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**Feasting to decolonize the community:
building a moral community for the 21st century**

INTRODUCTION

My paper is about ideas - and how ideas are used to build a consciousness about the world and about a people's relationship in that world. This consciousness deals with who people are as a collectivity and as individuals. It is about their perception of their history, their place in the world today, and their future.

The ideas I discuss ultimately involve the consciousness aboriginal people in Canada have about their position in confederation and about the value of their culture as we all move into the 21st century. My topic concerns the way these ideas are given substance and meaning and how they are structured into an indigenous theory of practice.

At the practical level, self government, land reforms, economic development and cultural revival are some of the chief topics by which the ideas are discussed in Canada. My paper discusses how these political topics become meaningful in popular life, how they provide an alternative way of imagining the community and individual existence, how they become tools of resistance to a century of colonial government policies, and how they can contribute to decolonizing, not only aboriginal communities but the rest of the country as well.

There are many and diverse groups of aboriginal people in Canada, many First Nations, all with their own set of ideas. My own focus is on a single people, the Tsimshians of northwestern British Columbia. Nonetheless, despite this specificity in a diverse subject, I have two reasons to believe my my comments are relevant to many groups throughout the country. The first is that my limited experience in other parts of the country and discussions with aboriginal people and anthropologists from other provinces indicate the similarities exist. The other reason is the fact that the many and diverse First Nations in Canada all share a particularly relevant and common historical experience. They all presently live under the regime of the centralized Federal government in Ottawa which represents a dominant, colonialist ideology that is codified by statutes and policies. This is not to say a unified opinion exists about the Federal government or about aboriginal affairs, but only to remark on the existence of a body of national law that governs aboriginal lives, for example the Indian Act. To the extent that colonial power represents a central force and a common experience for all aboriginal peoples, their various decolonization projects share a common consciousness.¹

To illustrate this general context and set the tone for my comments I would like to repeat a quote I recently encountered. Early in May, Canada's national newspaper, the Globe and Mail, reported on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, describing meetings the Commission was holding in the village of Akwasane, an Iroquois Indian Reserve near Cornwall, in the central province of Ontario. Staff writer Andre Picard reported the Iroquois elders who attended the meetings argued that recognition of self rule was long overdue, and that the wampum belts were binding treaties covering land claims (the Globe and Mail, May 4, 1993). The quote comes from Oren Lyons' presentation. Lyons is an Iroquois faith keeper, a hereditary Onondaga chief, and a professor at Buffalo State University south of the border in New York State. He said:

Sovereignty is in our hearts. Sovereignty is in our

acts.

I was not at those meetings, so I do not know the full context of Lyon's statement, but when I read the quote in the paper, it seemed particularly pertinent to my topic. In its poetic elegance, this phrase is about the meaning structure that is called, in Canada, "self government" and how the meaning of sovereignty is inculcated deeply into the motivations and actions of aboriginal people.

"Sovereignty is in our hearts. Sovereignty is in our acts." Although the words were uttered by an Iroquois intellectual living in the northeastern region of North America, the phrase strikes a chord that harmonizes with similar sentiments on the other side of the continent, in northwestern British Columbia, where the Tsimshian people also are defining and understanding what they mean by sovereignty, and what sovereignty means in their hearts and in their acts.

KITSUMKALUM

The village where my work is centred, and which centres my work, is the Tsimshian community of Kitsumkalum on Canada's west coast. The Tsimshian First Nation lives on the lower Skeena River in northwestern British Columbia, Canada and on the adjacent islands in the North Pacific Ocean. One community lives in the Alaska panhandle, principally in the town of Metalakata but also in nearby Kitchican. In Canada, there are five principle reserve villages on the coast and two inland villages near the city of Terrace. Kitsumkalum is one of the inland communities. Other local northwest towns and cities, in particular Prince Rupert, Port Edward, and Terrace, also have significant, resident Tsimshian populations.

Of the approximately 450 people in the community of Kitsumkalum, over 250 people actually live (in 1993) in the village of Kitsumkalum, which is the community's central residence, and which is located on the Indian Band's principle Indian Reserve. This community has felt the impact of colonialization very strongly. They are considered to be one of the most assimilated of the contemporary Tsimshian groups, and many in the community agree. The reasons for this assimilation are complex. I have been describing them in a series of publications (see references) and reports with limited distribution for the Band sponsored Kitsumkalum Social History Research Project (reports and general information are available through the Band or this author). Sometimes the assimilation was accepted as part of individual and group strategies for making a life in the colonial period. Other times, the changes were imposed directly or indirectly by governments, missionaries, businesses, or general racism. The people of Kitsumkalum have lived in close contact with the colonial forces for over one hundred years. They were not mentioned in archival records until their first appearance at the Hudson Bay Company trading post, Port Simpson, in 184* (ref*), and disappeared again until 187* when the missionary Tomlinson held the first Christian service in the village (ref*). After being given a special reserve beside the cannerey town of Port Essington in 189*, many of the Kitsumkalum people moved to that coastal town and became known as the Port Essington Indians. Ever since, their association with regional economic development was extremely intimate, affecting their lives to an extent unimaginable in the more isolated communities on the coast and in other river valleys. When Port Essington withered and died, finally burning down around 1960?*, most of the Kitsumkalum families moved back to join their relatives in Terrace. Their neighbouring Indian Reserve was re-occupied and the village rebuilt.

The village today is located next to the urbanized area of Terrace with over 20,000 people. Terrace supports a logging industry and acts as the regional service centre for business and government. Beyond the city's immediate vicinity, there are a few farming settlements in the limited agricultural lands that are available. Since the territory surrounding Terrace is mountainous, little of

it is settled. All of it, however, is treated as the hinterland for the city of Terrace and is organized in several ways for development and exploitation. For example, the forest part of a provincial management region called Tree Farm Licence number 1.

A significant portion of the Terrace hinterland includes the traditional land of the Kitsumkalum people and is under a land claim filed by the legal entity of the Kitsumkalum Indian Band. Aboriginal land claims can be a significant political force in Canada, not only in the north and on the frontier but also in southern urbanized areas (for example, the Oka crisis of 1990, see *ref*). Governments at all levels have a significant interest in resolving land claims, so as to rectify the uncertainties conflicts can introduce into development plans. Nonetheless, despite the benefits that can be realized by settling land claims, the results of negotiations are mixed. For the Nisga'a and the Gitksans, two groups neighbouring the Kitsumkalum, the process for has resulted in some remarkable agreements and court cases (e.g., ***). For the Kitsumkalum Indian Band and the Tsimshian Tribal Council the major, comprehensive land claims negotiations are still pending. In the meantime, development of Kitsumkalum territory by non-aboriginal interests proceeds unilaterally. Clear cut logging of the forest, for example, is proceeding with the same type of haste and waste that is more usually associated with third world colonial development (e.g., **)

Notwithstanding the continuing colonization of their lands and resources, the people of Kitsumkalum have consistently defended their aboriginal rights against foreign domination, whether from other aboriginal peoples (McDonald 1983), settlers (e.g., Drucker 195?:?? [ref to Ed]; McDonald 1990a), or industrialists (e.g., McDonald 1990b).

s.t. on govt ban vs. this eg the antiLC ban and other policies

Even after the 1930s, when the aggressiveness of Federal assimilation policies peaked and the Canadian government outlawed organizational work for land claims, community members found alternative, surreptitious means to protect their interests, and helped to establish the important, political vehicle called the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia (discussed in Drucker 195?:??*).

With the slow liberalization of the country's laws governing Indians during the past 30 years, the community quickly reverted to more overt political activities to defend their territorial and other rights. One of the more significant of these recent developments is the reinstatement of ceremonial feasting, commonly called the potlatch in the anthropological literature. [fn:term]

The feast or potlatch is a "ceremonial at which the various prerogatives intimately associated with social status [are] assumed" (Drucker 1963:131). A feast is held to formally and publicly present an heir to a leadership position or to other privileges to a group of invited guests. The prerogatives and the heir's rights to those prerogatives are publicly explained during the ceremony, in order for those rights and social positions to be publicly validated by the witnesses to the proceedings. In recognition of the critical role the guests have in validating social position, the host group provides the guests with a lavish banquet and presents gifts. In English, people on the coast frequently refer to these ceremonies as "feasts" because of the banquet format.

My description of the feast is brief, but 2 key points to keep in mind are that the feast is a focal political forum in the government of social relations and the central integrative institution of that society. The overall function of the feast ceremonial complex has been described by Miller as the knot "holding together the Tsimshian fabric" (Miller 1984:27-28), by Adams as an investment in community relationships (Adams 1973:4), and by Sequin as the central integrative institution of that society (Sequin 1985:58). Many, for example Barnett (1939), have described the political function of the feast all along the coast.

Historically, Canadian Indian policy sought to undermine aboriginal cultures. Tremendous assimilation pressures were focused specifically against feast ceremonialism (e.g. Laviolette 1973). Officially, the practice was outlawed in the Indian Act of 1884, (*previous?) and people were jailed for dancing or giving away gifts. Less officially, missionaries exerted additional pressure by preaching against the practice, encouraging the burning of regalia and damning participants, and agitating politicians. In general, the colonial attitude was set against the potlatch and at times rose in hysteria to what were misperceived to be excessive displays of savage behaviour (*ref nec.*)

But potlatching survived in British Columbia, albeit in modified forms.

Actually, potlatching did more than just survive. It became a symbol of the distinctiveness of aboriginal cultures, offering communities a means to continue their culture and to resist the destructively aggressive acculturation emanating from many sources in Canadian society (e.g., Drucker and Heizer [1967]). After years of protest, the law prohibiting potlatching was dropped from the revised Indian Act of 1951. Since then, especially in the past 20 years, there has been a dramatic upswing in feast activities in British Columbia. Today, many aboriginal communities are experimenting with the feast as an institutional device to govern themselves and to govern their relations with other aboriginal first nations and with Canadian society.

THE KITSUMKALUM CULTURAL PROJECT

The community of Kitsumkalum returned to formal feasting in 1987, after a hiatus of at least 50 - 60 years. The exact date of the community's last, previous feast is uncertain, however, my research suggests the turn of the century, perhaps as late as the early 1930s. One result of this interruption in their ceremonialism was that, in 1986, no one in the village had hosted a feast ceremony and only a few had attended one.

Since the 1987 ceremony, others have been held. A second major feast occurred in 1992. Between these two key events, a number (2-3) of minor feasts have also been held or are entered into a planning stage. All these activities represent a strong revival of the feasting practice.

The revival has generated a community wide discourse on feasting in which much of the discussion is about the renovation of the political and social structure of the community along lines they identify as traditional. People talk about being Indian, about their Indian-ness. They talk about their traditions and traditional values. They talk about their social conditions and what they need to obtain a better, more just life, and to survive as a people.

It brings to mind Peter Worsely's suggestion that culture in the colonized world is really a project that supplies answers to the important question of "what is to be done?" (1984:43). This notion of culture supplying a project, a design for living characterises a wide spread phenomenon in Canada in which traditional ceremonies are being given more and more prominence.

Across Canada, the cultural project takes many shapes and directions, according to the history of each First Nation. One example is the effort of the people in the Attikamek First Nation, in the eastern province of Quebec, to develop their economy. Their goal is to define indigenous strategies for sustainable development in their territories and for integrated resource management in a way that will be compatible to multiple uses and all legitimate users. Their ultimate ambition is "to rediscover the basis of traditional culture, and symbols of Attikamek identity (Quebec 1992:7) and to blend the aboriginal philosophy and way of life, with the environmental situation. One of their recent experiments with this approach is the establishment of a forestry service by their national council, Conseil de la nation atikamekw.

There are many other examples. North of Toronto, reserve communities have developed

Ojibwa cultural theme parks to encourage both cultural awareness and economic development through tourism. And, in northwestern British Columbia, to get back to the subject of my paper, the Kitsumkalum people are talking about how, what they call their 'cultural revival', can respond to their community's needs for economic, social, and cultural development, and how the potlatch can be the forum to organize that rejuvenation. This response is just another translation of Lyons's sentence: "Sovereignty is in our hearts. Sovereignty is in our acts."

In 1987, the first Kitsumkalum potlatch had four explicit concerns: 1.) revival of the art and ceremonialism which embodies the culture, 2.) claiming a just and meaningful place in the economic development of the region, 3.) advancing the land claim, and 4.) manifesting self government.

In 1992, the expressed concerns were just as comprehensive, but they were contained in just two goals: 1.) reviving ceremonialism, and 2.) reviving aboriginal structures of self government. The second goal encompassed, or assumed, the issues of the land claim and economic development. This assumption is noteworthy evidence a considerable evolution had occurred in the community. By 1992, the participants were assuming Tsimshian self government was the proper context for developing the land claims and economic issues. The issue was not how to establish this context but how to strengthen and deepen it. The instruments of self government were seen as the way to shift the values of the community more fully onto indigenous Tsimshian values and to build a specifically Tsimshian moral community to take the people into the 21st century.

Such is the Kitsumkalum cultural project. A principal part of which is the use of the feast as a social institution that can "... engage a world of politics and privilege, power and positioning..." (Roseberry 1989:232) and as an instrument of knowledge that can revive Tsimshian values.

I must insert a concern expressed to me by members of the community when I discussed this paper with them. The feasting I describe at Kitsumkalum represents a practice that depends on reviving existing knowledge and relearning knowledge that had been lost. The more experienced potlachers in the area, notably individual Nisga'a, insist that feasting had not stopped in their communities. Thus, while Kitsumkalum was turning to the feast as a form of self government, other groups watched with an experienced eye. [s.t. thing on the Kit. potl. and Beynon notes

A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

When we think about the feast as a social institution, the classic definition of the potlatch as a political forum is crucial. The image is one of noble titleholders (chiefs) performing public rituals concerning some claim of social distinction, in front of a convention of invited witnesses (Barnett 1939). Thus the potlatch legitimizes social and political relationships and is the institutional equivalent of a parliament, and a records office.

The intention of returning to the feast involves the utilization of this institutional formulation, and the privileging of the tradition and customs of the feast viz a vis the institutions of the dominant Canadian society in order to organize an indigenous form of self government, to resolve land claims based in the context of that self government, and to promote economic development in that context.

Much has been written about the symbolic power a feast has to impose a social reality, by symbolically embodying that reality. Certainly the feast generates a critical dialectic relation between the symbolic structures and the corresponding action structures but in practice the development of aboriginal self government also implies enhancing not just the structures, but also aboriginal dispositions to government, and de-colonizing the mind after 100 years of coercive acculturation. In other words, feasting gives access to a type of knowledge and structures certain

dispositions that make possible, to use Pierre Bourdieu's (1972:2) terminology, a certain "native experience" and a "native representaton" of that experience.

AN INSTRUMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

As an instrument of knowledge, feasting can generate and propagate principles for the construction of the social reality. Feasting can generate an orthodoxy about the social world, as well as the competencies needed to live in it.

As an instrument of knowledge, feasting 1.) homogenizes people's understanding and knowledge about their heritage, 2.) inculcates in its practitioners durable dispositions and competencies that enable them to act as Tsimshians, and 3.) provides principles for a practical logic that generates further appropriate practices in the same and different contexts. I will comment briefly on each of these three points.

1.) Homogenizing knowledge

First, successful feasting requires sorting through a heterodoxy of opinions and homogenizing people's understanding and knowledge about their heritage. During the planning stages for the feasts of 1987 and 1992, fundamental questions were raised about how and why to potlatch. One was the question of 'To potlatch or not to potlatch'. 130 years ago, this question may not even have been thinkable, at least, not in such a profound sense, but today, the legacy of colonialism has made it thinkable.

A second set of questions involved the definition of such problematic matters as the meaning of tradition, aboriginal culture, feasting, and self government. A third set of questions addressed how the return to feasting might counter the hegemonic influence of the colonial government's own orthodoxy concerning self government, land claims, aboriginal rights, criminal justice, and so on.

Discussion of opinion on these questions, in 1987 and 1992, developed in formal meetings and informal gatherings, and generated a common opinion that provided the basis for actions to be determined and taken. Over time, a necessary orthodoxy emerged defining the correct way to feast. It was a tentative orthodoxy as orthodoxies go. People were acutely aware of their lack of knowledge and experience and remained receptive to other ideas, but as their experience grew, their orthodox opinions became clearer and stronger.²

As the discourse proceeded, some of what had been conscious, inevitably and gradually, receded into the implicit corridors of the conversation. Matters that needed to be explored thoroughly at the start of the process became assumptions that guided later conversations, became a part of the culture of the unconscious "that leaves unsaid all that goes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977:18), and, as the history of this knowledge was forgotten in the conversation, the product became naturalized.

"Naturalization" refers to the implicit knowledge, or assumptions, that make it seem so natural for a Tsimshian to feast in a certain way, indeed, to feast at all. These are the intellectual assumptions and attitudes that a mature, experienced potlatcher carries, seemingly naturally. This type of mastery was demonstrated in 1992 when a titleholder^a from a related household in a neighbouring community, who had considerable feasting experience, came forward to support the

^a should I mention names - ask Deanna

host family's efforts and added fine ritualistic and ideological embellishments to the proceedings with that apparent spontaneity that only experience imparts.

2.) Dispositions

This brings me back to my second point concerning feast ceremonialism as an instrument of knowledge for constructing a de-colonized social world. The process I am describing involves more than the development and naturalization of ideas and ideology for feasting. Feasting requires both discussion and experience. It entails the organization of the perception of practices, and the production of practices. Thereby involving a universe of discourse and a universe of practice. The aspect of these discourses that has been emphasized in the past is how feasting appropriates collective history in the form of institutional structures and orthodoxies. Seguin's discussions (e.g., 1985) provide an excellent contemporary example from a coastal Tsimshian village. I am emphasizing another aspect as being especially important in the decolonization process.

Thus my second point: feasting inculcates in its practitioners certain dispositions and competencies enabling them to reproduce the deeply tacit values and norms that underlie the feast as an institution.

The 1987 ceremony involved seven months of preparation to work out the logistics of the feast. Protocols were discussed. Gifts were organized. Invitations were sent out. The service and agenda were organized and presentations were rehearsed. And so on. Decisions made in the meetings were put into practice in the days that followed with, seemingly, unceasing corrections building knowledge and integrating experiences. Potlatch thinking came to govern what people did during the week.

The 1992 ceremony involved five months of preparation, as well as preliminary discussions that started at least four years earlier. Those discussions involved decisions about the appropriateness of the event, the willingness of the participants, organizing support, and dealing with the myriad of strategies that underlie a successful translation of the political discourse into a discourse of practice.

This preparatory period is important. A relationship must be built between the political discourse represented by the feast and the political practice that the discourse will become. If this relationship fails, the feast will fail. Feasts can fail. If a proper base of support is not built, efforts to host a feast can collapse, even at the "eleventh hour".

In all cases, whether of failure or success, practical experience, of the sort that grows into mastery, is gained with the mechanics and practical logic of feasting. The practical processes, like the discursive processes that move toward an orthodoxy in the explicit knowledge and a homogenization of the unconscious knowledge, also move towards habitual behaviour that is homogenized and does not demand conscious direction. The durable dispositions that result have great significance for feasting and for countering the "colonization of the consciousness" [(Caranofs, in Smith 1993ms)]. This significance can be best understood if the subjectivity of the dispositions is not taken to be simply an individual subjectivity. The dispositions I am talking about are sociological, with a subject that exists only in relation to the collective appreciation of the dispositions. Thus, the Tsimshians are tolerant of variations that exist among the villages in the traditions of the feast (Seguin 1985:**) and one could follow Bourdieu and say style is as much a part of the matter as is substance (Bourdieu 177:86-87). This observation allows an important flexibility in the decolonization process as communities revive their traditions and customs, allowing more experienced communities to provide support,. An example, was the acceptance of variances during the 1987 feast (McDonald 1990b:**).

3.) The matrix

My third point is that the forging of practices and meanings produces a relationship between collective action and event that Bourdieu called a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions (Bourdieu 1977:82-83). This matrix internalizes the outside world and makes possible the achievement of the infinitely diverse activities to which people in Kitsumkalum refer when they speak about their cultural revival. Their current revival matrix is discussed and structured in terms of many analogically similar issues, including art, ceremonialism, self government, land claims, economic development, and education. The effect is that feasting dispositions and competencies engender further feasting aspirations and practices that are compatible to the appropriate social conditions and that are responses to the stimulation of those social conditions. Thus, the 1987 potlatch was the breeding ground for later feasting, and the 1992 potlatch can be seen as a continuation of the previous one and a prologue to the next. The two potlatches provided the practice that generated such cultural competencies in the community of Kitsumkalum. Discursive practice in 1992 began at a "higher" level, and took for granted much that seemed arbitrary in 1987. The 1992 potlatch incorporated many modifications and additional customs (or practices) and nuances (or style) into the model of 1987.

Potlatching competencies, tied as they are to other cultural domains, influence numerous other analogically related cultural activities. In the cultural revival situation of the 2 Kitsumkalum potlatches this transfer effect was especially dramatic, percolating through the community and instilling a sense of self government in the hearts and actions of the people. Another way to describe this effect, this sense, is with the naturalizing phrase "Tsimshian culture".

I think, however, it is crucial to keep in mind what the people of Kitsumkalum do not need to keep in mind: The matrix consists of diverse experiences, including Canadian politics as well as Tsimshian revivals. The growth of Tsimshian competencies does not so much create a new matrix defined by pure Tsimshian culture or 'tradition' as cause a shift in the existing matrix away from coordinates situating people in terms of the dominant society and towards perceptions related to feasting that contribute to a decolonized form of self government.

The existence of this complexity was illustrated in 1987, when the same group of people simultaneously organized the pole raising ceremony that revived the principles of the potlatch and another pole raising ceremony in the city of Terrace that incorporated showy references to Tsimshian feasting but avoided invoking the central governing functions of a feast that are ceremonially embodied. Appropriately, this event was called a dedication ceremony.

Another thing to note about these structured dispositions, I am describing, is that they render it difficult to think about, much less perform, incompatible actions (Bourdieu 1977:77). This phenomenon is part of the explanation for the origin of one of the problems the feast was to resolve. Generations of official and unofficial Canadian suppression of Tsimshian cultural practices had not only undermined and damaged their knowledge of their traditions, but also undermined and damaged the thinkability of many cultural practices. The censorship of these governmental policies rendered, as 'unthinkable', the idea that the community would have its own feast or a government other than some form of Indian Act government. This was true even as recently as say 1985. However, the unthinkable became thinkable in 1987, and again in 1992 when the change in what was thinkable was deepened.

Thus, the return to feasting activities puts at stake nothing less than the task of creating a

world in the Tsimshian image, a world structured in a Tsimshian way, a world that allows Tsimshian thoughts and practices.

Very relevant to my analysis is Seguin's discussion of the Tsimshian concept of sm'oogyet or chief. A sm'oogyet, literally a 'real person', is a model person who embodies Tsimshian morality and cultural values. For these real people, feasting is a collective manifestation of their individual reality. So too for the modern community, where feasting is an expression of the degree to which decolonization has been achieved.

The feast is symbolic of a way of life, infusing meaning and consciousness, generating a Tsimshian person, and defining an answer to the question of 'what is to be done'.

When seen this way, the scope of the feasting project is breath taking, especially in a community that has suffered tremendous assimilation.

Question of interests

Before concluding, there is an important aspect to this process I should emphasize. The creation of a world in the Tsimshian image is more than a clever orchestration of the matrix and social institutions. The political and ideological discourse of feasting does not legislate a Tsimshian world into existence.

When successful, feasting reflects a harmony between the subject which is the individual or collectivity, and the objective circumstances in which the subject is located.

The Tsimshian concept of a 'real person', with its blend of ideals and practicalities, again comes to mind. Real-ness is a recognition and a reconciliation of the objective and subjective conditions of a Tsimshian existence. A person cannot become a real person by simply saying so. Real person status requires participation in Tsimshian values, commitment to those values, and the propagation of those values. This can only occur if certain conditions are met and other beings (both human and supernatural) recognize and support the efforts.

So too, like the sm'oogyet, the realization of decolonization or the cultural revival, is based on and involves the creation of a harmony between the subjective and objective conditions of the community. In producing this harmony, feasting works with Tsimshian material conditions and interests, "elaborating, cohering and transforming them in various ways" (Eagleton 1991:213)

What are these interests? This is a very complicated question. The short answer is that feasting focuses attention on interests that are common to the various aboriginal peoples throughout Canada (land claims, aboriginal rights, self government) and that are identified and defined by their aboriginality. These interests exist as a result of the special history of aboriginal peoples and because of their specific struggles to enshrine these interests in the constitution and law of the country. Feasting occurs in this context. This is the part of the answer that relates to my introductory comments about the applicability of my paper to other parts of Canada. Aboriginal interests, as such, exist throughout Canada.

The other part of the answer is that, feasting places aboriginal interests into the context of Tsimshian traditions (*?term?*) and values, distinguishing them from aboriginal interests in other parts of the country and giving them identity as being specifically Tsimshian interests. Thus, the history and specific circumstances of the Tsimshian or Kitsumkalum people is manifested and important to the understanding of what is to be done.

So, a quick Malinoskian answer to the question of interest is that, for the Tsimshians, the interests are a bundle of rights to symbolic and material property, tied together while feasting, by the threads of heritage, kinship, rank, and realness.

In Canadian political discourse, aboriginal interests are generally identified as aboriginal rights, creating a duality between what can be perceived as aboriginal and what is not. Aboriginal rights are important because they are the interests that make aboriginal people a distinct social class in the Canadian social formation. These rights are not the only material and social interests that aboriginal people have. They are a class of interests crucial to the meaning of the contemporary feast as an effort to recreate the subjective life of the community in harmony with the objective conditions of the community's history. I do not want my comments to promote a conceptual dualism between tradition (that is, aboriginal) and modern. I do want to suggest that by feasting, Tsimshians support and advance their interests that are called aboriginal rights and, at the same time, strengthen one of the foundations they can use to pursue their other interests, including those are linked to small business and wage labour (see McDonald 1984, 1985, 1994). The feast is a means, and an alternative political discourse, which can mix all their interests into a single way of life.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude my discussion by going to the national level. In Canada, the multicultural situation, with its complexly differentiated politics, will probably never allow instruments of knowledge like the feast to become a natural or self-evident way to conduct political affairs, there will always be discussion of the question 'To potlatch or not to potlatch', but as the practice of feasting helps shift the perceptions and appreciations of its practitioners, the other questions concerning the alternativeness of the feast for governing the relations between people and communities will be answered with ever more profound understandings.

This cultural decolonization has many consequences for all Canadians. Development of the feast, or other forms of self government, as an alternative to our regularized BNA³ Governments, breaks the hermeneutic discussion about government in Canada and opens a deeply heterodox discourse.

The growth of such heterodoxy requires the review of the dominant political traditions and habits. These are not speculative comments. We are slowly seeing results of this review in land claims agreements that incorporate aboriginal political structures, or in broad management agreements to cover forestry and fisheries that incorporate aboriginal management structures and principles, or in official bureaucratic interaction with elements of self government, such as titleholders and aboriginal legal systems, or in the conscious assimilation of aboriginal concepts of consensual politics by national political organizations and non governmental organizations, such as the National Action Committee on Women (Collison 1993:62).

Feasting, and other forms of self government, may not entirely challenge the existence of the BNA governments, the population figures and distribution of power are too disproportionate, but, the practice does challenge the orthodoxy they hitherto misrepresented and imposed.

Undoubtedly, the feast challenge is most important in the community, where the magnitude of the experience is greatest. There, feasting shakes Parliament in its lofty Victorian perch as the epitome of man's rise to civilization and as the closest thing to truly natural government. But the importance is not limited to the reserve.

As the aboriginal agenda for self government has its impact on the constitutional and political debates of Canada, practices such as feasting mean the BNA Governments, tenaciously rooted as they are in the colonial heritage, can no longer be misrecognized as natural. The hitherto naturalized Social Darwinian tradition of the superiority and inevitable domination of a EuroCanadian political order becomes a rather arbitrary and unstable thought.

These types of changes have implications for all levels of government in all parts of the country, whether in the north of the province of British Columbia where First Nation are arguing to become a new level of government, or in the Federally administered North West Territories where First Nations are struggling for provincial status, or elsewhere.

Where they will take us, is uncertain but, self government activities like feasting, have the potential for decolonizing not only aboriginal communities but the rest of the country as well.

ENDNOTES

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1. Interestingly, conversations I have had with New Zealand Maoris, Australian aboriginals, and Fijian natives, indicate a remarkable similarity in other parts of the colonized world and Commonwealth

2. I am not going to say more about the politics of orthodoxy, which is obviously an important and large topic. There are two reasons. The minor one is that Seguin and Barnett have analyzed the process for other Tsimshian communities. More importantly is an ethical consideration. To publicly expose the process and discuss internal debates might, at this time, generate political difficulties from forces in the dominant society opposed to self government. Such a discussion might become a damaging type of intervention. I will only take the time to acknowledge the importance of the dynamic.

3. By BNA governments, I refer to the Provincial and Federal governments established by the British North America Act (BNA Act) of 1867, which was the Canadian constitution until 1982 when the BNA Act was incorporated into the Constitution of 1982.