columbia and southeastern Alaska (embracing the Gitksan, Haida, Haisla, Nisga'a, Tsimshian, Tlingit, Wet'suwet'en, and others) often follow such lines of historical relationship. Names, crests, songs, and oral chronicles are among the emblems by which these peoples know and honour relationships among different local descent groups. Intertribal diplomacy has traditionally taken the form of trading and ceremonial relationships between related houses and of marrying relationships between matrilineally unrelated ones. These far-flung houses' situatedness within their respective territories is legitimized by their embeddedness within a complex international order that is the result of centuries or millennia of migrating, feasting, and remembering.

Despite these wide historical and geographical resonances, the house is the strongest and most naturalized level of Tsimshian social membership. Genealogical relationships within a house are always close enough to be reckoned through known individuals. In earlier generations a set of related houses was called a *wilnaat'aat* (Boas 1916, 488; cf. Harris 1994, 79-82 for the Gitksan), though the term is little used today. For such a grouping, within a tribe or embracing related houses in different tribes (such as the variously distributed descendants of Lagax'niits), the *wilnaat'aat* blood-tie is still very real (and ultimately biological) but beyond the range of reckonable individual matrikin. In many cases the oral chronicle of a former unity is the only record of a matrilineal relationship between different houses in a *wilnaat'aat*. At this level the use of kin terms such as "brother" and "sister" to refer to co-members is consciously metaphorical; the English "distant cousin" perhaps best captures the consensus genealogical reality. At the level of the clan – moving now to more and more overarching groups – the shared matrilineal ancestry of different *wilnaat'aat* is assumed but is too ancient to be within the range of detailed oral history. This is the level at which endogamy is forbidden: one must marry outside one's clan.

Tsimshian sometimes call a house "a box" or "a basket of names" (Seguin 1984, III-2; 1986, 483), a collectivity whose true members are not people but the names that people wear as well as those names that are not being worn or used at a given moment. Each name is categorized both by gender and as either an adult name or a child's name. Adult names are ranked within their gender, so that one can speak of "the second highest man's name" in a particular house, although ranking is stricter near the top of the list than near the

bottom. The highest-ranked man's name in a house is always that of the house head, after whom the house is named. In some Tsimshian communities it is asserted that only the leading royal house of a tribe is headed by a *sm'oogit* (translated as "chief") and that lower-ranking house heads are instead *lik'agigyēt* or *manlik'agigyēt* (sometimes translated as "councillors," "spokesmen," or "noblemen") (Garfield 1939, 178). However, when (probably in 1926) interviewing the head of Kitsumkalum's principal Gispwudwada house, Arthur Stevens, Barbeau wrote,

No *lik'agigyēt*z [in Kitsumkalum]. The system resembled the Gitksan in that each head of the group was recognized as chief of his own group. He [Stevens] recognized himself the difference between the [more coastal] Tsimshian group and this. (B-F-49.2, p. 18)

Since my focus is Kitsumkalum, I use *sm'oogit* to mean any house head.

Since the ranking of names fluctuates as individual holders rise or fall in relative status, the house may be known by different names at different times. For example, what was known in the 1920s in Kitsumkalum as the House of Łagaax is now known as the House of Hat'axgmliimidiik, because, currently, the holder of Hat'axgmliimidiik is the highest-ranking person in that house. Hat'axgmliimidiik was elevated above Łagaax partly due to the high personal prestige of the most recent holder of the name. Worn during a period of the twentieth century when few other Kitsumkalum Gispwudwada names were being worn, it is a more valued name precisely because of its firmer link to the remembered past.

Within a house, names constitute an internally coherent and idealized social order. In addition to the highest occupied name being that of the chief, other adult male names can be associated with specific roles, such as *galdm'algyax* ("spokesman"). The highest of the adult female names are the *sigidmna'a*, literally the "chiefly women" or, in English usage, "matriarchs." Often, the Tsimshian regard specific names within a house as "brothers" or "sisters," even if their holders are, say, cousins or of different generations, or even if the names are without current holders (cf. McNeary 1976, 129). "Floating" (dormant or vacant) names are clearly regarded as, nonetheless, very real personages. One can say, for example, that a name is the *galdm'algyax* of a particular house, even if no one has the name at that particular

moment. When names are assumed, their wearers are fitted into the pre-existing structure of the house that the names constitute – a structure that they can then, within limits, proceed to modify from their respective positions through personal and politico-ceremonial behaviour. Names, then, are social actors who constitute a social order that transcends their holders. Paramount among these positions is that of the house head, who represents his (or her) matrilineal relatives as the caretaker of their territory.

Within their vigorously matrilineal system, Tsimshian today do acknowledge the social and biological significance of paternity,⁴ and there is no reason to doubt that this has long been the case. For example, it has traditionally been the father's side that has provided mortuary payments and services, including the carving of crest poles, in addition to a whole range of ceremonial services in the course of an individual's life (Garfield 1939, 220-1, 239-42; Miller 1997, 126). Many names, especially those of children, contain references to the crest animal of the father, so that, for example, today one of the young members of Kitsumkalum's House of Hat'axgmlimidiik, a Gispwudwada (Killer Whale clan) house, is Tkgügkstxsgiiik, Downward Hunting Eagle (B-F-51.2), a type of name recalled by the generation of elders in the 1910s and 1920s to have been part of a house's stock of names drawn upon to designate the paternity of its holder, so that only a Gispwudwada who had a Laxsgiiik (Eagle clan) father could hold the name Tkgügkstxsgiiik. Typically, such a name would be conferred at a feast by a member of the father's side. Chief Herbert Wallace summarized this phenomenon for Barbeau as follows:

The children's names were given by the father, according to the different crests of their house. And these names remain in the children's family (mother's side), and these names are reapplied in their own family. In this manner the children's names spread in all directions ... But in their main names, of chiefs, they keep to their own crest. (B-F-30.16; see also Duff 1964a, 67-8; Miller 1997, 128)

Such a naming system describes a kinship structure within which children's names, like children themselves, belong to the mother but

⁴ Some Tsimshian elders assert (Miller 1997, 102) that a child's face comes from the father's side. Brad Campbell's (1975) speculation, using examples from oral narrative, that the Tsimshian might share with matrilineal peoples of Melanesia and elsewhere a notion of paternally (seminally) derived bones and maternally derived flesh and blood is vindicated by Bruce Rigsby's work with Gitksan elders (Rigsby, personal communication, 1998) and may well have been true in traditional Tsimshian thought as well (see also Cove 1987, 146.)

also emanate from the father (Cove 1987, 79). The word for “father’s side” in Sm’algyax, *ksuwaatk*, means literally “from where one emerges” (as opposed, of course, to *where one is*, which is one’s house). Children’s names, then, have an indexical, ceremonially marked relationship to the father’s side but an unmarked, automatic relationship of shared essence to the mother’s side.

In this way names anchor their holders in a political and social structure and specifically index their relationships to their matrikin as well as to the other (structurally patrilateral) lineages that represent their matrikin’s traditional marrying and feasting “opposites.” A single name, through what it says and through what people know about where it fits into a system of names, registers ongoing participation in a web of relationships among lineages, affines, histories, wealth, and territories. In this way the names do indeed “spread in all directions.”

When a name is in use, the Tsimshian say that it is being “worn” or “held” or that a specific person “has” – or even “is” – that name. Sometimes, though, one can “hold” a name but “not really have it yet.” Today, this is often the case when a would-be successor takes charge of a name at a (Christian) memorial service after the name holder’s death. The name will have to be “strengthened” later at a proper name-taking feast before it can be “really worn by” that person. In such a case, one says: “He doesn’t have that name; he’s just holding it” – a distinction which, when not properly appreciated, is sometimes the nub of a crisis of succession. A less frequent, third order of name-holding involves “just holding” a name in trust, with no implications for the trustee’s candidacy for full assumption of the name. This can happen in the case of someone giving a name to a relative outside of one’s matrilineage, such as a wife or son, when no heirs are available; the idea is that, if heirs become available in later years, then the trustee will be able to ensure its eventual transmission (see Cove 1987, 128).

The idiom of holding, passing on, and wearing names is reinforced by the donning of a ceremonial robe at the moment of assuming a name at a feast. This imagery evokes the unique materiality of the name and its function as an object of wealth. In other ways, it resembles the metaphor, among more southerly Northwest Coast peoples, of names as seats (e.g., Sapir 1916). Indeed, the portability of garments, as opposed to seats in a feast hall, is more compatible with the function of North Coast names – less like those farther south – as social mnemonics for migratory histories.

Records suggest that during the period of early contact the Tsimshian experienced the continuity of successive name holders as the same personage in a more automatic and unambiguous fashion than they do today. Neither Franz Boas (1916, 497-8) nor Viola Garfield (1939, 221-6) discusses these issues in any depth in their published considerations of Tsimshian naming, but Barbeau's unpublished files, which include a record of exhaustive interviews with the oldest generation of Tsimshian elders from the 1910s and 1920s, offer numerous instances of what, to the modern Tsimshian or non-Tsimshian reader, is a striking conflation of name and person.

Wallace told Barbeau, regarding a then vacant name in his tribe (the Gits'iis), the following: "Hai'mas a great warrior; he killed many Gispaxlo'ts chiefs; after he died, they [the Gits'iis] dropped the name, being afraid to take it up again, for fear the Gispaxlo'ts chief might get after him" (B-F-30.7). Haymaas,⁵ then, was a personage that had committed certain acts for which any successor might be held accountable. For these Tsimshian, the agency and accountability associated with an action transcended the lifetime of a mortal individual and pertained not to a biological self but, rather, to an onomastic one. Haymaas's kinsmen in a sense *hid* "him" by keeping "him" unembodied. Indeed, if any of these Gispaxlo'ts chiefs ever had decided to "get after" a new Haymaas, an incarnation, if you will, of Haymaas the perduring personage might have decided to avenge "his own" murder, a type of situation that there is no reason to doubt has occurred time and again in Northwest Coast history. Even for, say, the closest European analogues to Tsimshian personages – the hereditary titles of the royalty and nobility – personhood and agency are not so strongly associated with the title itself; a title holder's behaviour can affect the status of the institution but not, so automatically, his or her successor's personal identity.

The Haymaas example seems exotic to young Tsimshian today, although the sense that one inherits one's predecessor's rank and reputation does not. Even today, although names are in one sense objects – as in, "He's going to try to get that name at the feast next

⁵ I use Barbeau and others' original spellings in quotations, but outside of quotation marks I use a version of the standardized Tsimshian orthography that has been developed by John Dunn, Susan Marsden, and Marie-Lucie Tarpent (Dunn et al. n.d.) in collaboration with the Tsimshian language instructors and the First Nations Advisory Council of School District No. 52. This is the orthography used by, among others, the Tsimshian Tribal Council and the Kitsumkalum Tribal Claims Office. It is based on that developed by Dunn (1978) and is sometimes called the Rigsby-Dunn-Tarpent system.

year” – many elders and many younger Tsimshian also regard them as immortal personages whom one might meet on the street in Prince Rupert or Terrace. Often I have been initially confused to hear an elder refer to a named personage’s historical feats in quick succession, only to learn later that the events described had been separated by centuries. During one interview, I sketched a genealogy that showed three brothers that I inferred had lived a few generations ago – brothers to the interviewee’s namesake and predecessor. A subsequent interview revealed that these brothers were figures in an *adawox*, describing events occurring perhaps millennia ago. I had missed the narrative shift to the ancient-historical since, to the interviewee, namesakes were, in a sense, the same selves. I have even heard some elders adopt (in English and in Sm’algyax) the third person when discussing their ceremonial accomplishments under the aegis of their hereditary names, thus implying that the same person performed, say, both a heroic act shortly after the Flood and certain services at last week’s feast.

The Tsimshian social system is designed to provide continuity in the face of stress and change – to maintain structure, one might say, in spite of history. Although a structure of names (in, say, a house group) corresponds to a structure of as many name holders, such apparent stasis belies historical instabilities that the system continually confronts and overcomes. These instabilities range from the quotidian to the epoch making. To begin with, a name holder’s bodily death always makes, as Sergei Kan (1989) has put it, a rent in the social fabric – a rent that must be re-sewn. The Tsimshian do this – as do Kan’s Tlingit hosts – by transmitting the identity of the deceased to a new heir at a mortuary feast. On the occasion of a Tsimshian chief’s death, for example, his name passes to a suitable heir, typically a nephew or a younger brother, at which point the heir might pass his own name to a suitable brother or nephew. The death of the highest-ranking member of a house, then, can result in a ripple effect, with several men in the matrilineage being promoted to slightly higher-ranking names. A successful Tsimshian lifecycle can be expressed as a series of names held – from lower to higher rank – just as the history of a name can be described in terms of its successive holders, from older to younger.

Often one hears of a matriarch “reaching into her basket of names” (i.e., her lineage’s collective memory, which she embodies) to find a suitable identity for a new arrival. Since in no human population can

the number of births be expected to offset but not exceed the number of deaths, it is useful for a house to have a surplus of names at any given time – a deep basket. One effect of a fluctuating population of bodies is shifts in the ratio of adults to children in the genealogical structure of individuals as it corresponds to the structure of names. Since adult names of consequence are always scarce, some biological adults will have to take children's names. Depending on the timing of deaths or on the sizes of different generations, children might inherit adult names that suddenly become available, while an adult with, say, an excess of older siblings might never hold an adult name. "Mrs. Dudoward" explained this phenomenon to Barbeau in 1915 in uncompromising terms: "When there is a memorial feast for the dead, then the children are entitled to a new name, to be called in society. Those who are not able to assume such a higher [name] are not recognized by the people as belonging to the society of men or women. They remain the lowest people" (B-F-28.12); that is, they remain, socially, children. Holding a child's name today need no longer have such consequences for a biological adult, but it can keep one outside of the circle of key decision makers and ceremonial actors in the house.

Another strategy is attested to by only one source and is particularly striking. Matthew Sheppard of the Gispaxlo'ots told Barbeau (probably in 1915) that, in one Gispaxlo'ots royal house, "there were so many that they had not enough names for them. So one name was divided into three; it meant the same thing; and pronounced in almost the same way" (B-F-24.7). The name lists in the Barbeau Files, however, suggest that, however common or uncommon such a practice might have been, houses rarely maintained such mutations of names past the point at which they were needed and did not incorporate them into a stable inventory of names. More common, possibly, was a strategy Garfield (1939, 222) reported: "Within a lineage children's names may be held by more than one child at a time, but this is not true of adult[s'] names." Both of these strategies show that the theoretical one-to-correspondence between names and bodies could be severely manipulated within Tsimshian law to ensure that everyone was named.

More traditionally, however – in addition possibly to other methods of population control – the system has a built-in fissiparous tendency to prevent houses from growing too populous and thereby running out of names. Large house groups split into subdivisions within which the second-ranking name of a house seceded, taking with him, in a

kind of cellular mitosis, a replicated stock of the names of the parent house (Cove 1987, 142; see also McNeary 1976, 151-2). Some secessions and migrations were spurred by natural disasters, feuds, and wars, but many, to hear the chronicles tell it, resulted from demographic imbalance. And when a secessionist house moved to another location, the result was the geographical diffusion of daughter houses with similar or identical onomastic inventories, as alluded to earlier. (On the other hand, this tendency must have been kept in check by another material factor: there wasn't always new land available for a secessionist group.)

The oral material collected by Barbeau and Beynon is full of such instances, and their inventories of tribes, houses, and names are thickly annotated with notes on which houses are subdivisions or offshoots of which others and which related houses have been amalgamating (i.e., re-amalgamating) as their numbers once again thin (see, for example, Barbeau 1929, 1950). The motivation seems to have been that, since only members of a house are authorized to use the house's crests or to tell its histories, the extinction of a house entails a loss of wealth and of historical knowledge. Occasionally, in what may have been particularly dire demographic circumstances, houses of the same clan that were in different *wilnaat'aał* – such as, by the early twentieth century, the two Laxsgiik houses of Kitsumkalum, the House of Nisgeel and the House of Nisgankwadzeks – have amalgamated, but for the most part the historical relatedness of specific houses is invoked.

On the other hand is a potential for *too many* names for the available bodies, as in the extreme case of a lone surviving member of a house. Such a person, while perhaps wearing only one name, is in one sense the embodiment of all of the names of the house. This puts a heavy responsibility on the survivor to see to it that the prerogatives, including territorial prerogatives, are perpetuated.

Some Tsimshian elders have said to me that it is impossible for a house's prerogatives – including title to its territory – to die. While a house might become genealogically extinct, its prerogatives are in some sense still there for the taking. In a similar vein, in discussing the effect on Oowekeeno (“Northern Kwakiutl”) prerogatives of that nation's massive population declines, Ronald Olson (1950, 109) writes: “These intangibles are in native theory eternal and indestructible. They may be in abeyance but they are not extinct. Those not in use lie dormant, so to speak, and may be revived at any time by an heir

giving a potlatch and assuming the title in question.” Olson’s account rings true for the Tsimshian worldview as well, and it echoes a comment I once heard a Tsimshian make with respect to ceremonial neglect: “The culture’s not dead. It’s just sleeping.” Indeed, I know of cases of supposedly genealogically extinct lineages coming back to life, either because a forgotten branch of the lineage steps forward to claim the prerogatives or because a member of another lineage turned out to have been holding key names in trust. The crisis of a looming extinction is not so much that specific owned knowledges of a house might *die* but, rather, that they might be *lost*, forgotten, that the information might not be passed on and that these prerogatives, while still theoretically extant, would be humanly irrecoverable. Moreover, the Tsimshian seem to feel that, if a name is forgotten, then, in some sense, a *person* – embodied in innumerable ancestors stretching back through history – dies.

In Tsimshian communities, two different forces work to maintain a correspondence between a society of bodies and a society of names: (1) the drive to keep bodies named and (2) the drive to keep names embodied. These are not only social pressures but cosmological imperatives. First, namelessness has traditionally been a state of social marginalization or disgrace. This potentiality is necessarily greater in times of burgeoning population. The old term for a disgraced or disreputable person, *'wa'aayin*, is sometimes loosely translated as “without history,” or “without relatives,” and refers to those in earlier times who had no clan affiliation or hereditary name, such as former slaves (or, indeed, foreigners from clanless lands like England) (see Boas 1916, 496; Garfield 1939, 178; McNeary 1976, 135; Dunn 1978, 107; Seguin 1986, 493). To lack a name is to lack the overt connection to lineage history that house membership offers. Even today, the unnamed sometimes express feelings of lack with respect to the named in their communities.

Second, some Tsimshian have told me that the existence of the social group somehow depends upon the transmission of names. A house whose names lie unembodied is a house not alive, one in which the relationships among those people genealogically belonging to the house – and between them and the wealth and prerogatives of the house, including territories – are poorly expressed and therefore poorly regulated. It is in the overriding interest of all houses to ensure that each house remains vital (“an active house,” to use the common idiom). These structural relationships continue to regulate Tsimshian

society today. Even when material wealth is not an issue, it is desirable to have houses that are more or less equal in their vitality as part of an overriding ideology of social harmony that balances the strict individual ranking in Tsimshian life.

Even younger Tsimshian see the continued embodiment of names as an unquestionable good, a cosmic necessity. "We have to keep our names alive," is a common assertion about the preservation of Tsimshian culture. The Tsimshian refer to a flurry of ceremonial and name-distributing activity as "getting our houses in order," an enterprise they equate with ethnic pride, self-respect, and social cohesion.

All of the various strategies for fine tuning the correspondence of names to bodies are responses to the always present threat of numeric imbalance between demographic and onomastic structures. Tsimshian society, then, can be seen as an idealized, demographically harmonious social structure laid out as a structure of names, within which no house is much more populous than any other. The Barbeau Files pertaining to Tsimshian names are, then, a kind of *map* of this ideal society. The totality of Tsimshian names forms a more or less static social grid to which the never static genealogical structure of bodies is made to conform. The feast, because it distributes names, is the mechanism for making these structures correspond by moving bodies to available positions.⁶ Just as the static social grid is itself a situated, territorially grounded structure that belies the narratives of movement and migration that its names tell, so the demographic mechanisms of the feast constitute a system for moving bodies *into*, *out of*, and *along* one sector of the grid (a house) in order to preserve its structural integrity. Bodily birth and death can be seen as the movement of bodies into and out of the grid, occasions marked by the reallocation

⁶ John W. Adams (1973, 98-106) has made a similar argument for the regulative mechanisms of the Gitksan potlatch. Aside from various errors of detail in his cursory account (see Harris 1994), he rests his explanations too heavily on economic factors. For him, resource distribution is the underlying motivation for the feast's regulative mechanisms. The Tsimshian economy is not my focus here, so I will not attempt to refute Adams's conclusions for precontact or postcontact patterns of resource use; indeed, many such issues are highly charged and delicate matters within the current political context of the British Columbia treaty process. However, my fieldwork has revealed to me time and again how even those Tsimshian who are uninvolved in the traditional economic round – the urbanized, the disaffected, the distracted, the assimilated – are profoundly, and not just materially, motivated to ensure that bodies are named and names embodied. This suggests a deeper structure to Tsimshian cosmological thinking than can be explained by economic considerations. The harmonious balance of the social system is a metaphysical priority in daily Tsimshian life and operates independently of considerations of resource use. It is this philosophical predilection for balance, not the rumblings of their stomachs, that drives Tsimshian to say, "We must keep the names alive."

of named structural positions in the feast hall. But it is through the institution of ceremonial adoption that the law of the feast hall moves bodies *across the boundaries* of the grid. This institution is a far more profound transformation of the individual than can be accounted for by the mere reshuffling of personages after a death, and it deserves discussion for the cosmological principles it highlights.

We know less about precontact solutions to the problem of a surplus of bodies and a shortage of names because, during the period of early contact, when ancient customs were last so strictly observed, the Tsimshian had the opposite problem: too many names and too few bodies (as a result of depopulation by disease and emigration). For example, the 1836-7 smallpox epidemic wiped out perhaps 33 per cent (Boyd 1990, 141) of a Tsimshian population of perhaps 4,200 (Duff 1964b, 39). While these specific figures could be contested, the seriousness and suddenness of the decline cannot. But what happened after that period gives some clues as to how lineage size was regulated. It was after the worst epidemics that the best early records of hereditary names begin: the records of the Anglican lay minister William Duncan at Old Metlakatla, which usually list the “tribe” and “heathen name” of Tsimshian – including members of at least thirteen of the fourteen Tsimshian tribes – at their moment of Christianization and renaming. Those data offer a wealth of hereditary names, many of which seem not to be included in the attempts at comprehensive lists of house names collected by Barbeau in the 1910s and 1920s. In addition, the Anglican records list numerous teknonyms and the like, such as *Naks* (“spouse of”), *Nagwats* (“father of”), or *Noos* (“mother of”) followed by either a hereditary name or a Christian name. These forms should not be taken as evidence that the individuals had no hereditary names of their own. Indeed, the spouse or offspring referred to is usually of high rank; in the 1930s, Garfield (1939, 226), found that, in such cases, a teknonym was used in preference to a name one might have oneself. In short, the Duncan material gives every indication of a system in which – at least at the moment when Duncan was attempting (vainly, as it has turned out) to cauterize the traditional naming system by bestowing English names – every Tsimshian villager had a hereditary name. It is only later that one finds in the records a profusion of (baptized) Tsimshian who seem to have *only* English names. Most strikingly, Duncan’s records show a relative demographic balance between different tribes and houses, despite what must have been the gutting of many lineages’

memberships through disease in immediately recent generations. It is only later, from Duncan's era to Barbeau's, that there seems to have been a concomitant demographic drift. Beynon's survey of household heads in Port Simpson in 1915 (Barbeau n.d., B-F-16.12) showed all major lineages represented – but sometimes only by single elders. Something was regulating the sizes of houses, and whatever it was became less effective around the time English names took over. Without the twin spectres of nameless bodies and bodiless names as motivating factors, some houses grew and others dwindled. The missing element – which has since reasserted itself as Tsimshian are restoring the demographic balance of their houses – is ceremonial adoption.

Although some Tsimshian think of ceremonial adoption as a rather modern practice (at least at its current rate of occurrence), even generations that came of age in the nineteenth century considered this kind of adoption a perfectly traditional feature of the system (Boas 1916, 500; Garfield 1939, 226-30) available to lineages in demographic decline. In 1915, Dudoward explained to Barbeau the usefulness of her house's ties to the highest-ranking house in Kitkatla:

If the royal house of Gitxata has no heirs, they have to send for us here, who would take up the succession. And the same about here. A man and a girl would have to be sent; they may be brother and sister. The man could not be outside the royal house. The girl brings in the seed. When they go to the other place, the boy and girl marry whoever is suitable for them and their rank. It is the custom here that the people select a husband or wife for the prince or princess; they don't go by their own choice, no, no (and the informant laughs). (B-F-28.12; see also Garfield 1939:227)

This is an example of a matrilineal bloodline that local descent groups that may have split off from one another centuries earlier can still invoke in their relations with one another. Many Tsimshian feel that wealth such as names and territories is ideally associated only with specific matrilineal bloodlines and that those affinities are, if necessary, restorable. Of course, over a long period, two houses might repeatedly exchange adoptees in order to replenish each other's populations. Each time, this reinforces the blood tie for the next time it needs to be invoked. Such a relationship stabilizes each house's population over the centuries: the back-and-forth feastings and individual migrations reinforce the geographical and political distinctness of the two houses, while their collective migratory histories – which tell the same story up to the point of their split – invoke their common origins.

To cite an example from Kitsumkalum, a previous holder of Xpilaxha, a royal Ganhada chief of Kitsumkalum, got his name at a feast early in the twentieth century at Kitwanga, a Gitksan village up the Skeena River, where there is a related house, presumably because for one reason or another there was no representative of the Kitsumkalum House of Xpilaxha to sponsor a feast. (It was probably not that there were no living members of the Kitsumkalum house: I have managed to track down other extant bloodlines from the House of Xpilaxha dating to before that period, including one adopted into the related Gispaxlo'ots Ganhada house, the House of Nismasgaws.) In this way, a geographically distant but socially and historically very close bloodline was tapped in order to preserve the name and its prerogatives.⁷

That example is interesting on a number of levels. The Kitwanga house that includes a Xpilaxha is Laxgibuu, while the Kitsumkalum House of Xpilaxha is Ganhada (Barbeau 1929, 156). The Kitsumkalum Xpilaxha's *wilnaat'aat'* relatives among the Gispaxlo'ots are Ganhada as well (Duff n.d., "Kitsumkalum Origins"). Barbeau (1929, 156) calls this Laxgibuu *wilnaat'aat'* the Gitxandakt and attributes the peculiarity of having local chapters of different phratries to an "unusual relationship" having been formed between the closely related Houses of Wudiwiye and Wüneeymhapiskw of the Kitsumkalum Wolves on the one hand and the original Xpilaxha and Xpinon lineages of Ravens in their Kitsumkalum Valley homeland (the ancestors, it seems, of all Xpilaxhas and Xpisuunts) on the other: "A mutual exchange of privileges is known to have resulted" (129). This is a rare case in which some privileges of a *wilnaat'aat'* seem to have changed *p'teex* in the course of the *wilnaat'aat'*'s fission into local houses. Thus, the leading Raven and Wolf houses of Kitsumkalum today each have the name Xpisuunt, an unusual looking but perfectly legitimate circumstance. More than anything else, this configuration of related Ganhada and Laxgibuu houses illustrates that the blood of true clanship (consanguinity within the *wilnaat'aat'*) is thicker than the more legalistic consanguinity of the phratries.

People can also be adopted into unrelated houses, even from one clan to another, to ameliorate the effects of population drift. However, clan-to-clan adoptions also serve other ends, including ensuring that heirs to a high name have sufficiently high-ranking pedigrees on both

⁷ I have not interviewed anyone in Kitwanga for the Gitksan perspective on these events. My source consists of information passed down in the former Xpilaxha's family.

mother's and father's sides. Adoption, then, ensures an availability of suitable heirs – heirs that used to be ensured by arranged marriage (Halpin 1984). The structural equivalence of the two institutions works on a number of levels. Both adoption and arranged marriage require negotiation between exogamous clans, they regulate inheritance and the flow of wealth, and they require public validation (despite the fact that, since missionization, Tsimshian weddings have moved from the feast hall to the church). Both marriage and clan-to-clan adoption express symbolic movement from one “home” to another, although in either case a physical move may or may not occur. The Tsimshian often speak of adoptions as “moving someone over” from one clan into another, and one can speak of a chief “taking someone into his house” – *ts'ilmgaada*, “taking in,” being one term for clan-to-clan adoption.

Over the past century or so, one type of interclan adoption has become more common and involves a more complex form of social transformation: father adoption. Most Tsimshian houses' recent histories involve some instance of a man adopting into his own house his own children or grandchildren – who congenitally belong to the house and clan of their mother, always different from her husband's (see Garfield 1939, 228). As Boas (1916, 500) puts it, relying on his informant Henry Tate:

When a family [i.e., house] is likely to die out, the father is allowed to adopt one of his daughters, who then receives a name belonging to his crest. On this occasion a great festival [i.e., feast] is given ... Thus Mr. Tate adopted his daughter, who attained the legal status of his sister, and to whom he gave his mother's name, X-ts!Em-mâks n!éxtn!>e'x̄t̄ (“White in Center of Killer Whales”).

Father adoption, then, is a special case of clan-to-clan adoption, involving a transformation of the adoptee from – in Tate's case – a daughter (and therefore, for a man, an affine) into a sister or niece (and therefore his consanguine).

Some elders have told me that it is preferable, if a house's extinction looms, to find someone from the same *wilnaat'aať* in a house that has personnel to spare and, only failing that, for a father to adopt his own offspring.⁸ Others prefer adopting one's own offspring on the

⁸ Compare this to Dudoward's example (above) of the exchange of children between related royal houses: a classic arranged marriage involving an adoption within the *wilnaat'aať* was an attempt to forestall the need for a more drastic clan-to-clan adoption in a later generation.

reasoning that the adoptee would already have the bloodline of his or her father's house, only "not on the right side"; an adoption, as it were, fixes that and symbolically puts the blood on the correct side. It also does not require the adoptee to move to another village in order to exercise his or her new responsibilities. (These preferences are, of course, in reality often complicated by the circumstances of any specific case.) Occasionally I have heard undercurrents of complaint that adoption is too rampant, that some lineages are in effect becoming patrilineages, and that people use the feast hall to validate non-Native-style patrifocal structures to replace Tsimshian traditions of avuncular authority and matrifocality. But, overall, Tsimshian acknowledge that whatever is agreed upon in the feast hall constitutes the highest law. Adoption, in particular, is an ingenious institution that gives an extra edge to the survival of the names, which are the essence of Tsimshian politics and society.

The generation of Tsimshian growing up in the 1990s in Tsimshian territory refutes the stereotype of indigenous people drifting away from their traditional culture and traditional social formations. Despite the fact that few Tsimshian under the age of fifty speak Sm'algyax fluently (perhaps none at all under that age in Kitsumkalum), the language does survive in the form of the pieces of language that are hereditary names. Unlike biologically conferred identity as a landed house member – or even the spiritually conferred identity that comes with being the reincarnation of an ancestor (Seguin 1984, 120-1, 1986, 488) – the assumption of named identities within the house is not an independent process that occurs whether people believe in it or not. The transmission of names is a ceremonially and politically complex affair that requires significant amounts of energy, time, and money to maintain. This distinction between how different modes of personhood are maintained indexes a duality in the experience of Tsimshian ethnicity. Biological and spiritual affinity with one's ancestors is automatic and can confer Tsimshian ethnic identity on anyone born into a Tsimshian family or a Tsimshian community. However, the onomastic, social, and political component of Tsimshianness is not automatic but requires a personal investment and social validation in the feast hall. It takes effort, then, to be "a traditional Tsimshian," one who participates in the traditional culture, rather than merely "a Tsimshian." This is one subtext of the question young Tsimshian often ask one another: "Have you got your name yet?"

Granted, many Tsimshian – perhaps especially those isolated in the urban diaspora – who are eager to get a hereditary name are looking for a marker of Tsimshian identity rather than an ineffable mechanism for inhabiting it. But even the most acculturated members of Kitsumkalum's diaspora also speak of names as more than something to set themselves apart from their non-First Nations neighbours. They seek in a name something to reconnect them in a literal way with their ancestral communities, a mechanism for personally exploring what it means to be a Tsimshian and a house member. (And, in some cases, these seekers do not know to which houses they belong.) They have learned in their families, if they have learned nothing else about the traditional culture, that to get a name is to become a real person; indeed, it is to become an ancestor.

More concretely, once one has a name, one is automatically ranked with respect to other name holders. These relative rankings can be modified, but that modification can take place only with the received ranking as a starting point. Once the next feast is on the horizon, the named person is suddenly taken more seriously as a participant in the community's ceremonial and political activities. Not incidentally, having a name is a prerequisite for ceremonially adopting another person; some would even say only the holder of a very high name can adopt. Names, then, also confer (on men) a kind of reproductive power. To be named, then, is to be fully a person and to be charged with ensuring that the immortal personages are incarnated in a new generation in the feast hall.

But it is important to note that even the unnamed in Tsimshian communities are members of named houses and, thereby, theoretically eligible for names. In many cases, as my research has shown in Kitsumkalum, children's names and women's names belonging to a house have been passed on in a quiet – but still legitimate – fashion during periods when feasting was criminalized or neglected. This has been the case at times when there was not the wealth or political consensus to pass on the higher, chiefly names. Even when there is no functioning chief, identity as a lineage is not so easily forgotten, and sometimes all that is necessary is one name-giving feast to fully reactivate a house as a society of names.

Throughout the Tsimshian territories, chiefs assume names at feasts honouring their predecessors, forming an unbroken succession of landowners dating to long before “Canada” or “British Columbia” – or even the British monarchy – was conceived of (Gisday Wa and

Delgam Uukw 1989, 32). In 1995 I was witness to the Talking Stick ceremony at the Tsimshian Nation's Annual General Assembly in Prince Rupert (Tsimshian Tribal Council 1995), at which dozens of chiefs and house heads passed around a carved stick to the president of the Tsimshian Tribal Council, authorizing the council to represent the hereditary chiefs. This ceremony is not ancient but, rather, is a modern political rite. But these chiefs, in turn, were installed at traditional feasts validated entirely by the attendance and approval of the rank and file of their communities. Since the mandate from name holders derives from the communities who validate name-taking feasts by witnessing them and receiving goods, the current Sm'oogit Xpilaxha, Gerald Wesley, who is the Tsimshian Tribal Council's chief negotiator, represents an institution with a mandate from the ancestral land-holding lineages that the Tsimshian communities embody. As Xpilaxha negotiates with the governments in Victoria and Ottawa, not only does he follow in the tradition of his great-great-grandfather and the former Xpilaxha, Charles Nelson, who argued Kitsumkalum's land rights before the McKenna-McBride Commission in 1915, but he also has the authority of countless generations of land-owning Tsimshian names behind him. The Talking Stick Ceremony, then, is a reminder, as are the innumerable feasts held each year throughout Tsimshian territory, that names are ancient, immortal deeds to title and that, so long as Tsimshian feast and give life to them, names never die.

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