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**When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance**

by

Kiera L. Ladner, B.A., M.A., M.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Political Science

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
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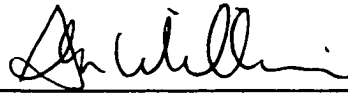
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**WHEN BUFFALO SPEAKS:
CREATING AN ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF
TRADITIONAL BLACKFOOT GOVERNANCE**

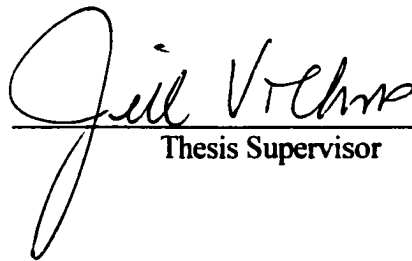submitted by

Kiera Ladner, B.A., M.A.

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

---
Chair, Department of Political Science

---
Thesis Supervisor

---
External Examiner

Carleton University
December 15, 2000

# ABSTRACT

Does the exclusion of Indigenous political traditions from the purview of political science mean that American Indians had no political traditions of their own prior to colonization? Were there no structures of government prior the occupation of the Americas? Is the development of Indigenous governments intrinsically linked to colonization? If Indigenous peoples had government and their own political traditions, should political science concern itself with Indigenous political traditions or should political science simply be concerned with western-eurocentric political traditions or state-based government?

Recognizing that the 'exclusion' of Indigenous political traditions from the disciplinary domain of political science is unjustified, this dissertation attempts to bring Indigenous structures of governance and Indigenous understandings of their own political traditions into political science. Identifying and depicting 'stateless' Indigenous political traditions as a parallel to state-based western-eurocentric political traditions, I attempt to destablilize and decolonize political science by introducing an alterNative and stateless 'way of knowing' governance.

Acknowledging that the 'universal' excludes Aboriginal political traditions, this thesis contends both that there is no universal, and that Aboriginal peoples had their own political traditions prior to colonization; as such 'the Indian must be brought into political science'. Because there is no universal, my thesis contends that it is only by understanding Indigenous political traditions from the vantage point of Indigenist thought

that we can come to a meaningful understanding of pre-colonial, non-state Indigenous governance. In developing these ideas, I will demonstrate that *Siiksikaawa* governance was forged through a people's experiences with Creation or by observing, experiencing, understanding and listening when beings such as buffalo 'speak'. I will also illustrate that examining polities using Henderson's theory of ecological contexts is a useful approach for the study of Indigenous non-state political traditions.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my great appreciation to my supervisor, Professor Jill M. Vickers, and my committee members, Professor Miriam C. Smith and Professor Radha Jhappan. Thanks for your encouragement, advise and support. I would also like to acknowledge my internal examiner, Simon Dalby , and my external examiner, Sarah Carter, for their thoughtful commentaries and questions. Notwithstanding the assistance that I have received from a number of individuals and organizations, I would also like to thank SSHRC, OGS, the Department of Political Science at Carleton University and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at Carleton University.

I would like to extend my gratitude to those Elders who provided the guidance, encouragement and teachings necessary to complete this project. Specifically, I wish to thank 'the little old man', Alan Wolf Leg, Andrew Weasel Fat, Leonard Bastien, Alan Pard, Joe Crowshoe, Reg Crowshoe, Tom Crane Bear, Bob Breaker, 'the old man', 'the old woman', and the others who assisted in my learning for their many teachings. Without them, there would be no dissertation. Without them, I would have never mastered 'hoop dancing'. I hope that I have done their stories justice. Nonetheless, I

take full responsibility for any mistranslations, misinterpretations, or misunderstandings. Meegwetch!

Although the topic of this dissertation was inspired by a foray of conversations with Professor Jill M. Vickers, I also wish to acknowledge James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson for his inspiration and support. His post-colonial dream has provided the foundation for theorizing and explaining my understanding of Indigenous political thought and governance, his support and encouragement has enabled me to realize my own post-colonial dream.

In addition, I would like to thank the many people (past and present) who have seen me through this adventure in academia. I particularly wish to honour those people who have walked the road before me and in so doing have shown me the way forward and provided me with much inspiration. A special note of appreciation goes out to those people who have stood by me during the writing off this dissertation and who have provided me with the much needed encouragement, guidance and support. Specifically, I wish to thank Pauline Rankin who never let me give up and was always there with words of encouragement and advice. I am indebted to her constant reminders that I am only human. I also want to thank Denise McConney for her 24-7 translation and academic support services, Patricia Monture-Angus for taking her role as Auntie seriously, and Greg Hill for his technical support and expertise. I would also like to thank Lynn Davis and my current graduate students for convincing me that I truly am on the right path and encouraging me to finish this journey quickly, and provide them with another 'stack of

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# DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Bonnie Ladner, who introduced me to politics and drove me to my first day of school. I'm not sure which came first, but I do know that it is her support, encouragement, influence and guidance that enabled me to push both to their limits.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my nieces, Melissa, Martine and Cole E., I hope that one day you will understand why I went away. I also hope that one day you too will come to understand what it means to be a post-colonial ghost-dancer, only I hope that by then you are not called a dreamer, a ghost-dancer or a radical thinker. My dream for you is that you will one day be part of a post-colonial world.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy, particularly my relations, Wynonah, the children and those yet to come, for the words that I write and the stories that I tell are yours. Meegwetch.

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# INTRODUCTION

In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue. In actuality, a very lost and starving

Christoble Colone was discovered in 1492 searching for a new route to India by the

Indigenous inhabitants of Turtle Island. Since the time of this 'great discovery', when

people found Columbus off the shores of their territory, this land and its peoples

wrongly referred to as Indians,[1] have inhabited the imaginations of the world. Initially,

the land and its bountiful wealth set astir the minds of European nobility and

mercantilists who envisioned capitalizing on the riches of the new world to sustain the old

world. In time, the land and its bountiful riches were captured in the 'American Dream',

which still inspires people from around the globe to migrate to and/or 'explore' the new

world with the same hope of capitalizing upon its wealth and beauty. The Indigenous

peoples' 'discovery' of Colone (a.k.a. Columbus) off the shores of the Americas roused

the minds of those seeking new wealth. Knowledge of the Americas and the peoples who

lived there also captured the minds and imaginations of some of Europe's greatest

political philosophers: More, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Spencer, and Engels, to

name but a few.[2] These 'great' philosophers spent much time contemplating the life of

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[1] I use the term Indigenous, Aboriginal and Indian to refer to the original peoples of Turtle Island (the Americas) quite interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Though these terms refer to all First Nations peoples or all of the original peoples and collectivities, my dissertation is concerned solely with those peoples who had not organized themselves as states or empires in North America. Although this division is artificial, it is, nevertheless, necessary given the confines of this dissertation and the enormity of this topic as it stands. Thus, unless otherwise qualified, Indigenous, Aboriginal and Indian refer to the 'stateless' peoples of the pre-colonial Americas.

[2] William Brandon, *New Worlds for Old: Reports from the New World and Their Effect on the Development of Social Thought in Europe: 1500-1800*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1986).

the 'savage' and the pre-colonial history of the 'savage', who they assumed, lived the way Europeans had in some pre-historical time.

Despite all the time spent contemplating the life of the 'savage' by these great thinkers, and despite the fact that Indians of the Americas have occupied the imaginations of the world since the time of 'discovery', Indians have not occupied the imaginations of modern political scientists. Political science, for the most part, has ignored Indigenous political traditions. While studies of contemporary Indigenous peoples and their interactions with the state are increasing in numbers, political scientists have ignored pre-colonial Indigenous political traditions and have studied contemporary Indigenous politics only from the vantage point of the western-eurocentric tradition. Simply put, most political scientists have been unable to escape their own paradigm to understand the politics of the 'other' on its own terms or as separate from the western-eurocentric experience. Moreover, political science continues to perpetuate a western-eurocentric understanding of the world which virtually denies 'others' a voice within the discipline.

Until recently, the political traditions of Aboriginal people were not an acceptable subject of inquiry within the field of Canadian politics. While the reasons for ignoring Indigenous political traditions and the exclusion itself may vary within the academy, my own varied experiences within the discipline are useful in conveying an understanding of why this exclusion occurred. As such, I would argue that the reason Indigenous political traditions have been ignored in political science varies from scholar to scholar and institution to institution. At an individual level, many assume that Indigenous peoples lacked politics simply because they were 'savages'. Many have likely never considered the possibility. Most never had access to the knowledge needed to make fair assessment. Some may deny that Indigenous peoples had elaborate, highly developed political traditions prior to colonization, because recognizing that Indigenous peoples were sovereign nations brings the legitimacy of colonization into question. Others simply

argue that political science has the state as its focus and that anything that falls beyond the boundaries of the state should be ignored or should be the responsibility of other disciplines. Whatever the case may be, most political scientists deny, ignore or exclude Indigenous political traditions in their examination of politics.

While the exclusion of Indigenous political traditions may reflect simple ignorance or willful disregard, I was taught that we did not study Indians in political science because Indians were 'savages' with no political traditions of their own and no capacity for government until they achieved the level of 'development' described as 'civilization'.[3] There was no need to mention Indigenous political traditions or specific structures of government, because the study of politics in Canada was assumed to begin with the arrival of the Europeans. Furthermore, Indigenous people were assumed to have had no political traditions that corresponded with the types of political traditions (read: western-eurocentric government or the state) that we study in political science.

Political science is changing, and as a result, such sentiments are now commonly challenged and there is an increasing awareness of, and interest in, contemporary Aboriginal politics. But while more scholars now address contemporary Aboriginal politics in both the classroom and in their scholarship, Indigenous political traditions are, with few exceptions, still ignored or excluded. That is to say, scholars typically ignore the 'Indigenous', and study contemporary Aboriginal politics from a western-eurocentric perspective or focus on the interaction between Aboriginal people and the state. Thus, political science continues to ignore 'Indigenous' political traditions and 'Indigenous' perspectives. This exclusion raises several questions. Does the exclusion of Indigenous political traditions from political science mean that American Indians had no political

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[3] It should be noted that this was not an isolated event and that while many political scientists reject this position on the grounds that it is 'outrageous', such sentiments are still commonplace in political science, and 'whitestream' society. In fact, such sentiments were echoed by the British Columbia Supreme Court in the case *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* (1991). Chief Justice Alan McEachern quoted Hobbes in stating that life in pre-colonial America was 'nasty, brutish and short' and implied that Indians lacked attributes of civilization and thus, governance prior to colonization. Delgamuukw v. British Columbia, *Canadian Native Law Reporter*, 1 (1994).

traditions of their own prior to colonization? Are Indigenous political traditions

intrinsically linked to colonization and were there no structures of government prior the

occupation of the Americas? Was the development of Indigenous governments

intrinsically linked to colonization? If Indigenous peoples had government and their own

political traditions, should political science concern itself with Indigenous political

traditions or should political science simply be concerned with western-eurocentric

political traditions or state-based government? The answers to these questions are found

within the intellectual history of the discipline.

## INDIANS & THE OCCUPATION OF THE EUROCENTRIC MIND

According to Daniel Francis:

> The Indian began as a White man's mistake, and became a White man's
> fantasy. Through the prism of White hopes, fears and prejudices,
> indigenous Americans would be seen to have lost contact with reality and
> to have become "Indians"; that is, anything that non-Natives wanted them
> to be.[4]

Similarly, Robert F. Berkhofer writes:

> For most Whites throughout the past five centuries, the Indian of the
> imagination and ideology has been as real, perhaps more real than the
> Native American of actual existence and contact. As pre-conception
> became conception and conception became fact, the Indian was used for
> the ends of an argument, art, and entertainment by White painters,
> philosophers, poets, novelists and movie makers among many.[5]

The imaginary Indian, or the image of the Indian that occupied the minds of

eurocentric thinkers, became idealized in two opposing ways: the 'savage' and the 'noble

savage'. Though binary opposites, the idealized images of both the 'savage' and 'noble

savage' provided enlightenment thinkers with a living example of life in a 'state of nature',

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[4] Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), p. 5.

[5] Robert F. Berkhofer Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*, (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 71.

an example which provided many theorists with a foundation to theorize the state of

nature and to idealize and criticize their own political tradition. As Berkhofer explains:

> Inquiries into the origin of man and the state of nature as exemplified by
> contemporary primitives, therefore, not only served a philosophical
> purpose but also provided a critique of the social institutions inherited
> from an old regime. In the end, the use of the Noble Savage and the
> primitivistic tradition was dedicated to the establishment of a new social
> order consonant with the liberal ideals of the age. As a result, the Noble
> Savage really pointed out the possibility of progress by civilized man if
> left free and untrammeled by outworn institutions.[6]

Berkhofer is not alone in suggesting that the 'noble savage' had an enormous impact

on the enlightenment as there exists a growing body of literature examining the

relationship between the imaginary Indian (both 'noble' and 'ignoble') and the

enlightenment.[7]   What is of interest here, however, is not that the imaginary Indian

influenced western-eurocentric political philosophy, but that in some cases, this influence

constituted an implicit recognition of (real) Indigenous political traditions and Indigenous

political systems.

For example, some who assert that the European enlightenment thinkers were

influenced by Indigenous ideas and practices argue that John Locke recognized the

existence of government in the Americas and borrowed extensively from Indigenous

political traditions.  While there is much evidence to support the claim that Locke

borrowed from Indigenous political traditions, it must also be noted that Locke was, at

the same time, an avid proponent of colonization who saw the dispossession of

Indigenous lands as a legal and biblically-defined responsibility of 'civilized' European

nations.  In both respects, Locke was indeed influenced by his contemporaries'

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[6] Berkhofer, op. cit., p. 76.

[7] James E. Gillespie, *The Influence of Overseas Expansion on England to 1700*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920).  Charles S. Sanford, *The Quest for Paradise: Europe and the American Moral Imagination*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961).  Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*, (New York: Ballentine Books, 1988), pp. 256-267. Brandon, op. cit

conceptualizations of the state of nature, the 'noble savage' and the 'savage'. He was also influenced by the knowledge of the Americas and its inhabitants conveyed by early explorers, missionaries and entrepreneurs.

One can not argue with certainty that portrayals of real Indians were more influential than the imaginary Indian or *vise-versa*. Clearly both wielded some influence over the great minds of the enlightenment both in Europe and in America. As William Brandon explains it:

> ... the point is simply that certain attitudes on which most New World
> societies seemed to have been constructed were different, fundamentally
> different from corresponding attitudes at the base of most Old World
> societies and that *reports* of this fundamental difference affected the course
> of Old World thought.[8]

There is much evidence to support Brandon's assertion that reports from the New World affected the intellectual history of the Old World. In fact, several scholars have attempted to demonstrate this by tracing the influence of the accounts of explorers, traders and missionaries in the social and scientific literature of the period. For example, James E. Gillespie, provides conclusive evidence that when writing *Utopia*, More was influenced by Amerigo Vespucci's reports of his encounters with the peoples of the Americas.[9] Jack Weatherford documents the influence studies of the Iroquois Confederacy by early 'anthropologists' Henry Rowe Schoolcraft and Lewis Henry Morgan had on Engels, Marx, Locke and Levi-Strauss.[10] Brandon documents how the publication of the *Jesuit Relations* and the works of Fathers Lafitau (about the Huron) and Denys (about the Mikmaq) as influencing Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau.[11] Finally, Michael Kraus, shows that the published accounts on the Huron and the Iroquois by the

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[8] Ibid., p. 167. emphasis added

[9] Gillespie, op. cit., p. 251.

[10] Weatherford, op. cit., pp. 256-267.

[11] Brandon, op. cit., 1986.

early adventurists and explorers Baron de Lahontan and Cadwallader Colden were instrumental in the development of the philosophical ideas of Hobbes and Locke.[12]

Locke, for example, had in his library 195 titles regarding voyages and travel "most of which described trips to the Americas by European explorers."[13] It is entirely possible that no direct influence occurred, and that enlightenment scholars were merely influenced by the idea of the Indian (noble or ignoble) living in the state of nature. A small, but significant debate exists about the actual influence Indigenous 'thinkers' and collectivities on the development of the western-eurocentric intellectual tradition.[14] Commenting on this controversy or 'influence debate', Wilber Jacobs writes:

> While we cannot prove that good old John Locke had a copy of the
> Iroquois Constitution at his elbow when he wrote the second essay on
> civil government, some of us who study ethnohistory might take the
> position that his ideas are exceedingly familiar. One recalls the historic fact
> that Sir Isaac Newton and Baron Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibnitz
> discovered calculus at about the same time but independently of each
> other; therefore, it is not entirely impossible that Hiawatha, Deganaweda
> on the one side and John Locke on the other discovered and commented on
> representative institutions of government, and that all three made
> substantial contributions to our democratic institutions of government. ...
> There are those among us who conjecture that Locke, Hiawatha and
> Deganaweda, might have had some kind of heavenly powwow-committee
> meeting to cogitate about problems of governance in both the New and the
> Old World.[15]

The possibility of a heavenly powwow-committee is extremely unlikely. Still, there are some who reject the idea that enlightenment thinkers such as Locke recognized that

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[12] Michael Kraus, *The Atlantic Civilization: Eighteenth Century Origins*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1949), pp. 8-17.

[13] Barbara Arneil, "All the World Was America: John Locke and the Defense of Colonialism", (paper presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Conference, Carleton University, 1993), p. 1. For a list of the sources in Locke's library see: John Harrison and Peter Laslett, *The Library of John Locke*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[14] José Barreiro (ed.), *Indian Roots of American Democracy*, (Ithaca: Akwe:kon Press, 1992).

[15] Wilbur R. Jacobs, "The American Indian Legacy of Freedom and Liberty", in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 16:4, (1992), pp. 185-186.

Indigenous peoples in the Americas had separate and distinct political traditions worthy of study and emulation by European societies. Notwithstanding, significant mainstream scholarship on the enlightenment accepts the idea that knowledge of Indigenous polities influenced many enlightenment thinkers, as evidenced by the work of Carl Becker. Further to this, there is a growing body of literature which shows that Indigenous ideas and practices contributed to how rights, liberty, happiness, equality, democracy, and federalism were understood by American founding fathers and institutionalized in the unique federal and congressional system they created.[16]

The proposition that Indigenous peoples lacked government, therefore, cannot be sustained. Nor can the contention that Indigenous political traditions and Indigenous structures of government developed only in the context of colonization. Given that from the outset of the American invasion, western-eurocentric thinkers recognized Indigenous peoples as having separate and distinct political traditions worthy of both study and emulation, it is my thesis that the 'exclusion' of Indigenous political traditions from political science is clearly unjustified.

Recognizing that the 'exclusion' of Indigenous political traditions from political science is unjustified, however, is not enough. The problems faced in political science by those attempting to study Indigenous political traditions are not limited to the implicit disciplinary denial or attempts to ignore pre-colonial Indigenous political traditions. Students of Indigenous political traditions also face an unending struggle with the eurocentric disciplinary boundaries, methods and knowledge of political science. Similar

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[16] Bruce E. Johansen, *Debating Democracy: Native American Legacy of Freedom*, (Santa Fe New Mexico: Clear Light Publishers, 1998). John Mohawk, "Indians and Democracy: No One Ever Told Us", in Oren Lyons et. al. *Exiled in the Land of the Free: Democracy, Indian Nations and the U.S. Constitution*, (Santa Fe: Clearlight Publishers, 1992), pp. 43-72. Benjamin Franklin, quoted in Bruce E. Johansen, *Forgotten Founders: Benjamin Franklin, the Iroquois and the rationale for the American Revolution*, (Ipswich: Gambit, 1982), p. 87. Renee Jacobs, "Iroquois Great Law of Peace and the United States Constitution: How the Founding Fathers Ignored the Clan Mothers", in *American Indian Law Review* 16:2, (1991), pp. 497-531. Sally Roesch Wagner, "The Iroquois Influence on Women's Rights", *Akwe:Kon Journal* (Spring, 1992), pp. 4-15. Sally Roesch Wagner, "The Roots of Oppression Is the Loss of Memory: The Iroquois and the Early Feminist Vision", in *Akwesasne Notes*, (1989), pp. 11-13

struggles are often faced by students of contemporary Indigenous politics. The emergence of Aboriginal peoples as objects of inquiry in political science reflects their becoming active (at least noticed) in the politics of the colonizer. Thus, Indigenous politics as an accepted field of inquiry within political science has had little to do with an interest in Indian politics *per se* as it has simply been the study of Aboriginal people in mainstream, Canadian politics. Although advances have been made such that political science now studies Indigenous people as 'problems' and social movements interacting with the state; politicians, bureaucrats and scholars deal with Aboriginal rights, demands and aspirations, only with great difficulty. Difficulties persist as misunderstanding prevails because knowledge of Aboriginal politics is grounded only in the western-eurocentric tradition, and more specifically the disciplinary knowledge of political science which teaches us to see politics through western-eurocentric eyes. So although politicians and scholars now attempt to discuss contemporary Aboriginal politics, these attempts are limited by the western-eurocentric ideas which are assumed to be universally applicable.[17]

Political science's ability to understand Indigenous politics is limited because its knowledge can only view politics through western-eurocentric eyes. Aboriginal politics is not viewed as different from European-style politics, since the European state polity is assumed to be both the norm and the universal. The global nation-state system is of recent origin, however, and there is no 'universal' when we try to analyze the diverse spectrum of polities which exist and have existed. Thus, the assumption in political science that universal (truth) claims can be made about politics is unjustified as there is neither one truth nor a single political tradition. Asserting that no 'universal' exists, however, does not solve the problems associated with studying Indigenous political traditions, structures of governance and contemporary politics within the disciplinary

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[17] Political science has constructed, conceptualized and theorized the world based on the western-eurocentric experience, in which the western-eurocentric and its teleological understanding of history is perceived as the essential or the universal.

boundaries of political science. Misunderstanding prevails as intricate details and points of differentiation are not understood, partly because of disciplinary constructs, eurocentrism, language and cultural barriers. The potential for misunderstanding is evident if we consider the different ways the concept of government is expressed within the Blackfoot language, including: traditional governance or *soyipihtsiiksi* (the person who is of and speaks for the people) and contemporary western-eurocentric governance under the *Indian Act* band council and the 'medal chief' or *áókakihtsimaanan* (the person who makes decisions for and is separate from the people). The traditional explanation (*soyipihtsiiksi*) of governance assumes that government exists as a relationship among people or that it exists as part of society and not as something that is separate from society. Traditional explanations are extremely different from those in western-eurocentric thought in which government is typically viewed as institutions which legitimately monopolize and exercise power or the hierarchical structures of coercion and authority which exist virtually independently of society since the state is separated from civil society.

## INTELECTUAL DECOLONIZATION

Because of this difference of understanding and because most Indigenous governments are not states, the discipline's assumed universal excludes Indigenous governments or classifies Indigenous political traditions as inferior or exotic. The universal also excludes Indigenous understandings of governance leading to misunderstandings of Indigenous peoples and their political traditions are often misunderstood. Misunderstanding occurs even when we escape the illusion of the 'imaginary Indian' because the essentialist nature of political science still prevents us from understanding difference or that which exists beyond the universal. As a result, to truly understand Indigenous political traditions, the universal claims of disciplinary knowledge must be 'destabilized'. In short, political science must be 'decolonized' by addressing the challenges of 'fourth world scholars' or

Indigenous peoples, just as it has begun to deal with the challenges posed by feminist scholars.[18] In order to deconstruct existing knowledge and make it more open to alterNative conceptualizations of governance or 'institutionalized' political traditions, however, it is necessary to construct an understanding of the 'other' (i.e. pre-colonial Indigenous non-state polities). Constructing such an understanding is the primary purpose of my dissertation.

Destabilizing, decolonizing and deconstructing mainstream political theories may be achieved by constructing an 'alterNative' understanding of politics within the confines of western-eurocentric thought. I have chosen, however to examine 'traditional Indigenous politics' on its own terms. Specifically, I will examine 'traditional Indigenous governance' on its own terms, by studying governance from the perspective of the americacentric or Indigenous 'way of knowing' governance; not from the perspective of the existing disciplinary knowledge. Although accounts of americacentric 'ways of knowing' have long run parallel to the western-eurocentric 'ways of knowing' politics, 'Indigenous ways of knowing' have seldom been given a voice within political science. Thus, this dissertation is an attempt to provide Indigenous political traditions a voice within the discipline of political science, and to challenge the exclusion of Indigenous forms of governance or the relegation of the study of the 'stateless' and the 'primitive' to anthropology. That is, my goal is 'to bring Indigenous governance in' and in so doing, I also seek to bring Indigenous people's understandings of their own political traditions into political science.

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[18] Anne Phillips, "Universal Pretensions in Political Thought", in Michelle Marrett & Anne Phillips eds., *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), pp. 10-30. James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "Post Colonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism" in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 57-76. James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" in Battiste, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-278.

The purpose of this study, then, is to 'bring Indigenous political traditions (back) into political science'. Identifying and depicting 'stateless' Indigenous political traditions[19] as a parallel to state-based western-eurocentric political traditions. Hence, I 'bring the Indian in' by telling the story of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing governance from an Indigenist perspective. In this way I attempt to destablilize and decolonize political science by introducing alterNative and stateless ways of knowing governance. I also destabilize and decolonize the western-eurocentric tradition and the discipline's knowledge and truth claims, by validating Indigenist conceptualizations of governance and telling the story of Indigenous ways of knowing from outside the confines of the presumed universal and from the interpreted perspective of Indigenous peoples themselves.

According to James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "attempting to validate [Indigenous] world view[s] and knowledge in its own right, without interference of Eurocentrism, requires a transformation of consciousness."[20] The changes in consciousness involved in transforming the colonized into post-colonial thinkers requires processes of decolonization. Post-colonial scholarship requires the researcher to escape colonial legacies and western-eurocentric thought. It requires the researcher to understand Indigenous knowledge on its own terms and within its own context. Thus, post-colonial scholarship directs Indigenous peoples to decolonize and reinterpret western-eurocentric knowledge of Indigenous peoples. This is achieved by deconstructing western-eurocentric knowledge and truth claims and by synthesizing their own experiences and knowledge of both traditions. Expanding on these ideas, Henderson argues that:

> ... to acquire freedom in the decolonized and dealienated order requires the
> colonized to break their silence and struggle to retake their possession of

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[19] State-based Indigenous polities existed prior to colonization throughout the Americas, however, this dissertation has as its focus non-state structures of Indigenous governance; particularly the traditional Blackfoot political system.

[20] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, *The Mikmaw Concordat*, (Halifax: Fernwood, 1997), p. 24.

their humanity and dignity. To speak initially, they have to share
Eurocentric thought and discourse with their oppressor; however to exist
with dignity and integrity, they must renounce Eurocentric models and live
with the ambiguity of thinking against themselves. They must learn to
create models to help them take their bearings in unexplored territory.
Educated Aboriginal thinkers have to understand and reconsider
Eurocentric discourse in order to reinvent an Aboriginal discourse based on
heritage and language, and to develop a new post-colonial synthesis of
knowledge and law to protect them from old and new dominators and
oppressors.

The crisis of our times has created post-colonial thinkers and societies who
struggle to free themselves from the Eurocentric colonial context. While
we still have to use the techniques of colonial thought, we must also have
the courage to rise above them and to follow traditional devices.[21]

Recognizing that non-state structures of Indigenous governance do not fit within the
western-eurocentric tradition that defines political science; and that Indigenous peoples
had their own political structures and traditions, I set out on a journey to decolonize
political science by creating a post-Indian and a post-colonial understanding of traditional
Indigenous governance in North America. In this context, post-Indian is understood to
require the death of the 'white man's Indian' and the creation of a non-essentialist 'image'
of Indigenous collectivities that respects diversity.[22] Post-colonialism is understood, not
as a description of reality, since colonialism persists on Turtle Island, but as a dream of
personal, intellectual decolonization. A dream of decolonization which is similar to the
journey on which many fourth world scholars have embarked as they attempt to escape
the confines of eurocentric thought and begin the process of thinking against themselves
or thinking in an Indigenous paradigm.

Heeding the voices of the ancestors, and heeding the wisdom of those who have
walked before me, I take as my starting point what Henderson has described as post-
colonial ghost dancing. It is to his words and his courage that I owe respect, for he has

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[21] Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought", *op. cit.*, p. 254.

[22] Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Communities*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

shown by example (*kwe 'ask ta 'ki 'peh 'kiskinowapahtihicik*) what can be attained when one escapes completely or dreams outside the western-eurocentric paradigm. In so doing he has urged others to do the same; to accept their responsibilities, to honour their gifts and to dream a post-colonial dream.[23] This is what I am attempting to do in this dissertation: create a post-colonial dream of a decolonized political science by creating an alterNative, post-Indian and post-colonial understanding of traditional Indigenous governance.

I have set out to destabilize and decolonize political science by 'bringing Indigenous political traditions (back) in'. To do so I engage in a study of pre-colonial, non-state Indigenous governance to recreate traditional Indigenous political systems from an Indigenous perspective, not as a deviant of the western-eurocentric paradigm, but as part of a separate and independent political tradition. Because the universal does not exist, because it is impossible to come to a true and accurate understanding of Indigenous political systems from within the western-eurocentric tradition and because traditional political science theory, methodology and approaches do not work to explain Indigenous governance, this thesis contends that Indigenous structures of governance must be understood on their own terms and from the vantage point of their own intellectual and political traditions. Finally, it is my thesis that understanding non-state, traditional Indigenous governance from a post-colonial perspective and from the vantage point of Indigenous intellectual and political traditions is best achieved using Henderson's theory of ecological contexts.

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[23] I honour Sakej Henderson specifically because his article has been both inspirational and comforting in my struggle to dream a post-colonial dream. But in heeding the wisdom of those that have walked before me, I am also thinking of all my relations, the Elders that have been so instrumental in my education, and those scholars who have shown me what it means to dream a post-colonial dream and escape the confines of the eurocentric paradigm. Here I am thinking of, Leroy Little Bear, Patricia Monture Angus, Vine Deloria Jr., Denise McConney, Robert Warrior, Russel Barsh, Marie Battiste, Mary Ellen Turpel, Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred, Jack Forbes, Jace Weaver, Ward Churchill and James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson.

## 'CREATING' POST-COLONIAL KNOWLEDGE

There is no single Indigenous political tradition, no single Indigenous political system or form of governance and no single Indigenist perspective. Hence, it would be all but impossible to study each and every Indigenous political system in the Americas, especially from the perspective of the peoples themselves. Consequently, my research is concerned solely with non-state Indigenous polities in North America and my research has focused on a single case study: the Blackfoot Confederacy or the *Siiksikaawa*. Moreover, because it is not possible to present a detailed interpretive discussion of all elements of the Blackfoot political tradition, my discussion is further limited to traditional Blackfoot governance.[24]

I have studied traditional *Siiksikaawa* or Blackfoot politics *not* because Blackfoot governance is a universal and *not* because it is representative of all stateless Indigenous polities in pre-colonial North America. Rather, I have studied the Blackfoot because as a single case study, the *Siiksikaawa* provided me with the greatest opportunity to write a detailed interpretive analysis of governance in a stateless polity. This case was selected for a variety of reasons. First, having grown up in Blackfoot territory, I had some knowledge of Blackfoot political traditions, culture, ceremony, oral tradition, external relations, treaties and colonial history, and extensive personal and academic relationships with both individuals and communities prior to starting this research project. This case was selected because I had the knowledge and contacts necessary to conduct research and to attempt to create a trustworthy and contextual account of traditional governance. Second, a significant body of oral history exists as part of the Blackfoot collective

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[24]For the purposes of this dissertation I define Blackfoot political traditions or the traditional Blackfoot political system as that system which existed prior to the imposition of the state. In Canada this occurred when the federal government imposed the Indian Act system of Band Council government following the signing of Treaty Seven in 1877. In the United States, the imposition of the state was a more gradual process which began in the early 1880s when the Blackfeet were confined to their reservation and culminating in the 1930s with the Indian Reorganization Act.

memory.[25] Third, the Blackfoot, unlike their neighbors the Plains Cree, were not what anthropologists have termed a 'society in transition' at the time of colonization.[26] As a result, it is possible to engage in a study of traditional governance without having to deal with complex and cumbersome issues resulting from flux or transition, such as the definition of 'tradition' and the existence of competing traditions.

Because a detailed interpretive study of one political system does not, by itself, disrupt and decolonize the universalist and eurocentric assumptions of political science, I also use evidence from other Indigenous political systems to show that the Blackfoot experience is not an isolated case of traditional Indigenous governance, and to emphasize the fact that the Blackfoot political system is not a universal or essential Indigenous political tradition. Thus, selecting *Siiksikaawa* enables me to solidifying claims through an 'eclectic scanning' of primary tenets other Indigenous political traditions and through a brief examination of Plains Cree governance. Ultimately, of course, full fledged case studies of Indigenous political traditions (not simply governance) and of increasingly different Aboriginal polities (including state systems) will be necessary to outline fully the nature of americacentric or Indigenous political traditions. At this time, however, since my goal is to explore Blackfoot governance from within and to demonstrate the applicability of Henderson's ecological context, I have chosen a single in depth case study.

Utilizing a detailed interpretive and post-colonial study of *Siiksikaawa* governance, I have embarked on a study of non-state Indigenous governance in which I see traditional forms of governance as constituting a political tradition in its own right and not as deviant

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[25] While the present state of the oral tradition in Blackfoot territory can only accurately be discerned through communication with Elders and in comparison to other First Nations, the breadth, complexity and accuracy of this way of recording history is demonstrated in Treaty Seven Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter and Dorthy First Rider, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty Seven*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996).

[26] Although the Blackfoot was not a static polity, they were not engaged in the process of radical transition or adaptation that characterized the Plains Cree as they attempted to become a plains people rather than 'bush Indians'.

from the western-eurocentric state experience.[27] To do so, I have had to escape the confines of western-eurocentric thought, and study traditional Blackfoot governance from the interpreted perspective of the peoples themselves, using methodological and analytical tools which are themselves derived from Indigenist intellectual traditions, and not from the perspective of the discipline or by using the tools of political science.

I conceptualize governance in a way which reflects Indigenist thought: as 'the way in which a people lives best together'; or the way a people has structured their society in a relationship to the natural world; or as an expression of how they see themselves fitting within that world as a part of the circle of life, not as superior beings who claim dominion over other species and other humans. Using Henderson's theory of ecological contexts to describe and analyze traditional governance from the interpreted perspective of the Blackfoot world view, I look at the relationships between structures of governance and the local ecological order. That is, I seek to explain how a peoples' understanding of Creation and a peoples' relationship to Creation influences how an Indigenous political system develops and functions. The goal is to identify how Blackfoot governance emerges from and is operationalized within an ecological context.

While examining governance from an ecological context may seem odd from within western-eurocentric thought, I will demonstrate the value, indeed even the necessity, of this approach in the discussion that follows. Proceeding in this manner, however, allows me to contribute a non-anthropological study of *Siiksikaawa* governance which brings Indigenous political traditions into political science, and to study Blackfoot governance from a non-eurocentric, post-colonial perspective. This dissertation makes its contributions by destabilizing and decolonizing political science through demonstrating

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[27] 'Traditional', is a means of referencing 'Indigenous' and in the context of this dissertation is used to refer to the dynamic structures of governance as they existed prior to colonization and not how these exist in the contemporary. Further to this, it should be noted that in using 'traditional' I am not using it to confer that which is opposite to modernity or 'civilization'. Eurocentric civilizations have their own traditions which form the foundation of contemporary traditions just as Indigenous civilizations have traditions which despite colonization and the American holocaust form the foundation of contemporary traditions.

that Indigenous political traditions are distinct, separate and parallel to western-eurocentric political traditions and by 'bringing Indigenous political traditions (back) in' and introducing an alterNative or Indigenist conceptualization of governance. It also contributes a new ecologically-based approach that can be utilized to study other Indigenous non-state polities in the Americas. Thus, this dissertation makes an original contribution to knowledge, for while others have attempted to study Indigenous political traditions previously, with very few exceptions, they have done so from the perspective of the assumed universal or the western-eurocentric tradition.

## THE PATH FORWARD

My dissertation proceeds as follows: In chapter one I explore the act of doing research pertaining to traditional Blackfoot governance. Specifically, I note some of the methodological and epistemological difficulties associated with this research, and I describe the methodological tools used to conduct my study of Blackfoot politics.

Chapter two introduces the reader to the Blackfoot Confederacy and explores some of the primary tenets of the Blackfoot world view. My goal in this chapter is to assist the reader in understanding the discussion of Blackfoot governance which follows.

In chapter three, I explain governance as it has been recounted to me by those who are contemporary members of the traditional Blackfoot structures of governance. This chapter, therefore, is primarily descriptive as the purpose is to construct a contextualized portrait of traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance.

Having described traditional Blackfoot governance, the remainder of the dissertation has as its focus the analysis of this political system. Chapter four functions as a literature review, a literature review focused on explicating major trends in how Aboriginal politics has been conceptualized previously and exposing significant shortcomings in how Indigenous politics is studied. Because of the enormity of this task, this chapter provides a 'scanning' of the literature and its major deficiencies, beginning with anthropology and

culminating in a brief discussion of political science. I argue that this literature has been unsuccessful in building a trustworthy understanding of Indigenous political traditions, and that the approaches currently used in the study of Indigenous politics are insufficient. I conclude this chapter by considering if there are any western-eurocentric approaches which can be used in my study of traditional Blackfoot governance.

I demonstrate that an alterNative approach is necessary because the existing literature conceptualizes Indigenous political traditions from a western-eurocentric standpoint, and because much of this literature attempts to validate and theorize a teleological or primitivist vision of Indigenous polities. Is there an alterNative approach? Is it even possible to conceptualize politics and study Indigenous political traditions outside of the confines of the western-eurocentric tradition? Chapter five addresses this question. Specifically, it begins with an examination of existing Indigenist literature to ascertain whether it is possible to study Indigenous political traditions from 'within'. Arguing that it is both possible and necessary to study Indigenous political traditions from 'within', I then examine how this can be done using the tools of Indigenist thought. In concluding this chapter, I explain why using Henderson's theory of ecological contexts is the best way to proceed since it enables the researcher to approach the study of a polity from within and to analyze governance and its operation from the standpoint of a people living within a particular ecological order.

Chapter six considers the relationship between the *Siiksikaawa* political system and its ecological context. In this chapter I explore the relationship between politics and the natural world by examining Blackfoot structures of governance using the lens of Henderson's ecological contexts. Henderson's theory of ecological contexts has enabled me to explain governance in a way that coincides with the teachings of the Elders. Hence, I attempt to demonstrate also that his theory is a reflection of Indigenous traditions. Finally, I also 'scan' the traditions of the Plains Cree to show that the applicability of this thesis is not limited to the Blackfoot, and to demonstrate that Henderson's theory of

ecological contexts is not an essentialist theory of governance. That is to say, by using two examples and by conceptualizing governance in terms of a relationship with a local ecological order, I show why it is impossible to conceive of governance as a universal as Indigenous political systems are created and maintained within specific ecological orders.

In chapter seven I explore governance further using ecological contexts focusing on the relationship between structures of governance and the natural world. This chapter then explores the relationship between Creation and the act of governance. More particularly, I use the contextual approach to explain similarities and differences in governance between different stateless Indigenous societies.

In the conclusion, I summarize the main normative and theoretical findings of this research and assess its implications for contemporary Indigenous politics and contemporary Canadian politics.

# CHAPTER 1

## ENABLING A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF GOVERNANCE:
## POST-COLONIALISM & INDIGENIST METHODOLOGY

My purpose in this dissertation is to destabilize political science's assumption that political forms are universal by bringing Indigenous political traditions (back) and by creating a post-colonial understanding of Indigenous governance. Thus, the point of this dissertation is not simply to 'bring Aboriginal people into political science' or to stimulate discussion of traditional Indigenous politics within political science. This would inevitably result in the continued intellectual colonization of Indigenous political traditions and the perpetuation of the assumed universal and thus, the perception of Indigenous political traditions as 'exotic' deviants. By 'bringing Indigenous political traditions (back) in', I seek to destabilize and decolonize political science by providing a voice to alterNative political traditions within political science.

Inserting alterNative political traditions into political science requires an examination of these political traditions from within their own knowledge systems. The proposition that Indigenous political traditions need to be studied 'from the inside out' raises a number of questions. Why is it necessary to create a contextualized understanding of Indigenous political systems or to study governance 'from the inside out'? Is it really necessary? Are Indigenous political traditions really that different from western-eurocentric political traditions? Can I, who has been trained as a political scientist, escape or unlearn its disciplinary assumptions? How can I study the Blackfoot political system

'from the inside out' when I am an 'outsider'? How does one study traditional

*Siiksikaawa* governance when there is very little written on the subject matter? Its oral

tradition a trustworthy source? Can a research project rely strictly on oral testimony?

How can we create a contextualized understanding that respects cultural protocols and

differences in knowledge systems? What about issues of commensurability? Can I

translate between knowledge systems without losing cultural nuances and compromising

the trustworthiness of understanding? These are some of the questions I address in this

chapter.

More specifically, this chapter explores issues involved in the process I followed in

researching traditional Blackfoot governance. It examines the methodological,

epistemological and ontological issues involved in this study and how I chose to deal with

them. It begins by considering why it is necessary to engage in a study of traditional

Blackfoot governance 'from the inside out' and it explores the reality of doing research

outside the confines of western-eurocentric thought. Next, I discusses how a trustworthy

study of Blackfoot governance can be achieved using post-colonialism and Indigenist or

decolonizing methodology. This chapter then proceeds with a discussion of some of the

issues involved in the utilization of oral tradition as a scholarly source. I conclude this

chapter with a brief discussion of how my research plan was actualized in the process of

researching and writing this dissertation.


## 'ESCAPING THE BORG': MISUNDERSTANDING IS INEVITABLE

Prior to explaining how I studied an Indigenous political tradition from the 'inside

out', I will explore why such an approach is necessary. First, let us consider how

political scientists might engage in a study of a traditional Indigenous government. What

questions would they ask? What knowledge would they seek? What would they

consider as the foundation on which government was built? Without going into much

detail, a political scientist would likely identify structures of power, and enumerate both

the composition and the responsibilities of said structures. Finding no sign of a written constitution and no written source detailing the history of the polity, some political scientists might proceed by studying the relationship between the government and the governed and conduct interviews to identify possible historical trends. Others might simply skip to analyzing the evolution of the system by applying either institutional or societal theories of political development. In the end, most political scientists would focus on what they know best; power and rationality as a means of structuring societal relationships or creating 'social contracts'.

Studying Indigenous political systems such as the Blackfoot political system in this manner, however, would not get a researcher very far. Blackfoot governance is not predicated on power (coercion, authority and hierarchy), the institutionalization of power or the legitimization of hierarchy, authority and coercion. Blackfoot governance exists without a state, without a written constitution, and without a division between society and the structures of governance. This lack of congruency between Blackfoot political traditions and political science's assumed universal would almost inevitably result in a misrepresentation of Blackfoot political traditions as researchers would fail to see and truly understand governance in the context of Blackfoot society. That is to say, the disciplinary confines of political science would likely limit the researcher's ability to discover, understand, explain and analyze the Blackfoot political system in a trustworthy manner.

I understand trustworthiness or a trustworthy account to mean knowledge that 'holds true' within the community the knowledge purports to represent. It is my thesis that the only way to attain a trustworthy account of traditional Blackfoot governance is by overcoming the confines of political science and creating an Indigenist understanding from the inside out. This is because the questions typically asked within political science are not conducive to the creation of a trustworthy understanding of Blackfoot governance as *Siiksikaawa* understand it. This is also because knowledge has been constructed within

the discipline mainly as a phenomena that exist independently of the researcher; as 'something' obtained through rational inquiry. That the western-eurocentric knowledge system itself would impede the creation of a trustworthy account of traditional Blackfoot governance is demonstrated by the fact that most political scientists would find the proposition that one can understand Blackfoot governance by observing a herd of buffalo ludicrous. How is it possible to even consider such an idea? How would one rationalize and explain the Blackfoot political system based on these findings? What questions would they ask? Could such a discovery be rationalized within the confines of western-eurocentric knowledge? Given that such an understanding would be consistent with Blackfoot ways of knowing and explaining governance, how does a western-eurocentric thinker incorporate or even begin to grapple with an understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing? Are these knowledge systems incommensurable? Can intellectual bridges be built to facilitate communication and understanding between these seemingly divergent ways of knowing?

These questions must be dealt with if one is to achieve a trustworthy understanding of traditional Blackfoot governance and study this political system from the inside out. Thus, to achieve a post-colonial understanding of Indigenous governance and a study which engages the ontological, epistemological and ideological contours of an Indigenous political system, one must explore avenues of scholarly inquiry which are not grounded in western-eurocentric thought. In the remainder of this chapter, I begin the process of thinking beyond the existing paradigmatic paralysis that defines political science, and I explore what is required to create a 'study from within' which enables those who are outsiders to forge a meaningful understanding.

## TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE (TK)

While political science has not yet dealt with the problems surrounding the creation of a true and trustworthy understanding of Indigenous political traditions, other literatures

have begun dealing with problems associated with understanding and explaining Indigenous ways of knowing. A number of Indigenous scholars and scholars of Traditional Knowledge (TK), Traditional Environmental Knowledge or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) have begun problematizing and theorizing western-eurocentric and Indigenous world views and the ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies that ground or are inherent in each. A brief discussion of this body of literature is useful for it addresses the necessity of studying the 'Indigenous' from within and it also considers the methodological, epistemological and ontological ramifications of conducting research from the 'inside out' while at the same time creating an understanding of 'other' within the western-eurocentric tradition.

In his book, *Red Earth White Lies: Native Americans and the Scientific Myth of Fact*, Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. presents a critique of western-eurocentric or scientific knowledge and the 'myths' about the history of North America by comparing scientific theory and the oral tradition or Indigenous ways of knowing.[1] Deloria's work is significant because he constructs scientific knowledge and oral tradition as historically evolved and socially grounded ways of knowing the world around us.

According to Deloria, "every human society maintains its sense of identity with a set of stories that explain, at least to its satisfaction, how things came to be."[2] While all societies maintain intellectual traditions and knowledge systems, for the most part, science has failed to recognize that other 'valid' explanations of the world, its history and 'man's' relationship to it exist. Hence, the authority of knowledge, and the idea that just as Christianity is the only true religion, science is the only true knowledge and the only way to obtain knowledge of the unknown.

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[1] Vine Deloria Jr., *Red Earth White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Thought*, (Golden: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997).

[2] Ibid., p. 23.

Scholarly inquiry and the scientific process are not as objective as most believe: the knowledge scholars seek through 'objective' observation and experiment is confined by the limitations of western-eurocentric thought and its inability to see beyond this objective reality and to consider the 'subjective' knowledge claims (the folklore and myths) of 'others'. Science, therefore, is conceived as a self-perpetuating paradigm, which is not necessarily built on fact nor a search for fact, but merely what the western-eurocentric tradition defines or perceives as fact.[3] Science:

> ... is that collection of beliefs - some with considerable evidence, some lacking any proof at all - which reflects data gathered by a small group of people over the past five hundred years with the simple belief that phenomena have been objectively observed and properly described ... Unfortunately the assumptions and presumptions which these people bring to the interpretation of phenomenon are regarded as "normal" - as the way that people validly view the world.[4]

Given the 'fact' that an airplane flies, it is possible to argue with Deloria's conception of science. However, while experimentation and mathematical modeling have enabled science to define what it perceives as 'fact', I would argue that Deloria is correct in claiming that science is a self-perpetuating paradigm which is not necessarily built on fact nor a search for fact. Instead, it is self-perpetuating paradigm, built on a 'collection of beliefs' which it perceives as fact and a search for knowledge that it can define as fact; knowledge such as the 'myth' of the Bering Straight (land bridge) and knowledge such as the 'fact' that airplanes fly.

While western-eurocentric ways of knowing the world are defined by science Indigenous knowledge is grounded in the oral tradition (traditional knowledge). Viewing the oral tradition as being the equivalent of science in the Indigenous world, Deloria defines oral tradition as "a loosely held collection of anecdotal material that, taken together, explains the nature of the physical world as people have experienced it and the

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[3] Ibid., pp. 23-35.

[4] Ibid., p. 35.

important events of their historical journey."[5] Oral tradition, while comparable to science, is unlike western 'mechanistic' science in many respects. "[T]ribal knowledge was not fragmented data arranged according to rational speculation";[6] rather it is the accumulated knowledge of a people based on their experiences in a specific locality. It is collective, experiential, subjective, and holistic rather than fragmented, specialized pieces of knowledge that are said to be objective and have validity because of that objectivity and scientific methodology. Oral tradition is predicated on the belief that the world is alive and constantly changing not something which can be dominated or understood through experimentation.

Deloria's main point is that both western science and Indigenous science are exceedingly different ways of constructing knowledge. While both limit how people view the world, and in turn construct the world, the manner in which the world has been constructed within the oral tradition is limited only by individual and collective experience. Knowledge is not fragmented into areas of specialization, nor does it exclude that which has its source in other ways of knowing or subjective experiences. Thus, unknowingly and in non-technical terms, Deloria explains why an Indigenous person may attempt to explain a structure of governance by suggesting we observe the buffalo; whereas a political scientist will usually analyze the political system by applying 'scientific', 'law-like', 'universal', 'proven' theories of political development. Each is working within two different constructions of knowledge, have very different ways in which they see the world, and see knowledge being created through two radically different processes or methods of inquiry.

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[5] Ibid., p. 36.

[6] Ibid.

## EXPLORATIONS INTO KNOWING

Acknowledging that Indigenous and western-eurocentric ways of knowing, doing and understanding politics and governance are reflections of two fundamentally different knowledge systems requires one to question whether it is possible to understand one political tradition from the vantage point of the other? Is it possible to integrate these different ways of knowing? In other words, is it possible to integrate traditional political knowledge with political science's knowledge of politics, and conduct a study of Indigenous politics from the vantage of one tradition while using the knowledge and truth claims of the other? Like science, political science is grounded in a particular understanding of the world that evolved out of Christianity and the enlightenment and its appropriation of ideas and practices from both the ancients and 'others' such as American Indians. Meanwhile, Indigenous knowledge is predicated on an understanding of the natural world and the relationship of both individual and collectives to that world. As is demonstrated by my story of how a political scientist would be virtually unable to comprehend Indigenous political traditions with reference to observations of buffalo, ontologically, epistimologically and methodologically these western-eurocentric thinkers and Indigenist thinkers exist in separate worlds.

Deloria and students of TEK suggest that, ontologically, the two worlds are radically different. On the one hand, the Indigenist tradition constructs a world in which everything exists as one interconnected and holistic universe, where humans are part of nature, and the world is alive and each being (including those we cannot see) has an intelligence unto itself. On the other hand, the dominant western-eurocentric tradition has constructed a fragmented world in which 'man' exists at the earthly centre, where 'man' has dominion over non-living earth, where everything can be deconstructed, constructed and reconstructed, where all of its beings, including humans, can be objectified, and where knowledge (such as political science and mathematics) is said to transcend all cultures.

Western-eurocentric and Indigenous traditions differ on epistemological grounds, since one is grounded in the idea that we know the world through scientific experiment, objectifiable facts, and the published claims of scholars and scientists, whereas the other sees knowledge as the cumulative experience of individuals and communities. Explaining 'Aboriginal epistemology' as the 'search for subjective inner knowledge', Willie Ermine captures these fundamentally different ways of knowing reality by suggesting that 1492 represents the meeting of two ways of knowing and exploring knowledge and as such, "the encounter featured two diametric trajectories into the realm of knowledge. One was bound for an uncharted destination in outer space, the physical, and the other was on a dedicated path into inner space, the metaphysical."[7]

The manner in which Ermine has captured the epistemological differences that exist between oral tradition and science also helps to explain the methodologies inherent in each way of knowing. While there are many methodological options within the western-eurocentric tradition, most are predicated on some interpretation or application of the scientific method, and the idea that knowledge is obtained and verified through rigorous observation, experimentation, reduction, generalization and through the proving or disproving of theory. Whereas scientific knowledge is *assumed* to be objective, exists in a form separate from the individual, and is discovered by observation; the oral tradition, as Deloria points out, makes no attempt to disguise subjectivity, relativity and spirituality. Moreover, as Ermine argues, the creation of knowledge in the Indigenous tradition is an internal process of reflecting upon that which is experienced by individuals living their lives, observing the world at large, dreams, ceremony, stories and songs.

Ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies define and confine the way in which people see and know the world around them. Their utility as intellectual tools is

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[7] Willie Ermine, "Aboriginal Epistemology" in Marie Battiste and Jean Barnam (eds.) First Nations *Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995), p. 101.

demonstrated in their capacity for deconstructing and explaining the meta differences between western-eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge or to theorize and expand upon the explanations provided in TEK scholarship pertaining to ways of knowing. For while the TEK literature tends to be descriptive, by applying theories of knowledge, we can see that Indigenous ways of knowing differ from western-eurocentric ways of knowing, explain these differences, understand why differences exist and identify problems of reconciliation or commensurability.

As my brief discussion of ontology, epistemology and methodology suggests, western-eurocentric and Indigenous ways of knowing are different in fundamental ways and on many accounts. Thus, any explanation of difference and any subsequent discussion of commensurability or potential reconciliation through the creation of conceptual bridges of understanding must account for the fact that knowledge is a cultural construct that is dependent upon how a culture perceives the world or constructs reality, seeks to understand that reality and how knowledge is constructed or validated.

## BRIDGING THE INCOMMENSURABLE

Having explored the issue of difference, let us consider the issue of commensurability or whether it is possible for a eurocentric thinker to understand Indigenist thought and whether it is possible to reconcile different ways of knowing. Acknowledging that science and traditional knowledge or the western-eurocentric tradition and the americacentric tradition are different knowledge systems in fundamental ways, is it possible for a western-eurocentric scholar to understand and integrate traditional knowledge? Is it possible to 'get there from here'? Is it possible for a political scientist to understand Indigenous governance, its origins and its structure by watching the buffalo and hearing stories about the buffalo? How can understanding be facilitated between different knowledge systems when ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically they may be incommensurable? How does a researcher facilitate understanding without

colonizing a knowledge system for the benefit of another? What type of research methodology is required to ensure that intellectual colonization does not occur?

Since political science has yet to deal with any of these issues, let us consider these questions in light of the literature pertaining to TEK. According to Martha Johnson, "the fundamental tenets of Western Science ... have been challenged for being ethnocentric ... As a result, Western science is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary in response to today's globally interconnected world, in which biological, psychological, and social phenomena are recognized as belonging to interdependent systems".[8] Because of these changes, scholars such as Johnson, John Sallenave and Fritjof Capra suggest it is possible to integrate TEK and western science.[9] Nevertheless, while these scholars see the integration of TEK and science as possible and desirable, many argue that barriers still exist as scientists and Indigenist thinkers have different perspectives, realities, knowledge systems and world views. So while some integration is possible, scientists remain skeptical "about the credibility and reliability of Aboriginal information"[10] and decision-making processes have not been adapted to allow for the integration of TEK.[11]

While Johnson and Deloria claim that TK and science can be integrated if certain conditions are met (such as cross-cultural education and the existence of 'political will'), others such as Fikret Berkes, Thomas Henley and Nancy Doubleday, argue that these knowledge systems cannot be bridged in a manner that results in the construction of a

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[8] Johnson, Martha, "Research on Traditional Environmental Knowledge: Its Development and Its Role" in Martha Johnson (ed.), *Lore: Capturing Traditional Environmental Knowledge*, (Ottawa: Dene Cultural Institute & International Development Research Centre, 1993), p. 9.

[9] Fritjof Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society and the Rising Culture*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1982). Johnson, op. cit.

[10] John Sallenave, "Giving Traditional Ecological Knowledge Its Rightful Place in Environmental Impact Assessment", in *Northern Perspectives*, 22 (Spring 1994), p. 19.

[11] Ibid. .Johnson, op. cit., p. 10

new seamless web of knowledge.[12] Doubleday argues that while "the piecemeal adoption of TEK into the dominant western science or law"[13] is possible, it is not probable. Nor is it responsible, beneficial or likely to succeed, given the continuing relationship of colonization, domination and oppression of the Indigenous communities by the dominant society (supported by science and law) and the fact that "the removal of TEK from its paradigm and its importation into another dominant world view does violence both to TEK itself as a source of knowledge, and to the communities from which it comes."[14]

Doubleday suggests that, while a piecemeal appropriation of TEK is achievable and would be advantageous for science, altering the western-eurocentric tradition is not going to enable it to fully comprehend the Indigenous tradition.[15] Instead, she suggests that, while science and TEK are not mutually incomprehensible, true understanding can only be obtained by acknowledging that both knowledge systems are expressions of separate world views and by understanding each within their respective world view.[16] So unless Indigenist knowledge is viewed as part of a world view and is understood from within that world view, ontological nuances will be lost. So will much of the knowledge. Since Indigenous knowledge would merely be understood within the confines of western-eurocentric thought and how this tradition has constructed and understands the world. Furthermore, obtaining a true and trustworthy understanding of TEK may only be possible using Indigenist epistemology and methodology as Indigenist knowledge is an

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[12] Fikret Berkes and Thomas Henley, "Co-management and traditional Knowledge: Threat or Opportunity?" in *Policy Options*, (March 1997), pp. 29-31; Nancy C. Doubleday, "Finding Common Ground: Natural Law and Collective Wisdom", in Julian T. Inglis (ed.), *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Concepts and Cases*, (Ottawa: International Development and Research Centre, 1992), pp. 41-53.

[13] Ibid., p. 51.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 52.

[16] Ibid.

internally generated means of knowing the world and a knowledge system whose validity is not and cannot be determined from within the western-eurocentric tradition.

The problems associated with approaching an examination of Blackfoot political traditions is by utilizing the intellectual tools and the disciplinary knowledge and perspective of political science can also be understood in terms of what Ward Churchill has called 'intellectual imperialism'.[17] According to Churchill the problem is not simply an issue of incommensurability, rather the problem is complicated and perpetuated by the fact that education and thus, the construction of knowledge, is the domain of 'white studies'. Put another way, political science, indeed academia as a whole, exists within a 'paradigm of eurocentrism' which is seldom recognized as it is cloaked in the assumed universalisms and essentialisms that define western-eurocentric thought and underscore the academic project.[18] While "this sort of monolithic pedagogical reliance upon one cultural tradition constitutes a rather transparent form of intellectual domination"[19] it is only recently that it has begun to be challenged as the 'face' of academia changes from absolute 'whiteness' to a domain with vestiges of 'otherness'.

We must continue this challenge and venture forward, as the 'traditional approach' of 'intellectual imperialism' merely perpetuates misunderstanding and false knowledge claims as it uses a foreign conception of proof and evidence which ignores ontological, epistemological and methodological contextuality and conditionality.[20] Thus, I advocate

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[17] Ward Churchill, *From A Native Son: Selected Essays in Indigenism* (Boston: South End Press, 1996), pp. 271-293.

[18] Radha Jhappan, "Post-Modern Race and Gender Essentialism or a Post-Mortem of Scholarship" in *Studies in Political Economy* 51 (Fall, 1996), pp. 15-63. Mohanty has also addressed this issue in some detail, and has argued that claims of essentialism and universalism colonize the experiences and world views of 'third world' women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse", in Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman eds., *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 196-220.

[19] Churchill, op. cit., p. 271.

[20] For an example of research which utilizes this approach see: Thomas Flanagan, "The Sovereignty and Nationhood of Canadian Indians: A Comment on Boldt and Long", in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, XVIII (June, 1985), pp. 367-374.

an examination of Blackfoot political traditions within a post-colonial framework which

rejects universalism and prioritizes decolonization as the way in which to proceed in my

study of Indigenous political traditions, or more specifically, traditional Blackfoot

governance. In so doing, I will present an understanding of politics from the interpreted

perspective of *Siiksikaawa*, and create conceptual and analytical bridges of understanding

by 'translating' between the western-eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge systems

while respecting the knowledge and truth claims of the Blackfoot Confederacy.[21]

Many Indigenous scholars are advocates of this approach, commonly called

decolonizing methodology or Indigenist methodology, which has been used previously in

sociology, archeology, science and law. It has yet to be utilized, however, within political

science.[22] Still, I believe that this is the most valuable approach that could be used in this

study, because it does not deny issues of incommensurability, contextuality, relativism,

intellectual colonization and the possibility of creating contextualized knowledge claims

within diverse knowledge systems. Furthermore, this approach recognizes and affirms

the existence of Indigenous political traditions and respects the autonomy and traditions

of Indigenous peoples and their respective knowledge systems, hence allowing for the

sharing of knowledge in a respectful, non-coercive and non-intrusive manner. Thus, this

approach will enable me to create conceptual bridges of understanding by examining

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[21] This research approach and method of analysis is consistent with those advocated by theorists of 'naturalistic inquiry'. They argue: "it is important for researchers to attempt to share the constructions of those whose human setting they are investigating. These shared constructions need not be identical; in fact they cannot be. But they must be compatible so that communication can take place. ... the naturalistic researcher must take care to develop compatible constructions with the study's intended audience. ... this is the same reason why the naturalistic researcher uses thick description. ... It is thick description that will bring the reader vicariously into the setting the researcher is describing and thereby pave the way for shared constructions." David A. Erlandson, Edward L. Harris, Barbara L. Skipper & Steve D. Allen, *Doing Naturalistic Inquiry: A Guide to Methods*, (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 24.

[22] For examples of research utilizing this approach see: Vine Deloria, *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, (Goldon: Fulcrum, 1994).

Indigenous political traditions such as Blackfoot governance from within using

Henderson's theory of ecological contexts.[23]

## INDIGENOUS OR DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGY

Ian Hacking argues that incommensurability is not only the result of an inability to

translate truth claims between contexts, paradigms, and/or cultures. Instead, he argues it

is simply an issue of translation as "translation is hard when one gets to whole new

ranges of possibility that make no sense for the favoured styles of reasoning of another

culture."[24] As such, "translation of truths is irrelevant. Communication of ways to think

is what matters."[25] Thus, incommensurability is caused by an inability to translate

between styles of reasoning and incommensurability can be overcome and understanding

can be achieved by "learning how to reason" or learning "how to reason in a new way."[26]

In other words, for Hacking incommensurability is a problem of coming to understand

a whole other way of reasoning and of disassociation as one cannot grasp another way of

knowing without becoming deeply familiar with the alternative system of reasoning and

treating it as an independent and distinct style of reasoning. Relying on Hacking, Meyer

and Ramirez conclude that incommensurability is a problem of relativity and not of

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[23] This approach will be utilized in my examination of Indigenous traditions in a manner which is consistent with the way in which this approach has been utilized by Henderson. James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "The Context of the State of Nature", in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 11-38. James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "Post Colonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism" in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 57-76. James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "Ayukpach: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 248-278.

[24] Ian Hacking, "Language, Truth and Reason", in Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes (eds.) *Rationality and Relativism*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), p. 49.

[25] Ibid., p. 61.

[26] Ibid., p. 60.

ethnocentrism and subjectivity.[27] Meyer and Ramirez argue that relativity may be overcome insofar as one develops a deep familiarity with, and capacity in, the 'style of reasoning' inherent in each world view and learns about the world view and how to reason within it.[28] While this is possible, they note that overcoming relativity is extremely difficult and time consuming especially where the separation of world views or the disassociation is extreme.[29] Overcoming relativity is possible, however, if only in part.

Pam Colorado argues that problems associated with incommensurability can be dealt with in some limited way by articulating Indigenous Knowledge "in contemporary terms to permit scholarly exchange, growth and to empower Native people in the [academic] arena."[30] This seems similar to the integrationist or contributionist approaches advocated in the TEK literature. It is quite distinct, however, as Colorado's vision is predicated on a recognition of incommensurability and the necessity of utilizing a 'bi-cultural research model', "a blending of research efforts, not the domination or extension of ideological control by one culture's science,"[31] cross-cultural communication, and a recognition of the reliability and trustworthiness of Indigenous knowledge as a separate intellectual tradition. This is consistent with Indigenous, Indigenist or decolonizing methodology.

Indigenist methodology, however is not only an emancipatory research methodology or a decolonizing and post-colonial methodology, it is first and foremost a reaction against

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[27] Leroy N Meyer,. & Tony Ramirez, "'Wakinyan Hotan': The Inscrutability of Lakota/Dakota Metaphysics", in Sylvia O'Meara and Douglas A. West eds., *From Our Eyes: Learning From Indigenous Peoples*, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), p. 102. It should be noted that many disagree with the idea that relativity can be overcome and instead argue that relativity should define the study of comparative politics. For a discussion of this body of literature see: Marc Howard Ross, Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis", in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman (eds.), *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 42-80.

[28] Meyer and Ramirez, op. cit, p. 103.

[29] Ibid., p. 103.

[30] Pam Colorado, "Bridging Native and Western Science", *Convergence* XXI (1988), pp. 49.

[31] Ibid., p. 49.

research itself. Lester Irabinna Rigney, an Indigenous scholar from Australia, explains:

"Indigenous Australians like First Nations Peoples around the globe, are arguably the most studied people of the world. The research enterprise as a vehicle for investigation has poked, prodded, measured, tested, and compared data toward understanding Indigenous cultures and human nature."[32] As a result, "the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary."[33] It is out of this reality that Indigenous scholars from around the globe have developed alterNative methodologies that "construct, rediscover, and/or reaffirm their knowledges and cultures ... represent the aspirations of Indigenous [peoples] and carry within them the potential to strengthen the struggle for emancipation and liberation from oppression."[34]

There is no one Indigenist methodology. But there is a constantly growing body of literature which engages the subject of alterNative research methodologies and which purports to develop a variety of different research methodologies (participatory, post-colonial, nationalist, emancipatory, Indigenist and decolonizing). These are grounded in their reaction to intellectual colonization, the desire to reaffirm Indigenous Knowledge, and respect Indigenous communities and Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies.[35] Simply put, Indigenist or decolonizing methodology is a multidimensional research methodology which is in its formative stages and contains a

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[32] Lester-Irabinna Rigney, "Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies", in *Wicazo Sa Review*, 14:2 (Fall 1999), p. 104.

[33] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (New York: Zed Books, 1999), p. 1.

[34] Rigney, op. cit., p. 114.

[35] For example see: Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000). Marie Battiste and Jean Barman (eds.) *First Nations Education in Canada: The Circle Unfolds*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995). Sylvia O'Meara and Douglas A. West (eds.), *From Our Eyes: Learning From Indigenous Peoples*, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996). Rigney, op. cit. Smith, op. cit. Colorado, op. cit.

wide range of evolving methods and strategies predicated on 'resistance', 'integrity' and 'privileging Indigenous' voices, approaches, ontology, epistemology and methodology.[36]

For the purposes of this dissertation, Indigenist or decolonizing methodology refers to the ideas of Linda Tuhiwai Smith as advanced in her widely acclaimed book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.[37] Smith argues that "cultural protocols, values and behaviours ... are 'factors' to be built into research explicitly, to be thought out reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of the study ..."[38] These are requirements for 'ethical and respectful research' when dealing with Indigenous knowledge systems and political traditions. I incorporate Smith's suggestions into the construction and implementation of my research design; openly acknowledging that my research will be grounded in a recognition and an acceptance of contextuality. Unlike Smith, however, I do not advocate the complete separation of western-eurocentric and Indigenous intellectual traditions. Smith argues for the segregation of western-eurocentric "theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power."[39] Like Colorado, however, I advocate the appropriation and use of western-eurocentric language and theories to enable cross-cultural communication and the articulation of Indigenous knowledge "in contemporary terms to permit scholarly exchange"[40] and intellectual decolonization.

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[36] Rigney, op. cit., pp. 114-118.

[37] Smith, op. cit.

[38] Ibid., p. 15.

[39] Ibid., p. 42.

[40] Colorado, op. cit., p. 49.

## USING ORAL HISTORY AS AN EVIDENTIARY BASE

In this section, I discuss how I will reconstruct the pre-colonial or traditional Blackfoot system of governance. Much of what has been written previously about the Blackfoot Confederacy was written from a eurocentric standpoint, mostly by early missionaries and colonial authorities. Not surprisingly then, there is little congruence between the written tradition of the colonizer and the oral traditions of the *Siiksikaawa*. This raises questions of accuracy, truth and perspective which could easily impede accurate interpretation of existing literature. It also demonstrates how context impedes the creation of knowledge and the types of problems that emerge as a result of intellectual colonization and domination.[41] To overcome these difficulties, I propose to create a understanding of traditional Blackfoot governance from the (interpreted) perspective of the people themselves, using the written tradition insofar as it can support and provide a foundation for the Blackfoot perspective.

There are problems associated with both the oral and written traditions I will use. It is not merely the researcher who holds a complex array of assumptions and biases. All people associated with the research, including the 'authors' of both oral and written accounts of history, hold biases. Jennifer Brown reminds us that we cannot disassociate the 'story-teller' from the context within which s/he exist and that we must 'read beyond the words' or understand words as part of the 'author's' context. Drawing on the work of Modoc scholar Dorris, Brown argues:

> whether we are Native or not, whether we hail from New Zealand, the
> United States or Germany, we never approach history with a blank slate.
> We all carry a host of assumptions and expectations informed by
> Hollywood westerns and television, by the novels of James Fenimore
> Cooper, by childhood cowboy-and-Indian games, or by the "council rings"

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[41] This is not to say that the written tradition is useless. As my research on Treaty Number Seven and Van Kirks' research on the fur trade demonstrate, the written tradition can be an extremely valuable source of knowledge insofar as it is problematized, contextualized and 'read against the grain'. Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society 1670-1870*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983).

we joined at summer camp. Already in our minds are deep-seated if ill-defined images of "Indians," be they in savage red or dusky romantic brown. Serious considerations of Native history must therefore begin, Doris writes, with "an initial, abrupt, and wrenching demythologizing"; we must acknowledge that we begin not from some neutral point, but about ten steps back.[42]

Context cannot be disassociated from the issue of trustworthiness, because the two are mutually dependent; the reliability and trustworthiness of an interpretation depends on the 'author's' underlying assumptions and their understanding of Indigenous world views. Therefore, although I intend to 'read beyond the words', to create a post-colonial understanding of Indigenous politics from the perspective of Indigenous people, I will rely more readily on Indigenous sources and written sources that can be interpreted and validated from within an Indigenous knowledge system.

I recognize that this approach is not without its problems, however, since Indigenous sources, oral or written, may also be biased, especially since they are often expressed as an alterNative to the dominant paradigm. This is particularly evident in relation to discussions regarding tradition. There is often a tendency, for example, to recast tradition as a positive opposite to colonialism and to reconstruct tradition in light of colonialism. John Friesen, a scholar working in the area Aboriginal education and a Reverend on the Stoney reserve, argues:

> Written descriptions of traditional Native cultures by Native writers are of considerably more recent origin than anthropological sources and they promulgate an entirely different perspective. Relying heavily on information from contemporary elders, it must be acknowledged that much of this knowledge is speculative and in alignment with the oral tradition, not necessarily on written historical documentation. Much of the past is clouded with mystery and informants can only guess at the meaning of traditional Indian values ...[43]

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[42] Jennifer S. H. Brown, "Introduction", in Jennifer S. H. Brown & Elizabeth Vibert (eds.), *Reading Beyond Words*, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996), p. x.

[43] John W. Friesen, "Native Cultures in a Cultural Clash", in John W. Friesen (ed.), *The Cultural Maze: Complex Questions on Native Destiny in Western Canada*, (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1991), p. 27.

Friesen problematizes the use of the oral tradition as an evidential source, because he sees the oral tradition in its modern incarnation as little more than a speculative body of knowledge. He justifies this position by arguing that many of todays Elders are not fluent speakers of their languages and are not competent in their understanding of the past. For Friesen, Elders are incompetent due to incongruencies in their education, which results in a propensity to "paint a more positive picture of the past rather than a purely descriptive view or analyzing seemingly inconsistencies or deficiencies therein."[44] Moreover, he asserts, their knowledge is not consistent with written historical documentation. In short, Friesen concludes that oral tradition is not authentic or authoritative knowledge because he reserves this standing for the written, historical record. This, despite the fact that he acknowledges that "most of that which was recorded ... was accomplished by individuals who neither spoke Native languages nor understood their cultures."[45]

Responding to the assertion that the written word is superior to oral tradition, Patricia Monture-Angus writes:

> There is a reason why we recorded our laws, our agreements and our treaties in shell; and it was not because we were an inferior people. I do not believe that writing everything down is necessarily a very advanced idea or sign of great humanity. This is not how I experienced it. When you write things down they are easily forgotten, as you assume the paper will do your job of remembering. ...[46]

I find Friesen's assertions unfounded, and I perceive oral tradition to be an source of information which is superior to the written tradition for the purposes of this dissertation. Nonetheless, its use is not without problems. Because the nature of oral history is so different from written history with respect to what is told and how it is told,

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Patricia Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations Independence*, (Halifax: Fernwood, 1999), p. 37.

doing academic research based on oral sources is methodologically challenging.[47] The western-eurocentric academic mindset is so different from the Aboriginal world view that translating between the two, or understanding oral history from within the confines of a disciplinary knowledge, can be arduous.

Unlike written history, oral history tends to be circular in nature not linear. Moreover, it is spatially oriented rather than time dependent. Events are remembered in relation to the sacred spaces or the locality in which the event occurred or based on ecological and seasonal happenings. Written history is recounted in a linear or time-based fashion whereby events are remembered for the year in which they occurred. Oral history takes the form of 'it happened when the people were living there' or 'it happened during the year of the short winter when we were near 'x'. According to Vine Deloria Jr., "the western preoccupation with history as a chronological description of reality was not a dominant factor in any tribal conception of either time or history."[48] Oral history, and symbolic history,[49] represents the memory of past experiences, experiences that find meaning in their relation to the 'natural world' and not in their relation to a specific reference point in linear time or to a chronological conceptualization of progress.

For the most part, oral history lacks chronology in the sense of linear time. Oral history, then, is not a linear history. It is the story of interrelated yet separate events and experiences that occurred within 'a space' and in relationship to 'a space'. In other words, oral history is the story of a people in their territory, with no exact beginning, middle or end; simply individual events and experiences which are not separate and

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[47] Oral history meaning, the collective memory of history which exists as part of the oral tradition of Indigenous societies.

[48] Deloria, *God Is Red*, op. cit, p. 98.

[49] Symbolic history, meaning winter counts, rock paintings, tipi designs, bundles, songs and other 'remembering tools'.

segmented from the community and the territory, but intertwined and interdependent parts of the circle, which combine together to form the circle of life, the life of the people.

The difficulties of using oral tradition in academic research are exacerbated by language barriers, different cultural norms and traditions. To access oral tradition, one must first find an Elder or a story teller who has the knowledge sought. This can be a difficult and tedious process as not everyone knows or has the ability to tell a particular story. Further, there may be different accounts of the same story which have to be reconciled. Further, researchers must respect and adhere to cultural norms and traditions. Every society has its own norms regarding the transfer of knowledge, and norms regarding its acquisition. For example, in Euro-Canadian society we have institutions which were established to supervise knowledge transfers, and there are norms and laws that govern such transfers. This is also true in Native societies; there are institutions and protocols, including ceremonies, which must be respected for a transfer to occur. This makes inter-cultural research difficult as norms and traditions must be learnt and understood within the cultural reality of a particular society, and may not be easily translated, understood or provided to or by an outsider. Even when these difficulties are overcome by the researcher there is also potentially a language barrier.

Despite these difficulties in researching oral history, it is a valuable source of knowledge as is demonstrated by the use of oral tradition and traditional knowledge in disciplines including anthropology, sociology, biology, environmental science. The recent Supreme Court decision (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*), for example, emphasized the need to incorporate traditional knowledge in all areas of public policy. I believe that it is possible to decolonize political science and its eurocentric disciplinary knowledge and to create an understanding and acceptance of different ways of knowing and different knowledge claims in their own right. By decolonization, I mean creating a decolonized or postcolonial knowledge of other (and self) not through colonization or forced assimilation,

but through the elimination of western superiority, essentialism and universalism and the acknowledgment that 'others' exist as parallel political traditions.

Recreating a history in which Indigenous voices are understood and represented is difficult, however, especially since most disciplines use the dominant positivist methodologies that do not provide the tools necessary for conducting such research and articulating such knowledge. There are several methodologies, however, which can be used as guidelines for conducting research using oral history.

Oral history methodology dates back to the 'arrival of the Europeans' in the Americas, as missionaries, explorers and amateur anthropologists collected information and subsequently sought to empirically test the trustworthiness and reliablility of Indigenous oral traditions using positivist methodologies. While one could argue (as does the TEK literature) that Indigenous peoples have their own oral history methodologies, the methodologies developed by non-Aboriginal scholars seeking to use oral history as an evidentiary source provide guidelines for conducting such research.

According to Jan Vasina and James Lagrand, up until the late 1960s and early 1970s, most of the theorizing about oral history methodology focused on issues of reliability and truthfulness.[50] Differentiating between oral history (personal narratives and life histories) and oral tradition (legends, anecdotes and stories with no known author), much of this literature argued that oral testimony could only be considered reliable if verified using 'historical records'.[51] Even then, oral tradition was typically deemed unreliable and oral history was considered truthful only to the extent that there was no contradictory written evidence.[52] Though triangulation is a useful methodology, because this historically

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[50] Jan Vasina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1965). Jan Vasina, *Oral Tradition as History*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). James B. Lagrand, "Whose Voices Count? Oral Sources and Twentieth-Century American Indian History", in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21:1, (1997), pp. 73-105.

[51] Ibid., p. 83.

[52] Vasina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, op. cit., pp. 3-6.

predominant oral history methodology is predicated on the assumption that oral

traditions are inferior bodies of knowledge it is extremely problematic. The research

guidelines offered will not be used because they deny me the ability to explain Blackfoot

governance from the interpreted perspective of the people themselves. Furthermore, my

use of decolonizing methodology prevents the use of such a methodology.

That said, recent attempts to theorize oral history methodology provide guidelines

that are useful for this project. As Julie Cruikshank has argued, the challenge faced by

researchers using oral history as an evidentiary base is balancing the 'telling of a story'

and scholarly obligations.[53] Historically, theorists and practitioners met this challenge

using triangulation and by relying on written history for empirical verification. Since the

late 1960s, "studies are more likely to evaluate oral tradition on its own terms"[54] and to

acknowledge it as having its own system of empirical verification. As Cruikshank argues:

> Broadly speaking oral tradition (like history or anthropology) can be
> viewed as a coherent, open-ended system for constructing and transmitting
> knowledge. Ideas about what constitutes legitimate evidence may differ in
> oral tradition and scholarly investigation, and the explanations are certainly
> framed differently. They cannot be compared easily, nor can their
> accuracy or truth value necessarily bee evaluated in positivistic terms.
> From this perspective, scholarly papers can be understood as another form
> of narrative structured by the language of academic discourse.[55]

In part, Cruikshank has escaped the western-superiority complex, by suggesting that

oral traditions be understood and evaluated on their own terms. However, I would argue

that by suggesting that scholarship such as this be understood as a form of narration,

Cruikshank is devaluing oral tradition and scholarship which uses it as an evidentiary

base. Moreover, her oral history methodology is problematic because she continues to

suggest that historically-grounded triangulation is the 'best practice' and she, therefore,

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[53] Julie Cruikshank, "Notes and Comments", *Canadian Studies Review* 75:3, (1994), p. 404.

[54] Ibid., p. 408.

[55] Ibid.

does not provide adequate guidelines as to how to balance the 'telling of a story' and scholarly requirements.

In part, these problems are remedied by the oral history methodology of Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson. Like Cruikshank, Slim and Thompson argue that oral tradition is a combination of objective and subjective knowledge which must be understood and evaluated on its own terms. Further to this, they argue that questions as to the validity and reliability of oral traditions are "created by the bias of the educated and political elite, which tend to exaggerate the objectivity [trustworthiness and reliability] of something which is 'down on paper'."[56] Escaping the confines of this debate, these authors construct an oral history methodology which provides guidelines as to how to balance the 'telling of a story' and scholarly requirements. They argue that oral history methodology must be predicated on principles of ethical research.

By ethical research they suggest that one must acknowledge the impact that the interviewer has on both the process of obtaining oral testimony and in interpreting oral testimony. Interpretation should be in accordance with community interests and in the manner negotiated at the time of the interview.[57] Ethically, the authors argue that in conducting interviews and interpreting information the researcher must respect individuals, communities and their cultures, customs and protocols. As such, the use of 'tape recorders' and 'ball-point pens' are situationally dependent as local customs are binding and respect is the utmost priority. Finally, they argue that ownership of oral testimony and a peoples knowledge must be respected in both the writing and the dissemination of research, even when intellectual property rights and copy rights are not an issue.

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[56] Hugo Slim & Paul Thompson, *Listening For a Change: Oral Testimony and Community Development*, (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1994), p. 150.

[57] Ibid., pp. 147-149.

Using Slim and Thompson's oral history methodology as guidelines for conducting, interpreting and disseminating research is consistent with the stated intent of this dissertation, and decolonizing methodology. This oral history methodology is also consistent with my own ethical guidelines (approved by the Carleton Ethics Committee prior to conducting this research) which stipulated that this research was to be conducted and interpreted in accordance with the Blackfoot protocols. As such, oral testimony was used as my non-triangulated evidentiary base. This was done to ensure that intellectual property rights and Blackfoot protocols were respected and that information which is not deemed to be 'public' is not disseminated in this dissertation regardless as to whether it already exists in written form.

Slim and Thompson's oral history methodology also provides guidelines for conducting, interpreting and disseminating research using oral tradition which are consistent with a number of other methodological guidelines useful for interpreting history, and thus *Siiksikaawa* oral tradition. As Cree Elder Rick Lightning has suggested, to create a trustworthy understanding of history, we must first understand the context of that history, and the context of how it has been interpreted both in the past and in the present.[58] Kainai (Blood) scholar Leroy Little Bear has provided me with similar advice, suggesting that to understand what is being discussed you have to understand the historical situation and the historical perspective.[59] Similarly, Chickasaw legal scholar Henderson emphasizes that we must understand what is being said from within its 'natural context'; that is to say from within its own frame of reference or world view.[60]

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[58] Rick Lightning (Cree), Interview conducted for a previous research project, (Hobemma, Alberta, September 1, 1995).

[59] Leroy Little Bear (Kainai/Blood), Interview conducted for a previous research project, (Calgary, Alberta, August 29, 1995).

[60] James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson (Chickasaw), Interview conducted for a previous research project, (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, July 19, 1995).

These ideas form the foundation for an approach developed by Huron philosopher Georges Sioui in his book, *For an Amerindian Autohistory.*[61] According to Sioui, "the goal of Amerindian autohistory is to assist history in its duty to repair the damage it has traditionally caused to the integrity of Amerindian cultures"[62] and to demonstrate the influence (both past and present) of Indigenous cultures on Euro-Canadians. [63] Like Brown's idea of 'reading beyond words',[64] Sioui's approach to understanding and interpreting history will be of great benefit to this study. It recognizes that colonialism was experienced differently by the colonized and the colonizer, and that the views of both must be understood within the context of that particular society and as they were likely interpreted at the time.

While the ideas of Lightning, Little Bear, Henderson and Sioui offer methodological guidelines for the study and recreation of traditional political ideas and practices, one can also look to the communities themselves for guidelines for doing this kind of research.[65] Angela Wilson argues:

> ... problems arise when scholars attempt to treat oral historical material as they might deal with other written source material. ... what I see happening with those specializing in the field of oral history is an attempt to make oral accounts from other cultures conform to western notions of respectability, truth, narrative form, categories, significance, terminology, sensibility and so forth. While I would argue that oral accounts are certainly interpretations of the past [just as written accounts are] and should not be treated as raw data, *I do not believe that they should be tested*

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[61] Georges E. Sioui, *For an Amerindian Autohistory: An Essay on the Foundations of a Social Ethic*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992).

[62] Ibid., p. 21

[63] Ibid., p. 37.

[64] Brown, op. cit

[65] Theories of naturalistic inquiry address methodological issues pertinent to the creation of bridges of understanding between two parallel ways of knowing, and provide concrete methods of establishing reliability and detecting error by building tests of trustworthiness through thick description, purposive sampling, dependability audits and confirm ability audits. Naturalistic inquiry will not be used since Indigenous peoples and Indigenist traditions themselves hold the answers to these queries.

*and evaluated by western standards,* or any other standards from any
other cultures for that matter. *The only standards that matter are those set
within the culture, and if stories are still being told within the oral tradition
then they have obviously passed these internal checks.*[66]

As standards differ among Indigenous peoples, the standards used in the conducting of

research and in the writing of this dissertation rest largely within the cultural domain of

the Blackfoot Confederacy. As stated previously, this is consistent with decolonizing

methodology, oral history methodology and my own ethical guidelines.

## RESEARCH IN ACTION

Among *Siiksikaawa,* political knowledge is maintained within specialized structures

(or institutions) called clans, societies and Bundles.[67] Each of these 'organizations'

maintains a specialized process for the dissemination of knowledge, and a specialized

process which "distributes the responsibility for maintaining knowledge."[68] Only those

people who have been given the responsibility for maintaining the knowledge of a clan,

society or Bundle have the ability to disseminate this knowledge. These internal

processes are the Blackfoot standards for the maintenance and distribution of knowledge;

the criteria and mechanisms which maintain the trustworthiness of oral tradition.

Consistent with oral history methodology, decolonizing methodology, my ethical

guidelines and my stated intentions to write a postcolonial interpretive study of

*Siiksikaawa* governance, these are the protocols and procedures which were followed in

conducting, interpreting and disseminating this research. As such, internal processes

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[66] Angela Cavender Wilson, "Power of the Spoken Word: Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History", in Donald Fixico (ed.), *Rethinking American Indian History,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), pp. 109-110. emphasis added.

[67] As clans, societies and Bundles are the primary structures of governance within the Blackfoot political system, these structures and their roles and responsibilities are discussed in greater detail in the forthcoming chapter on Blackfoot Governance.

[68] Russel Lawrence Barsh, "How to Patent a Landscape", in *International Journal of Cultural Property,* 8:1 (1999), p. 19.

determined who I interviewed during the course of my research. More particularly, I sought out the 'Blackfoot experts' on clans, societies and Bundles and enlisted them as my teachers. In other words, I interviewed those people who had been provided with the necessary teachings through their involvement in these three structures and who had earned the responsibility for maintaining the political knowledge internal to each structure. Further, I used existing contacts within these structures to assist in determining who I should talk to regarding the different societies, clans and Bundles. Participants and 'leaders' in all three structures were interviewed. Trustworthiness and reliability of all information collected was determined using Blackfoot protocols and processes and by corroborating individual accounts both within and across the three structures. As a result, because I attempted to corroborate all accounts and because I was often provided the same information by different sources, most of the information recounted in this dissertation cannot be attributed to a single source. Further to this, much of the knowledge conveyed in this dissertation cannot be attributed to a single source as the information I was given is collectively 'owned' by the three structures of governance (arguably, the entire Confederacy). Thus, it should be noted that I refer to my sources collectively as 'my teachers' and do not provide reference to specific individuals. It should also be noted that even when stories could not be corroborated or disagreement existed, my sources are referred to as 'my teachers' to ensure anonymity.

This approach is unorthodox , but it is entirely consistent decolonizing methodology, fourth-world post-colonialism and recent work in the area of oral history methodology. As such, all of my research was conducted in accordance with Smith's ethical guidelines and Slim and Thompson's oral history methodology based on a recognition and respect for culturally-defined responsibilities and codes of conduct. The guidelines Smith offers are based on Kaupapa Maori practices, nonetheless, they are applicable to my own research. I have adopted them as general guidelines and grounded them within my

understanding of Blackfoot society, relationships, responsibilities, protocols, beliefs and values. These guidelines are:

1 Aroha ki te tangata (a respect for people).
2 Kanohi kitea (the seen face, that is present yourself to people face to face).
3 Titiro, whakarongo ... korero (look, listen ... speak).
4 Manaki ki te tangata (share and host people, be generous).
5 Kia tupato (be cautious).
6 Kaua e takahia te mana itte tangata (do not trample over the mana of people).
7 Kaua e mahaki (don't flaunt your knowledge).[69]

Once contacts were made, my understanding, or often my lack of understanding, of Blackfoot protocols determined how contacts were approached (when, where and how) and how our face-to-face 'gatherings' proceeded. Not all of the people I approached participated in my teaching and I was taught by several people who approached me. 'Interviews' were conducted in a variety of locales including restaurants in downtown Calgary, 'sacred sites', and the homes of my teachers. Some 'interviews' lasted several days, but out of respect for traditional protocols and processes, 'interviews' were not audio recorded, and in some cases even notes were not taken. Nevertheless, 'field notes' were compiled subsequent to all 'interviews'.

What these visits or 'gatherings' entailed, has been addressed with great accuracy by Colorado in her attempt to explain what is involved in doing 'bi-cultural research' with Elders. Colorado explains:

The visit is an essential ingredient of Native scientific methodology. the visit includes introductions, establishing a relationship between the Elder and the younger person (i.e. Who is your clan? Who is your family? What is your Indian name?) socializing including humour, and finally raising the purpose of the visit. Through visits a contract is established. Often the contracting process requires several visits ... Through this process trust is established and a genuine interest in the welfare of the Elder is promoted. This is important - the Elder is about to share

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[69] Smith, op. cit., p. 120.

> knowledge that is powerful, sacral, and often of a personal nature - the recipient must be prepared.

> In addition, the process of the visit teaches the younger person the qualities that are necessary for becoming a Native American scientist. These qualities include tremendous self-discipline, patience, a willingness to share faith and a belief in prayer. ...

> Questions form another part of the Elder-apprentice relationship. Elders often teach by leaving us with a riddle, or with some question in our mind. The result is that we go away curious, and wanting more. Furthermore, the way the information is passed to us from Elders causes us to think deeply, to look at our own lives intensely to try to figure out what the Elder was wanting us to see. ...[70]

While questions form a significant part of the research experience, interviews were not conducted using schedules or even pre-determined open-ended questions. Instead, consistent with Slim and Thompson's oral history methodology and decolonizing methodology, the words listening, observing, experiencing and reflecting capture my research experience. Questions were derived from the teachings of the Elders themselves and questions were asked in accordance with Smith's guidelines and Blackfoot protocols.

By respecting the Blackfoot method of authenticating and validating knowledge, I am limited in my ability to reconcile differing accounts. Since different accounts are accorded the status of 'truth' within the 'organizations' responsible for the maintenance of that knowledge, I must respect all versions of 'truth'. Concurring with this, Wilson acknowledges that, "this is a fundamentally different approach to other [truth claims] than that embraced by a Western European scholarly tradition that is largely based on Christian values and promotes a belief in only one truth, one way, one right."[71] As Wilson states, "[t]his approach [may] be disturbing to academics"[72] as it escapes the confines of western-eurocentric thought, does not conform to rigid scholarly norms of

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[70] Colorado, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

[71] Wilson, op. cit., p. 113.

[72] Ibid.

inquiry, proof, verification, reliability, the authority of the written word, and the idea that there is but one truth. I believe that incommensurability can be partially overcome through translation and the creation of intellectual and conceptual bridges of understanding. Nevertheless, I embrace the fact that "so much of what is contained within the oral tradition may never be corroborated by any written evidence."[73] Furthermore, consistent with Slim and Thompson's oral history methodology, decolonizing methodology and Henderson's postcolonial methodology, I will not attempt to corroborate Indigenist knowledge with western-eurocentric knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

Given the nature of my research and proposed methods, many would argue that I cannot take for granted that the knowledge that I have acquired is 'scientific fact', that what I learned from engaging the oral tradition is fact rather than opinion, or that what is presented is objective rather than subjective. But the problems that I faced in conducting my research and in writing this dissertation are not just the result of my selection of methodology or the nature of the topic. As Deloria suggests, there is little difference between western science and the 'tribal' equivalent of traditional knowledge or oral tradition. Both are serious bodies of knowledge with processes through which knowledge is authenticated, and with associated problems of subjectivity and objectivity. It is just that they view the world differently and ask different kinds of questions.[74] Thus, what follows are my answers to these different questions, viewed through different eyes, and presented in a manner which honours the spirit and the intent of traditional political knowledge.

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[73] Ibid.

[74] Deloria, *Red Earth, White Lies*, op. cit., pp. 35-36.

By honouring the spirit and intent of the teachings that I have been provided regarding *Siiksikaawa* political traditions, I recognize that there are limits to my intellectual freedom or, to use the terminology of Jack Forbes, my 'intellectual sovereignty'.[75] The reasons for this limitation are simple. As Deloria argues, *"Individual self-determination* and *intellectual sovereignty* are scary concepts because they mean that a whole generation of Indians are not going to be responsible to the Indian people, they are simply going to be isolated individuals playing with the symbols of Indians."[76] Therefore, acknowledging my responsibility to the knowledge that I have been given, my teachers, and to the relationships established between myself and my teachers, is not a limitation on my ability as an academic but a way of ensuring the integrity of the knowledge presented in this dissertation.

Acknowledging my responsibilities to my Blackfoot teachers and *Siiksikaawa* structures of governance and rejecting intellectual sovereignty is also about respecting the boundaries of the 'public domain', the sacred and the limitations of my own understanding. Respecting the boundaries of public knowledge and the sacred, I denounce 'intellectual tourism'.[77] I do not discuss any information which should not be part of the public domain, regardless as to whether or not this information exists in print elsewhere.[78]

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[75] Jack D. Forbes, "Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Implications for Native Studies and Native Intellectuals", in *Wicazo Sa Review* 13:1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 11-23.

[76] Vine Deloria Jr., "Intellectual Self-Determination and Sovereignty: Looking at the Windmills in Our Minds", in *Wicazo Sa Review* 13:1 (Spring, 1998), p. 28.

[77] Thomas King uses the term 'literary tourism' to refer to the works of authors such as Lynne Andrews and Carlos Castaneda who do not respect the boundaries of sacred and instead urge their readers to become 'tourists' and 'participants' within the sacred; at least the sacred as it is (mis)understood and (mis)represented by these authors. Thomas King, "Godzilla and Post-Colonialism" in Ajay Heble, Donna Palmateer Pennee and J. R. (Tim) Struthers (eds.) *New Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, (Peterborough: Broadview, 1997), p. 246.

[78] Consistent with Slim and Thompson's oral history methodology, decolonizing methodology and my own ethical research guidelines (approved by Carleton's Ethics Committee) I did not attempt to corroborate oral history using written history. Instead, I engaged in a process of triangulation from within. This lack of textual corroboration enabled me to ensure the attainment of ethical research and to avoid intellectual tourism. This is because I would have had limited ability to ascertain the limits of the public domain using written sources, even if those sources were written by Blackfoot peoples or documenting Blackfoot oral history. Such is the case with the George First Rider Collection (Kainai/Glenbow), the Lucien and

The knowledge provided herein is intended to provide "limited participation and access to the Native world which will allow the reader to associate with that world without being encouraged to feel a part of it."[79] In accordance with Indigenist epistemology, because knowledge is the result of an internalized process and reflexivity, I only know what I know and I can only speak of that which I truly understand. Thus, what follows is my own understanding of *Siiksikaawa* political traditions, and as such I take full responsibility for any misunderstanding or misinterpretation and I acknowledge the responsibilities that I have to those people to whom this knowledge truly belongs.

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Jane Richardson Hanks Papers (Glenbow/National Archives) and other archival sources. Regardless as to whether I received ethical clearance or permission from institutions such as the Glenbow Museum and Archives, such research would not be in accordance with the intentions of this project or my own ethical guidelines. Simply stated, permission has to be obtained from those peoples who have the responsibility for maintaining and disseminating knowledge within the three structures of governance.

[79] King, op. cit. p. 246.

# CHAPTER 2

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BLACKFOOT WORLD

In the chapters that follow, I will explain traditional Blackfoot governance and argue that it can best be understood using Henderson's theory of ecological contexts. In this chapter I will attempt to convey an understanding of the Blackfoot world to serve as a foundation for comprehending *Siiksikaawa* governance within its own context, rather than from a western-eurocentric perspective. Since the world of the 'Indian' has long been misunderstood by invaders, immigrants and their offspring, I attempt to create an alterNative vantage point from which to understand pre-colonial America that is neither situated in, nor limited by, the discourse of the 'Imaginary Indian'. I attempt to create a rudimentary understanding of the pre-colonial Blackfoot reality based on my interpretation of notable aspects of said world. I do so to provide the reader with a foundation for understanding Blackfoot governance as separate and distinct from the western-eurocentric tradition, and its universalist and essentialist understanding of governance.

The chapter functions as a backdrop to my subsequent discussion of Blackfoot governance, outlining for the reader key tenets of Blackfoot reality that grounded Blackfoot governance. These tenets must be understood to comprehend the Blackfoot political system and how Blackfoot governance functioned without coercive and hierarchical power. This chapter also outlines the foundational relationship between the Blackfoot political system and the local ecological order as I introduce the reader to my

understanding of Blackfoot reality. This is a reality constructed as a relationship to, and by experiencing, Creation; a reality developed over a millennia by asking 'how do we live best together' or 'how do we relate to or fit in the natural world'. This is in contrast to the dominant western-eurocentric approach that asks how do we create a new utopia for humanity that permits and promotes 'man's' dominion over the natural and human world.

What follows is my understanding of the Blackfoot realm; an understanding based on teachings provided by Blackfoot Elders, Cree Elders, and my reading of the existing literature. Yet, it is my own understanding; grounded in Blackfoot teachings, and based on research guided by post-colonialism,[1] and decolonizing or Indigenist methodology.[2] The reason for this is quite simple: I recognize and respect Blackfoot intellectual traditions and protocols which are predicated on the idea that people can only speak about what they know and from that 'place' which they know (themselves). It is therefore impossible for me to appropriate voice or knowledge, or to claim expertise. What follows, then, is the understanding of an outsider who spent considerable time 'learning my way into' Blackfoot rationality, ontology, epistemology and history. Thus, I thank 'the little old man', Alan Wolf Leg, Andrew Weasel Fat, Leonard Bastien, Alan Pard, Joe Crowshoe, Reg Crowshoe, Tom Crane Bear, Bob Breaker, 'the old man', 'the old woman', and the others who assisted in my learning, for their many teachings, many of which cannot appear in this dissertation out of respect for the Elders, oral tradition and the sensitivity of the knowledge. But what is presented is my own interpretation of Blackfoot traditions and I acknowledge that any misunderstanding or misinterpretation is my own.

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[1] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 248-278.

[2] Linda Luhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (New York: Zed Books, 1999).

## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO 'SOME OLD MAN'

To understand social reality and its meaning within the Blackfoot context one has to start with the beginning, for this is where the Blackfoot Confederacy has its origins and where the Elders begin their teachings.[3] Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall tell of Creation through the following Trickster, *Napi* or Old Man 'tales':

> The Making of the Earth
> During the flood, Old Man was sitting on the highest mountain with all the beasts. The flood was caused by the above people, because the baby (a fungus) of the woman who married a star was heedlessly torn in pieces by an Indian child. Old Man sent the Otter down to get some earth. For a long time he waited, then the Otter came up dead. Old Man examined its feet, but found nothing on them. Next he sent Beaver down, but after a long time he also came up drowned. Again nothing was found on his feet. He sent Muskrat to dive next. Muskrat also drowned. At length he sent the Duck (?). It was drowned, but in its paw it held some earth. Old Man saw it, put it in his hand, feigned putting it on the water three times, and at last dropped it. Then the above-people sent rain, and everything grew on the earth.

> Languages Confused on a Mountain
> After the flood, Old Man mixed water with different colors. He whistled, and all the people came together. He gave one man a cup of one kind of water, saying You will be chief of these people here." To another man he gave differently colored water, and so on. The Blackfoot, Piegan [sic] and Blood all received Black water. Then he said to the people, "Talk," and they all talked differently; but those who drank the Black water spoke the same. This happened on the highest mountain in the Montana Reservation (Chief Mountain?). ...

> Old Man Leads a Migration
> The first Indians were on the other side of the ocean, and Old Man decided to lead them to a better place. So he brought them over the ice to the far north. ... Now Old Man led these people down to where the Blood Reserve now is, and told them that this would be a fine country for them, and that they would be very rich. He said, "I will get all the people here." All the people living there ate and lived like wild animals; but Old Man went among them and taught them all the arts of civilization. ... At the

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[3] Because of the nature of these stories and because I have not been given permission to recount these stories, I rely on published sources to tell the story of Creation despite the fact that they are not entirely consistent with the way Creation has been explained to me by my teachers.

time the Blackfoot were just one tribe. When he was through teaching them, he did not die, but went among the Sioux ...

## The First Marriage

Now in those days, the men and the women did not live together. The men lived in one camp and the women in the other. The men lived in lodges made of skin with the hair on; the women in good lodges. One day Old Man came to the camp of the men, and, when he was there, a woman came over from the camp of the women. She said she had been sent by the chief of the women to invite all the men, because the women were going to pick out husbands.

Now the men began to get ready, and Old Man dressed himself up in his finest clothes: he was always fine looking. Then they started out and, when they came to the women's camp, they all stood up in a row. Now the chief of the women came out to make the first choice. She had on very dirty clothes, and none of the men knew who she was. She went along the line, looked them over, and finally picked out Old Man, because of his appearance. Now Old Man saw many nicely dressed women waiting their turn, and when the chief of the women took him by the hand, he pulled back and broke away. He did this because he thought her a very common woman. When he pulled away, the chief of the women went back to her lodge and instructed the other women not to choose Old Man. ...

After a while all the men had been picked out, except Old Man. Now he was very angry; but the chief woman said to him, "After this you are to be a tree, and are to stand just where you are now." Then he became a tree, and he is yet mad, because he is always caving down the bank.[4]

Referencing the story as 'the Blackfoot Genesis', George Bird Grinnell tells the story as follows:

... Old Man was traveling about, south of here, making the people. He came from the south, traveling north, making animals and birds as he passed along. He made the mountains, prairies, timber, and brush first. So he went along, traveling northward, making things up as he went, putting rivers here and there, and falls on them, putting red paint here and there in the ground, - fixing up the world as we see it today. ...

One day Old Man determined that he would make a woman and a child; so he formed them both of clay. ...That is how we came to be people. It is he

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[4] Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*,(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 19-23.

who made us. The first people were poor and naked, and did not know how to get a living. Old Man showed them ...

After that he told them how to act ...

After he had taught the people these things, he started off again, traveling north, until he came to where Bow and Elbow rivers meet. There he made some more people, and taught them the same things. From here he again went on northward. When he had come to nearly the Red Deer's River, he reached the hill where the Old Man sleeps. There he lay down and rested himself. The form of his body is to be seen there yet.

When he awoke from his sleep, he traveled further northward and came to a fine high hill. He climbed to the top of it, and sat there to rest. He looked over the country below him, and it pleased him. ...

This is as far as the Blackfeet followed the Old Man. The Crees know what he did further north.

In later times once, *Na'pi* said, "Here I will mark you off a piece of ground," and so he did. Then he said: "There is your land, and it is full of all kinds of animals, and many things grow in this land. Let no other people come into it. This is for you ... When people come across the line, take your bows and arrows, your lances and your battle axes, and give them battle and keep them out. If they gain footing trouble will come to you."

Our forefathers gave battle to all people who came to cross these lines, and kept them out. Of late years we have let our friends, the white people. come in, and you know the result. We, his children, have failed to obey his laws.[5]

Though these stories are not entirely consistent with the manner in which the

Creation story has been conveyed to me, and although they are recounted in such a way

that demonstrates the impact and influence of Christianity and western-eurocentric

thought,[6] they are nevertheless useful for the purposes of this dissertation. They recount

the birth of the nation and how it is that the Blackfoot came to live in their territory and

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[5] George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), pp. 137-144.

[6] For example, the Blackfoot do not tell of a migration across the ice, however, advocates of the Bering Straight land bridge 'myth' do. .

speak their language. They speak to *Siiksikaawa*'s relationship to Creation (read: the natural world or the local ecological order) and their responsibilities as part of Creation. They also provide some understanding of traditional Blackfoot spiritual, social, political, territorial, historical and economic realities. The stories also allude to the sense of 'otherness' with which the *Siiksikaawa* were imbued. Finally, the stories also recount some of the lessons and responsibilities that the Blackfoot were provided as a nation. For these reasons the Creation stories will provide the basis upon which I will construct a basic overview of pre-colonial Blackfoot reality in this chapter.

## 'SOME OLD MAN' CREATES *SOYITAPI*

According to these renditions of the Blackfoot Creation Story, as well as others that I have heard told over the years and during the course of doing research for this project, the *Siiksikaawa* were created from clay deposits found throughout their territory by *Napi* (Old Man), the First Woman and the *naato 'si*,[7] *natoji*,[8] Great Mystery, Great Power or Giver of Life. The people are said to have been created from the local ecological order within which they still exist, and were created to exist as part of that ecological order. Thus, the stories speak of the creation of the Blackfoot as a people, but they also tell of the relationship between the Blackfoot and Creation, and how the Blackfoot were 'taught all the arts of civilization' which would enable them to live as a people within the circle of life or the local ecological order.

The story of Creation tells of a time when the Blackfoot Confederacy all existed together as a single people; that is, of course, after the separate camps of men and women

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[7] According to D. Frantz and N. Russell, *naato 'si* means the sun. However, in this context I do not intend to confuse the power of Creation with the sun, for the Sun is merely one of many powerful manifestations of this power/*natoji*. Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell, *Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots and Affixes*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

[8] Viola F. Cordova, "The European Concept of *Usen*: An American Aboriginal Text", in Jace Weaver (ed.) *Native American Religious Identity: Unforgotten Gods*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), p. 27. Cordova could also be referring to the sun, or more accurately the sun's 'essence'.

were united to create the *Niitsitapi*. The people, known as *Siiksikaawa* (the entire group

of people known as people with black feet), *Niitsitapi*[9] (the real people), or the *Soyitapi*

(the people of the northern plains) existed in a territory that spanned the length of the

Rocky Mountains from the North Saskatchewan river to the Missouri river (and possibly

beyond) and to the prairies beyond the Cypress Hills on the eastern front.

While the Confederacy began as one nation, it did not remain one nation. Competing

accounts tell of the separation of *Siiksikaawa* into multiple nations. Hugh Dempsey, an

often cited historian of the Confederacy and the non-Native, son-in-law of the late

Blackfoot Senator James Gladstone, recounts the story about the origins of the

Confederacy as follows:

> ...the group was being harassed on all sides, so they decided to split into
> three camps to guard their frontiers. One group went north to guard
> against the Crees, another to the southwest to fight the mountain tribes,
> and the third to the southeast to guard against the Crows, Assiniboine and
> Sioux. Some time later, a man from the northern tribe went to visit the
> other two and on the way he passed an area that had been ravaged by a
> prairie fire. When he arrived at the southeast camp, he asked for the chief,
> and everyone he spoke to claimed he was the chief. As a result, the man
> called them the tribe of Many Chiefs (*A 'kainaawa*), which became the
> basis for the word Kainai, the native term for the Bloods. In turn, the
> people noticed the travelers blackened moccasins and called his tribe the
> Blackfoot, (*Sik-sikah*). When the man went to the third camp, he found
> that women had become lazy and were not tanning their hides properly. ...
> The visitor thus called the tribe Scabby Hides (*Apikuni*), this word later
> became corrupted into the name Peigan.[10]

As it has been explained to me, *Siiksikaawa* is a confederacy of three so-called

'nations or tribes of Indians', the *Siksika* or Blackfoot proper, the *Kainai* or Bloods and

the *Pikuni* or Peigan (including both *aamasskaapipiikanii* or South Peigan and

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[9] Since colonization, the term *Niitsitapi* has become synonymous with the term 'Indian', as it is generally used to describe an 'Indian' person and distinguish them from settlers and their offspring.

[10] Hugh A. Dempsey, *Indian Tribes of Alberta*, (Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1988), p. 8.

*aapatuxsipiikanii* or North Peigan).[11] Unlike most European confederacies, the Blackfoot Confederacy was not established through acts of violence, oppression or domination (i.e. conquest and war). Rather, it was a single nation which, prior to European invasion, had divided into interdependent nations. As to why it divided, I have been taught that this did not happen 'over night' and that the division did not occur at a single point in history. For reasons which are arguably related to defense and territorial responsibilities, periodically clans, or the extended kinship-based groups in which people traveled, chose to separate from their nation to form a separate summer camp or camp circle and thus, a separate nation.[12] In fact, this continual flux in the clan composition of nations is definitive of the history of the Confederacy. The clans comprising the *Siksika* separated from those which became the *Pikani*, which was again divided when the *Kainai* struck out on their own, and again when it divided to become the *Aputosi Piikani* (North Peigan) and the *Amaskapi Piikani* (South Peigan or Blackfeet). Except in the case of the Peigan which was amorphasizing during the contact period and became separate nations only in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, it is not clear when these divisions occurred, for oral history is not recorded in a linear fashion. But the three nations had been separated for a considerable time (several hundred years) at the point of contact in the mid-eighteenth century.

In short, the Blackfoot Confederacy was once comprised of a single nation. At some point in history, possibly in an attempt to defend its vast territory that spans much of what is now considered Alberta, Montana and southern Saskatchewan, this nation had divided into several interdependent and interlined nations which in turn established the

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[11] It should be noted that by the 1870s the *Pikuni* existed as two distinct nations (*aamasskaapipiikanii* and *aapatuxsipiikanii*), both of which were distinct nations within the Confederacy.

[12] Topics such as clans, nations and camp circles will be discussed at length in the following chapter pertaining to Blackfoot governance.

Blackfoot Confederacy.[13] Therefore, while the Confederacy was comprised of sovereign, interdependent nations, it was not a confederacy in the ordinary eurocentric sense of the word. The Confederacy itself acted as, and exhibited characteristics of a single nation, with a collective identity despite the fact that the derivative nations had spawned distinct yet mutually interdependent identities. In any case, it seems to me that the *Siiksikaawa* was both a Confederacy of derivative nations (with nested identities) and a hybrid nation in and of itself. Unlike other Indigenous confederacies such as the *Haudenosaunee* (Iroquois Confederacy) comprised of separate nations each of which retained its own distinct identity and sense of nationalism after joining the Confederacy. That is to say, the *Siiksikaawa* was once a single nation and that collective identity was maintained and fostered despite the creation of subsidiary nations, as there is but one people that comprise the Blackfoot Confederacy or *Niitsitapi* (read: the real people).

Whatever the case may be as to how and why *Soyitapi* became a confederacy of *Siksika, Kainai, Aputosi Piikani,* and *Amaskapi Piikani* in the era referred to as *i'kookaiksi*[14] or the time period when people use tipi designs which began some five hundred years ago. This era of *i'kookaiksi* was also characterized by *innaihtsiini* or the "sacred alliances of peace between individuals, families, and nations"[15] which resulted in the negotiation of peace and friendship treaties with neighboring tribes, the establishment of neutral international trade centres such as Cypress Hills and Waterton Lakes, and the

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[13] Even though *Kainai, aamasskaapipiikanii, aapatuxsipiikanii,* and *Siksika* are derivatives (creations) of *Siiksikaawa,* the idea that they are nations unto themselves prevails. In all likelihood, historically the nation was *Siiksikaawa* a nation that has spawned the creation of three/four separate nations, either through internal processes or as a reaction to or product of the continuing colonial experience. Notwithstanding this debate, at issue here is the problem of language or more particularly, the incongruencies between Western-eurocentric terminology and Indigenous practices. Further research is needed to construct a more accurate and appropriate typology or classificatory schema of Indigenous polities, but this is not the focus of this dissertation.

[14] For an explanation of this term, and the seven eras of Blackfoot history see: Wilton Goodstriker, "*Otsistsi Pakssaisstoyiih Pi* (the year when the winter was open and cold)" in Treaty Seven Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildabrandt, Sarah Carter and Dorthy First Rider, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty Seven,* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996), pp. 4-5.

[15] Ibid., p. 5.

establishment of alliances of peace. Whereas it is often argued by non-*Siiksikaawa* that these alliances of peace extended membership in the Confederacy to encompass nations which were not derivatives of the original Blackfoot nation, this is not how I have been taught to understand the composition of the Confederacy. While scholars such as Hugh Dempsey and Donald Ward argue that the Confederacy included the *Tsuu T'ina* (Sarcee) and the *Haaninin* (Gros Ventre),[16] the Elders speak of the *Tsuu T'ina* or *Haaninin* (*Aatsiina* in Blackfoot) as their allies and not as members of the Confederacy. These were nations that the Blackfoot once assisted but nevertheless, nations which have always remained separate and distinct from the *Siiksikaawa* since each had its own language, history, traditions, territory and structures of governance and each had an inherent right to self-determination. Each ally also had a system of governance that was distinct and separate from that which existed as a shared attribute in the Confederacy. In this dissertation, I am concerned solely with the Blackfoot Confederacy as it is defined by members of the Confederacy and as it was created and defined by the Giver of Life or Creator.

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[16] Dempsey, op. cit., p. 8. Donald Ward, *The People: A Historical Guide to the First Nations of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba*, (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995), p. 54. Both authors report that the *Haaninin/Aatsiina* lost membership in the Confederacy in 1861 when a dispute over horses erupted into a war.

## BLACKFOOT ESSENTIALISM[17]

Essentialism is an expression of 'the Indigenous world.'[18] One way essentialism is expressed in the Blackfoot world is in relation to 'being' or more particularly, the 'essence of being'. Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains this, albeit in a global context, as follows:

> ... the essence of a person is also discussed in relation to indigenous concepts of spirituality. In these views, the essence of a person has a genealogy that can be traced back to an earth parent, usually glossed as an Earth Mother. A human person does not stand alone, but shares with other animate and, in the Western sense, 'inanimate' beings, a relationship based on a shared 'essence' of life. The significance of place, of land, of landscape, of other things in the universe, in defining the very essence of people, makes for a very different rendering of the term essentialism as used by indigenous peoples.[19]

What I understand Smith to be saying is that essentialism is rooted in spirituality and an understanding that all beings are Creation. As part of Creation, the power or essence of Creator is manifested within all beings and all beings exist within a common circle of life. As I understand the meaning of essence within the context of Blackfoot thought, it is understood in relation to Creation or Creator. [20] It is the idea that people exist as part of Creation or the ecological order, that they are made of, or are an expression of, the same power or *naato 'si/natoji* as are all beings; be they human beings or non-human beings such

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[17] Within the context of the Blackfoot world view (as is the case with many non-state Indigenous world views) 'essentialism' refers to the 'essence of being' or the unique 'gifts', 'powers' or 'potentials' that are provided individuals by Creator. The word essentialism, therefore, takes on a completely different meaning in this context than standard usage in western-eurocentric scholarship. However, because I am working within both contexts and because of the limitations off the English language, essentialism is used at different times to convey both western-eurocentric and Indigenist understandings in this dissertation. Similarly, the term power also has multiple meanings in this dissertation. To clarify matters, when used to convey an understanding of an Indigenous world, terms should be understood from the vantage point of that context. To further clarify matters, terminology and usage will be clarified as this dissertation proceeds.

[18] Smith, op. cit., p. 74.

[19] Ibid.

[20] I use 'Creator' (not 'the Creator') to indicate that within the Blackfoot world view and knowledge system 'Creator' is a verb and not a noun. Although I cannot convey this in English, the absence of 'the article' is a reminder.

as the rocks, the winds, the four-leggeds, the wingeds and the sky people (the sun, the moon and the stars). Thus, as *Kainai* scholar Leroy Little Bear argues, the statement "I am the environment, for the land and me are the same" is not a metaphorical statement but a statement of reality for essentially they are the same as all beings are mere expressions of the essence of Creation.[21]

This is because, Creator exists in everyone and 'everything' for it is simply the 'life-force' or the 'energy' of the life world or ecological order and not a specific person or deity for there is no ultimate cause and Creator breathed his/her life force into everything which exists.[22] That is to say, Creator is not a 'noun-god' or specific being.[23] Creator is neither male or female. Creator is the 'life-force' or 'energy' that is manifested in all beings. Thus, Creator is everywhere and everything in Creation. Creator is understood in an action-oriented manner whereby Creator is synonymous with power or the 'essence' whether that essence is manifested in teachings, flux or beings. Simply put, power is Creation. This understanding of essentialism also explains how I interpret the individual to be understood within *Siiksikaawa*.

As I understand the Blackfoot world view, individuals' primary responsibility is to search out and live their own relationship to Creation and to honour all responsibilities which flow from this relationship. Henderson explains this understanding of individuals and their responsibilities as follows:

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[21] Leroy Little Bear, "Aboriginal Relations to the Land and its Resources", in Jill Oakes, Rick Riewe, Kathi Kinew and Elaine Maloney (eds.) *Sacred Lands: Aboriginal World Views, Claims and Conflicts*, (Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute, 1998), p. 15.

[22] Ibid., pp. 15-20. Also see: Vine Deloria, Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, (Golden Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994).

[23] 'Noun-god' meaning the name of a specific deity, as in God, Buddha, Allah. Noun Gods tend to provide direct and explicit instructions; instructions which have been used by authorities to confine and define society. Noun-gods are authorities, they exercise power (coercion) and are the pinnacle of a hierarchical order. Creator is the circle of life. Most Indigenous teachings are stories which are meant to interpreted and understood by the individual. These teachings are not rules and all teachings do not come directly from Creator. Creator is not a hierarchical authority, s/he is a teacher of principles and a direction along 'the red road'.

In most Aboriginal world views, people must struggle with various keepers of the natural order to find and understand their gifts. No concept of equality in gifts exists in Aboriginal thought. Ecological forces uniquely gift each person. The process of recognizing and affirming one's gifts or talents is the essence of learning. Each person must decide to develop his or her potential by understanding its relationship to the earth. ... Each life form must understand and realize his or her unknown and unrealized potential; find the capacity to have and respond to dreams, visions, ideals and teachings; have the courage to express his or her talents; and have the integrity to control his or her gifts in the face of desire, failure, and surprise.[24]

As an expression of Creation, power exists as the gifts bestowed on all beings; as the force which exists within all beings. Power or essence is manifested in the gifts or potential that all beings have a responsibility to honour. These gifts are manifested individually, and recognize the individuality of each being. In explaining the relationship between essence and individuality, Russel Barsh states:

An important corollary of special creation is human diversity - *that each new human is a creative act, neither good nor evil in its conception, but unique in its talents and capabilities, and as a consequence is indispensable*. Each human being brings a gift from the spirits world to the material plane, a gift that is innovative but lacks absolute moral value. *The challenge of the living, then, is not to learn what is already known in the world, albeit there is room for that as well, but to discover one's own unique talent and develop it fully.* ... Since there is no absolute moral certainty, there is no preordained specific destiny for the human species. The human purpose is to explore the unfolding universe and to play an unending role in the moral drama of its creation. Each individual strives to create his [or her] own *irreplaceable fragment* of the whole mosaic and *to respect and understand the pieces contributed by others*.[25]

I understand this to mean that differences are viewed as being more important than similarities within Blackfoot society.[26] This recognition and respect for diversity in essence is not, however, the be all and end all of individualism among *Siiksikaawa*.

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[24] Henderson, op. cit, p. 265

[25] Russel Lawrence Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of Native American Political Systems", in *American Indian Quarterly*, 10 (Summer, 1986), p. 182. (emphasis added)

[26] Ibid., p. 183.

Individualism is also perceived in terms of an individual's power and responsibilities emanating from Creation. Individuals are free to 'be what they were created to be' and are free to discover their own 'fragment of the whole' or their path in life in the manner in which they see fit and free from the interference of others. As Barsh explains,

> From this "respect for personality" naturally flows a sense of the moral equality of all human beings, regardless of their differences in abilities or beliefs. We have no right to judge others; "each man alone is responsible for his own conduct". All conscientious behaviour reflects the unique medicine [gift or power] conferred upon each individual by creation, and it is therefore morally indefensible and cosmologically hazardous to prevent anyone from doing what his conscience demands.[27]

Simply put, the Blackfoot world view is characterized by an individualistic orientation which is predicated on a spiritually-based understanding of power as an individualistic phenomena and an ethic of 'non-interference' or the understanding that one cannot interfere with another's realization of their powers.[28] Thus, 'individualism' in the Blackfoot world is a spiritually based recognition of an individual's power (essence) and autonomy.

While the issues of power, individualism and non-interference will be discussed at length in subsequent chapters, it is important to understand that historically, individuals were autonomous. This had a significant impact on both the structure and the functioning of Blackfoot governance. Briefly, this is illustrated with respect to the historic absence of coercive power. Because the individual was conceptualized as an autonomous being whose autonomy could not be interfered with (insofar as they acted responsibly), there was, except in certain, collectively defined situations, no authority greater than the

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[27] Ibid., p. 184.

[28] Rupert Ross, *Dancing With a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*, (Markham: Reed Books, 1992), pp. 11-28. Rupert Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 76-100. It should be noted that although Ross states that 'each man alone is responsible for his own conduct', it would be incorrect to suggest that only men have this ability as this is a direct violation of teh Blackfoot world view as all beings, be they human or non-human, have this ability regardless of gender for that is the nature and understanding of essentialism.

responsible individual. Since there was no authority greater than the individual, leaders were unable to legitimately exercise coercive power or take authoritative actions to enforce their or the 'collective will'. The only time that an individual had an obligation or responsibility to comply with the 'collective will' is in situations where they had consented to and were part of that 'collective will'. In other words, the legitimacy of a leader's actions or of a polity's decisions was dependent upon the consent of the governed, in so far as there is was no forced compliance. Legitimacy was attained through the 'coming together of minds' or consensual decision-making, horizontal authority or collective power.[29] Taiaiake Alfred has summarized this as follows:

> A crucial feature of the indigenous concept of governance is its respect for individual autonomy. This respect precludes the notion of 'sovereignty' - the idea that there can be some permanent transference of power from the individual to an abstraction called 'government'. The indigenous tradition sees government as the collective power of the individual members of the nation; there is no separation between society and state.[30]

In the following chapters, I address how autonomy and collective authority were operationalized within traditional Blackfoot governance and how its political system operated in the absence of coercive power. Here, it is important to understand that Blackfoot conceptualizations of essence and individualism had a significant impact on the structure and the functioning of Blackfoot governance.

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[29] To clarify terminology, in the context of Blackfoot reality power has two concurrent meanings: (1) a spiritually defined understanding of essentialism and individualism, and (2) power as collective decision-making process and the collectively defined authority to implement decisions. To differentiate between these two uses, I will refer to the later as collective power as it is conceptualized by Alfred. In both cases usage is *different* from that which is common in western-eurocentric thought. Power in western-eurocentric thought is typically conceived of as coercion or the ability to legitimately use and monopolize force, whereas authority is generally understood as hierarchical order or centralized vestiges of power which legitimately exercises sovereignty over land and people. Collective power is not separate from the autonomy of individuals, and it is non-hierarchical and non-authoritative as it implies collective decision-making, continuous consent and collective action. The idea of collective power will be explained in greater detail in chapter seven.

[30] Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 25.

## 'ALL MY RELATIONS' or I AM RELATED TO EVERYONE, REALLY!

The Blackfoot recount their history as having its origins within their traditional territory, where *Napi* or Creator (depending on the account) is said to have created 'the people' or *Niitsitapi* and they were instructed as to how to live as Blackfoot. But they also saw themselves as an undifferentiated part of the ecological order or the circle of life. The fact that the Blackfoot saw themselves from this essentialist perspective is suggested in the following statement by Winona LaDuke:

> Native American teachings [such as Creation stories and the Blackfoot stories of *Napi* or Old Man] describe the relations all around - animals, fish, trees, and rocks - as our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpas. Our relations to each other, our prayers whispered across generations to our relatives, are what binds our cultures together. The protection, teachings, and gifts of our relations have for generations preserved our families. These relations are honored in ceremony, song, story, and life that keeps relations close - to buffalo, sturgeon, salmon, turtles, bears, wolves, and panthers. These are our older relatives - the ones who came before us and taught us how to live.[31]

LaDuke speaks to the idea that the circle of life joins all beings that are recognized as having a life-force together in webs of relationships. She also speaks to the relationship between human beings and non-human beings as one that recognizes the dependence of human beings on all other life forces. That is, while essentialism or the recognition of each being's power gives rise to a understanding of relationships, the dependency of a being's power also speaks to how the Blackfoot constructed or accounted for the ecological order within their world view.

As the Creation stories recounted at the outset of this chapter explain, as the youngest and most dependent of all life forms, *Siiksikaawa* had to learn from the beings that were already in their territory how to survive and how to reconcile with those who had come before. That is, they had to figure out how they fit into the local ecological

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[31] Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), p. 2.

order or the specific 'territorially defined community' in which they lived. Barsh explains

this continual process as follows:

> Indigenous peoples conceive of landscapes as socially constructed moral
> spaces, fashioned out of relationships among co-existing species that have
> developed over a very long period of time through marriages, treaties, and
> shared endeavors. The ecosystem is a dynamic network of kinship, trade
> and diplomacy of which human societies are only one part, and in which
> alignments of power and cooperation continue to shift and change with
> little warning. In order to survive, humans must understand and respect
> their commitments to other species, exercise caution whenever the
> intervene in other species' affairs, and watch the ecosystem very carefully
> for signs of impending changes. A seasonal cycle of travel, visiting
> landmarks, medicine-gathering and performances constitutes an annual
> "reading" of the ecosystem, and of the history of inter-species
> relationships which are embedded within key features of the landscape.
> By reading the landscape and performing it, people teach, rehearse and
> exercise their responsibilities, renewing the land.[32]

Barsh is explaining the continual processes through which the Blackfoot engage, relate

to, learn from and are responsible for their interactions with their local ecological context.

He is also explaining how life, or more accurately the continual life cycle, is a continual

process of determining the role and place of the nation within the ecological order and of

formulating world views, traditions, structures of governance and language through that

interaction with the local ecosystem. In other words, Aboriginal world views, knowledge

systems, languages, and practices are the result of how a people understands its local

ecological order and how it sees itself as fitting within that order based on millennia of

cumulative experiences and observations of individuals and collectives.[33]

By recognizing the essence of all beings, and developing a 'civilization' through a

relationship with an ecosystem, I am not arguing that the *Siiksikaawa* existed in harmony

with nature. Christopher Vecsey argues: "to say that Indians existed in harmony with

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[32] Russel Lawrence Barsh, "How to Patent a Landscape", in *International Journal of Cultural Property*, 8:1 (1999), p. 26.

[33] Henderson, op. cit, pp. 259-260.

nature is a half truth. Indians were both part of nature and apart from nature in their own world view. They utilized the environment extensively, realized the differences between human and nonhuman persons, felt guilt for their exploitation of nature's life-giving life ..."[34] Nonetheless, their collective and individual identities were grounded in their experiences with and understandings of Creation.

Recognizing the essence or the existence of power within all beings, and acknowledging the interrelationship of all beings as part of a single undifferentiated circle of life, means that "... consequently, then it is no surprise that we say, "All my relations", if everything has a spirit, and everything is capable of relating."[35] The ideas expressed in statements like 'all my relations' and 'I am the environment' or in stories like the *Napi* tales told earlier are synonymous with the explanation of ecological relationships provided by LaDuke, as "- animals, fish, trees, and rocks - as our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpas."[36] All life is related and all beings (particularly humans) have a responsibility for honouring those relations and the essence of all beings by developing an understanding of the natural order and their relationship to it, through the songs, stories, ceremonies, languages and practices that have emerged out of this understanding. These ideas are not simply the abstract or ontological manifestations of a belief in a non-differentiated circle of life or the inter-relatedness and interdependency of all species. They are also an expression of kinship and relationships as they are understood and expressed within the Blackfoot tradition. Kinship is not a matter of blood relationships. It simply acknowledges the fact that a relationship exists between beings and that those beings have accepted the responsibilities that flow from said relationship. This can be

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[34] Christopher Vecsey, "American Indian Environmental Religions", in Christopher Vecsey and Robert W. Venables (eds.), *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980), p. 23.

[35] Little Bear, op. cit., p. 18

[36] LaDuke, op. cit., p. 2.

explained on a more practical level in that I have responsibilities for my brothers the buffalo, and responsibilities for the human families into which I have been adopted.

Barsh argues that while contemporary western-eurocentric states and their corresponding societies are defined geographically, Indigenous societies and their systems of governance are based on "universal kinship - kinship that is continuous in time, space and across species, and uniquely defines each individual in relation to every other."[37] Barsh is correct in his assessment of kinship being a universal social construct that links all beings within a territory extending both backwards and forwards in time. But Indigenous polities such as the Blackfoot were not kinship states, and its governance was not synonymous with kinship or a kin-group. The assertion that Indigenous politics was defined by kinship, which is commonplace in the literature on Indigenous political traditions, represents a continuation of the practice of creating the 'imaginary Indian' or the myth of 'primitivism' as 'primitive societies' are said to have been based solely on blood and not territory.[38]

Indigenous concepts of kinship have to be understood independently of the western-eurocentric intellectual tradition that understands kinship only as blood relations. Traditionally, kinship in most American Indian polities is best understood as an ideology pertaining to the "web of all interpersonal relationships in a community" which integrated individuals into societal groups and defined the responsibilities of individuals in a non-coercive fashion.[39] Thus, kinship was not about the politicization of the family or the use of the family as a unit of politics. Rather it was an expression of all intersecting, multiple relationships within a given territory; relationships which defined individual and

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[37] Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems", op. cit., p. 187.

[38] James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha Sociology*, (New York: Johnson Reprints, 1970), p. 215. Menno Boldt, *Surviving As Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government*, (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 117-166.

[39] Elman R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 5-19.

collective histories in said territory. It also defined individual and collective responsibilities within said territory in terms of both human and non-human beings, defense, economy, politics, spirituality and education.[40]

Given the individualistic orientation of 'Blackfoot essentialism' or Blackfoot understandings of power, it is important to understand that essentialism co-existed with and was predicated on a philosophy of universal kinship. Thus, kinship was neither simply an expression of a collectivist orientation nor a means of political, economic or social organization. Rather, it was a philosophy of responsibility for oneself, ones' relations and for all that existed within Creation. It was an acknowledgment that we are mere specks of dust in the universe or small atoms in the circle of life. It was a realization that what one does in that circle of life affects the total sum of that circle or 'all my relations'. It was a statement of relationships and responsibilities, and guidelines as to how one lives those relationships and responsibilities. Once an individual accepted their place as a Blackfoot in the circle of life, s/he assumed the obligations of a Blackfoot towards that circle of life and accepted that all others had obligations for her/him as well.

In summary, relations and responsibilities were the foundation that allowed politics to be expressed in terms of 'the way we live best together'. To live one's life in the best way possible, required that one acknowledge relationships and the responsibilities that flowed from those relationships. That one lived in balance with the world, in balance with themselves, in balance with relations and in balance with the forces of life. By balance, I understand my teachers to mean that people attain balance when they live their life with respect, responsibility (for self, relations and their essence), humility and control without weaknesses such as anger, meanness, aggressiveness, spite, hatred and jealousy. In as much as politics was about how a community created and maintained itself so as to enable it to live together the best way possible. It was also about how the entire circle of

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[40] Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society*, (Chicago: Aldine, 1965), pp. 85-86.

life lived together in the best way possible. How society was structured was a direct corollary of how it sees itself living the best way possible; that is, in balance with the circle of life. Thus, kinship, as a political ideology, enabled Blackfoot politics to function in a manner that respects individual freedom without needing coercive and authoritative structures of control.[41]

## UNDERSTANDING GENDER:
## 'SOME OLD MAN' LIKES 'SOME OLD WOMAN'

Thus far in this chapter I have alerted the reader to key tenets of Blackfoot reality which ground *Siiksikaawa* governance. While I have alerted the reader to the primary tenets that grounded governance, however, and have therefore provided a foundation from which one can begin to understand Blackfoot political traditions, one further misconception needs to be dispelled. While gender relations do not provide the reader with a means by which to begin to understand Blackfoot governance, nevertheles, it is an important tenet of Blackfoot reality to understand. It underscores all elements of the Blackfoot world view and influences how such things as Creation, essentialism, and governance are understood and constructed within this context.

Traditional Blackfoot conceptualizations of gender have generally been misunderstood by outsiders, as has gender in most traditional Aboriginal societies. Examining colonial discourse, Sarah Carter explains that the image of Aboriginal women constructed by the colonizers and subsequently embedded in the colonial imagination, was either one of degradation (the 'squaw') or one of virtue (the 'Pocahontas'). Since the image of women as victim and subordinate prevailed, "the powerfully negative images of Aboriginal women served to symbolize the shortcomings of that society."[42] In part, these images

[41] Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: The Leader as Servant and the Humane Uses of Power Among the Indians of the Americas*, Robert Hurley (trans.), (New York: Urizen Books, 1974).

[42] Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West*, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997), p. 160.

prevailed because they were useful for the colonial project and the unfettered expansion of the empire into the Canadian west.

Alice B. Kehoe also shows that these images of women as subordinate beasts of burden prevailed because Europeans were incapable of seeing Indian societies and Indian women for what they truly were. Europeans were shackled by their practical and intellectual traditions:

> ... the clearest conflict between unexamined premises and alien cultural patterns can be seen in the classic ethnographers' evaluation of women's statuses and roles. During the Victorian era ... a leisured wife and mother was in a very real sense an ornament to her husband, a conspicuous symbol of his power exercised through wealth. Working women, whether laboring in their home or employed outside the home, were associated with less wealth, less power, assigned to a lower social status [as the Victorian woman was to be a] frail and weak ... passive, passionless lady. ... Women in other societies who were physically strong, independent, perhaps lusty were perceived as innately inferior to the Victorian lady, and the societies with such "degraded" women predominantly were characterized as primitive and little evolved.[43]

As both Carter and Kehoe point out, what the colonial discourse fails to recognize is that physical strength and personal achievements could be glorified and were viewed differently in plains Indian societies, and may serve as an exemplar of the place of women within said societies. Siiksikaawa women were not the drudges or the slaves of males. Rather, although a division of labour existed in which most women remained in camp, the roles, abilities and achievements of women were honored and respected. The existence of a typically gendered division of labour, however, cannot be equated with inequality, subordination and oppression.

The idea that the gendering of society cannot be equated with inequality, subordination and oppression is, however, debated within the literature pertaining to Plains Indian women. For instance, in his article, "Property Relations, Production

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[43] Alice B. Kehoe, "The Shackles of Tradition", in Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (eds.) *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), p. 56.

Relations, and Inequality: Anthropology, Political Economy, and the Blackfeet", anthropologist David Nugent attempts to map 'contact period' social change within Blackfoot political economy and gender relations.[44] Nugent argues that *Siiksikaawa* property and production relations were relatively homogeneous and egalitarian prior to the aqcuisition of the horse (circa 1730), but that this had changed radically by 1830. Basing his conclusions on the writings of early explorers, Nugent asserts that prior to the arrival of the horse, the Blackfoot were not totally egalitarian. Society was internally differentiated and stratified on the basis of age and gender. Nevertheless, because of kinship ties and an economy based on redistribution, society remained relatively homogeneous with some semblance of gendered equality. Following the arrival of the horse and development of individualized production relations (buffalo hunts) contributed to the radical transformation of Blackfoot society. According to Nugent, this radical transformation was characterized by the emergence of a gerentocracy, a hierarchically stratified property and production relations, and differentiated gender relations whereby women were accumulated as 'property' (polygyny) and the "formerly homogeneous social category of 'married woman'" was transformed into social catagories of 'first or favorite wife' and 'subsidiary wife'.[45]

Responding to Nugent's article, Gerald T. Conaty, a senior curator of ethnology at the Glenbow Museum and Archives in Calgary, argues that Nugent's analysis fails on two grounds.

> First, his use of historical records is flawed and, as a result, his
> interpretation off pre-1730 Blackfoot culture is questionable. These
> failings stem from his reliance on the writings of explorers and traders who
> never entered Blackfoot camps within traditional Blackfoot territory.
> Furthermore, the historical documents were biased by the worldview of
> the writers and therefore offer only a partial picture of the Blackfoot, one

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[44] David Nugent, "Property Relations, Production Relations, and Inequality: Anthropology, Political Economy, and the Blackfeet", in *American Ethnologist* 20:2, (May, 1993), pp. 336-362.

[45] Ibid., p. 351

that invariably excludes Blackfoot women. Second, and perhaps more importantly, he does not understand key aspects of Blackfoot culture and therefore misinterprets how aspects of the economy interact with, and follow from, the social organization and, ultimately the worldview.[46]

Basing his analysis on historical documentation, Blackfoot oral traditions, the teachings of Blackfoot Elders and his understanding of Blackfoot culture, traditions and worldview, Conaty argues that during both historical periods (pre-horse and post-horse) some semblance of gender equality existed. Conaty concludes that traditionally, Blackfoot women exercised economic and political influence, owned property, participated fully in economic, social, spiritual and political life, and were not subservient to their husbands. Further to this, it should be noted that Conaty asserts that the difference in analysis is not simply a matter of his using different sources than did Nugent. Instead, he suggests that his analysis is more reliable and trustworthy because he did not attempt to understand the Blackfoot world from a western-eurocentric perspective and because he did not use a reductionist.

Like Nugent, I do agree that the horse transformed the Blackfoot way of life. Similarly, as Alan Klein has suggested in his analysis of the social changes resulting from the introduction of the horse and the buffalo trade on the Plains,[47] I do agree that the commmodification of the buffalo altered production and property relations. However, as has been suggested by Klein, Conaty and Kehoe, this transformation was mitigated by culture, worldview, pre-existing gender 'equality', social values, spirituality, and existing political, social and economic institutions, practices and philosophies.[48] Women did not become subordinate beasts of burden which were the owned property of men. That is,

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[46] Gerald T. Conaty, "Economic Models and Blackfoot Ideology", *American Ethnologist* 22(2), (1995), p. 403.

[47] Alan M. Klein, "The Political Economy of Gender: A 19th Century Plains Indian Case Study", in Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (eds.) *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women,* (Washington: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 143-173.

[48] Ibid. Conaty, op. cit. Kehoe, op. cit.

except in the eyes of western-eurocentric thinkers, as has been pointed out by Carter, Kehoe and Conaty.

Thus, like Conaty,

> I am not suggesting that Blackfoot culture was a pristine example of egalitarianism in which everyone shared everything, that no economic gaps existed between families, or that both genders were on absolutely equal footing. I am suggesting that, while expression of these differences was economic, their cause lay elsewhere – in access to the power of ... creator. The actions that Nugent interprets as indicating gender- and wealth-based stratification may, in fact, represent acknowledgement of an individual's spiritual status.[49]

It is important to understand that some may perceive Blackfoot essentialism as resulting in inequality (not necessarily gendered inequality). Just as it is important to understand Blackfoot essentialism if one is to fully grasp and comprehend the meaning and functioning of traditional Blackfoot governance, it is necessary to understand gender within the traditional Blackfoot world. No matter how much this world changed, these traditional ways of being continued to exist as the primary tenets of the Blackfoot world and thus, the traditional *Siiksikaawa* political system. That said, for the purposes of this thesis, it is important to understand gender relations within the traditional Blackfoot world as they are understood from the interpreted perspective of the Blackfoot themselves.

In Wissler and Duvall's previously cited telling of the Creation Story, explains that subsequent to the creation of *Niitsitapi*, men and women lived in separate camps. As I understand this story, the women were living a good life as they had plenty of food, a well-organized camp, beautifully crafted and decorated clothing and lodges. They were quite happy, but the men were not living such a good life for, while they had plenty of food, their lodges and clothing were not properly made, they were sick because the meat was ill-prepared and they were not eating vegetation. Moreover, they were quite lonely.

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[49] Conaty, op. cit., p. 408.

As Kehoe suggests, this "popular narrative of men's and women's original social condition eloquently conveys Blackfoot attitudes - men's pitiable natural state, women's innate gifts and the respect due their vocation."[50]

As I understand it, however, the point of this narrative is not simply to demonstrate the importance of women and their work in the camp or to say that 'men are nothing without women'. Rather, the point of the story is to convey that "men and women are necessary pairs"[51] interdependent for economic, social, political, spiritual and procreative reasons. Simply stated, without the joining together of the two camps there would be no nation. While the women (and possibly the men) would have survived independently for one generation, without the 'necessary pairing' of men and women there would have been no future. Furthermore, the *Siiksikaawa* would have never come to fruition as a nation for without relations an individual is no one; without relations an individual ceases to exist.

Therefore, despite the typical division of labour, the seemingly inferior position of women cannot be equated with inequality, subordination and oppression. Kehoe further illustrates this by pointing out that "myths also recount the role of women as critical intermediaries between men and powers. The four most important Blackfoot ceremonies were obtained through women."[52] But while women were integral members of Blackfoot society (politically, economically, socially and spiritually), and owned most of the property within the camp, women were not limited to these 'regular roles' as domestic

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[50] Alice B. Kehoe, "Blackfoot Persons", in Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman (eds.), *Women and Power in Native North America*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), p. 125.

[51] Ibid., p. 121. This does not imply compulsory heterosexuality, as gender is not defined by ones biological state.

[52] Kehoe, "The Shackles of Tradition", op. cit, p. 67.

labourers, gatherers, mothers, and spiritual leaders since "all secular activities normally pursued by men were open also to women, should they wish to join."[53]

Referred to as 'manly hearted women' (*ninawaki* or *sakwo 'mapi akikwan*), those women who pursued more 'masculine' roles (often in conjunction with more feminine roles), in so far as I have been able to determine, were not considered deviant among the Blackfoot. Instead as Beatrice Medicine points out, female role variability was highly regarded and viewed favourably, even with reverence, by other members of society.[54]

Thus, as I understand it, women were integral members of Blackfoot society in the pre-colonial period of *i'kookaiksi* (when people use tipi designs) regardless of the path in life women chose to pursue. This is exemplified in all areas of life as, traditionally, women were integral participants in the circle of life, as providers, property owners, caregivers, political leaders, spiritual leaders, warriors, hunters, labourers, mothers, and wives. This can also be understood in relation to Blackfoot conceptions of power or in terms of Blackfoot essentialism.

As Kehoe explains:

> The fact that gender, in Blackfoot, distinguishes animate from inanimate subordinates "gender roles" to the basic prerogative of living beings ... Rather than static categories, Blackfoot understanding posits a world of manifestations rooted in an Almighty, animating Power. Any being might be imbued to a surprising degree with power. That females are gifted with more power than males is seen in their innately greater reproductive capacity, but anyone can aspire to become more powerful. Talking about European gender categories misses the point.[55]

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[53] It should be noted, however, that "women were less likely to seek the glory road then were men, who had little other opportunity to earn respect ... it would seem that Blackfoot women had more options than men, and more easily achieved esteem." Ibid., p. 69.

[54] Beatrice Medicine, "'Warrior Women' - Sex Role Alternatives For Plains Indian Women", in Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (eds.) *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1983).

[55] Kehoe, "Blackfoot Persons", op. cit, p. 124.

It misses the point because the Blackfoot world view is not grounded in a recognition of gender (be that two or a multiplicity of genders) nor is it predicated on the idea of gender subordination or the assumption that one's abilities are dependent on one's genetic coding. Instead, the Blackfoot world view is predicated upon a recognition of individual autonomy and individualized powers whereby all beings and all manifestations of power are respected and included. Moreover, all beings are recognized as having the potential to contribute to the nation and to the circle of life in accordance with the gifts given by Creator.

The Blackfoot believe that our identity as human beings is not predicated on the subjugation of others, or by declaring dominion over another being, gender or species. As I understand my teachers, we all exist together in a single circle of life, and our identity comes from our responsibilities (essential and relational) within that circle and how it is that we choose to live those responsibilities. As Stan McKay argues, "Our identity ... cannot be expressed without talking about the rest of creation, since that very identity includes a sense of the interdependence and connectedness of all life."[56] Simply put, it is about balance or the ideas of responsibility, (self) control, humility and respect, particularly respect. For respect is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving balance and "[r]especting others means we accept diversity within the unity of the Creator."[57]

## CONCLUSION

The *Siiksikaawa* world was forged through experiences with Creation and expressed a relationship with Creation. The Blackfoot knowledge system expressed an understanding of how the Blackfoot related to and fit in with the rest of Creation and how 'we can all live together in the best way possible'. The 'Creation story' encapsulates this

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[56] Stan McKay, "Calling Creation Into Our Family", in Diane Engelstad and John Bird (eds.), *Nation to Nation: Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Future of Canada*, (Concord: Anansi, 1992), p. 29.

[57] Ibid., p. 31.

understanding for it explains how a people came to be a nation within their territory and how the natural world and Creator's teachings taught them how to exist as an intricate part of the ecosystem. Further to this, the Creation story, like a vast array of oral tradition, sets forth an explanation of the history of the people within their territory. These stories also explain how the people were to relate to, learn from, and see all others, be they human or non-human beings.

Thus, what I have attempted to do in telling the stories and in explicating key tenets of the traditional *Siiksikaawa* world view is provide the reader with a basis for understanding the Blackfoot political system. I have also attempted to introduce the reader to the idea that there is a relationship between Creation and the traditional Blackfoot world. Historically, this correlation is demonstrated in every aspect of the Blackfoot world from spirituality to language and from conceptualizations of power or essentialism to gender. With respect to gender, this relationship is demonstrated by the fact that while all species are dependent upon the pairing of the sexes for reasons of procreation. Their survival as individuals and collectives is not dependent on such pairing or the domination of one over the other. Both are able to survive and to prosper independently though often more success is gained when all genders become integral members of society and contribute to society by honouring essentialism not sexism or heterosexism.

The relationship between *Siiksikaawa* reality and Creation will be further explicated as this dissertation progresses. This discussion of the traditional Blackfoot world view and its relationship with the natural world can is a backdrop to my discussion of Blackfoot governance from an quasi-institutionalist perspective. This chapter provided a context within which we can begin to think about and understand *Siiksikaawa* governance beyond western-eurocentric thought. Once the political system has been explained using a quasi-institutionalist approach, a discussion of how one can best understand these

institutions through the teachings of Creation and the application of Henderson's idea of ecological contexts will follow.

# CHAPTER 3

## A BUNCH OF DOTS IN A CIRCLE

### or

## WRITING THE CIRCLE:

## A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF BLACKFOOT GOVERNANCE

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter proceeds with a discussion of the Blackfoot political system as it existed prior to the imposition of the state and the taking of reserves in Alberta, and a reservation in Montana.[1] I will attempt to create an understanding of traditional Blackfoot governance as a political system; an institutional configuration not encapsulated by a state. This chapter is descriptive in nature as I attempt to construct an understanding of *Siiksikaawa* governance as it has been explained to me by my teachers and I leave theorizing *Siiksikaawa* governance to later chapters. The chapter begins with a discussion of the meaning of governance within the Blackfoot context, and proceeds with an explanation of the primary structures of governance which comprise the Blackfoot political system. It concludes with a brief discussion as to the operation of the system in its totality.

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[1] Structures of traditional Blackfoot governance continue to exist in the present, albeit in an altered form. However, because my intent is to create an understanding of this political system as it existed prior to the imposition of the state, I will use the past-tense in discussing this political system.

## WRITTEN EXPLANATIONS OF BLACKFOOT GOVERNANCE

Clark Wissler, a leading Plains anthropologist writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, and author of one of the most extensive surveys of Plains Indian nations, begins his discussion of traditional Plains Indian politics by stating:

> It is customary to accept the political units of the Indians as tribes or independent nations. Thus, while the Crow recognize several subdivisions, they feel that they are one people and support a council or governing body for the whole. The Blackfoot, on the other hand, are composed of three distinct political divisions, the Peigan, the Blood and the Blackfoot, with no superior government, yet they feel that they are one people with common interests and, since [they have] a common speech and precisely similar cultures, it is customary to ignore the political units and designate them by the larger term.[2]

In this brief but telling statement, Wissler dispels the common misconception that all Plains Indians share the same political traditions and structures. He also raises the complex issue of nationhood, or more particularly, where the nation resides in the context of the Blackfoot Confederacy. For although it is a confederacy comprised of four separate nations, historically it was a single nation and even in contemporary times many Blackfoot see themselves not as *Kainai, Siksika, Aamasskaapipiikanii* or *Aapatuxsipiikanii* but as *Soyitapii, Siiksikaawa, Niitsitapi* or a Blackfoot. Wissler suggests that despite *Kainai's, Siksika's, Aamasskaapipiikanii's* and *Aapatuxsipiikanii's* existence as seemingly independent nations, the Confederacy can be discussed and analyzed as if it were one nation since the nations which comprise the Confederacy have precisely the same political traditions and governing structures.

Taking Wissler's description as my starting point, I will proceed with my analysis of traditional Blackfoot governance as it has been conceptualized and 'contextualized' in most of the existing eurocentric scholarly and historical literature. First, it should be

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[2] Clark Wissler, *North American Indians of the Plains*, (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1927), p. 91. It should be noted that while Wissler asserts that the Confederacy is comprised of three nations (*Siksika, Kainai* and *Piikani*), in actuality there are four nations as the Peigan were in the process of establishing themselves as two separate and autonomous nations when the Canadian-U.S. border was erected.

noted that, while Wissler conceives of the nation as the whole Confederacy and while I have argued previously that both could actually be viewed as nations,[3] for the sake of clarity in discourse, I utilize the term 'nation' to refer to the constituent units of the Confederacy and the terms *Siiksikaawa*, Blackfoot or Confederacy to refer to *Piikani, Siksika, and Kainai* collectively.

The *Kainai, Siksika* and *Piikani* (both *Aapatuxsipiikanii, Aputosi Piikani* or the North Peigan and the *Aamasskaapipiikanii*, or *Amaskapi Piikani* or the South Peigan) existed, for the most part, as politically independent nations. While this assertion is fairly well accepted and documented in the literature, not everyone views the nation as the primary political unit. As Howard Harrod explains, the political organization and the general 'tribal culture' of each of these nations was 'deeply conditioned', derived from or dependent upon the nature of the Blackfoot economy; which has been described as a hunting and gathering, subsistence economy.[4] Because of the nature of this economy, the movement of the Buffalo and the nature of the Buffalo hunt, Harrod believes that the basic political unit was not the nation but the smaller constituent units or subdivisions called bands or clans. Harrod bases his position on two interrelated assumptions: the band/clan was the primary social organization or collectivity within which people lived for most of the year; and he believed "political leadership was centred on the band chief."[5]

While the analyses of some prominent 'authorities' like Wissler seem consistent with the position taken by Harrod,[6] other scholars question the extent to which clans were the

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[3] Kiera L. Ladner, "Does Gender Matter? Women and Blackfoot Nationalism", in *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 35:2 (2000), forthcoming.

[4] Howard L. Harrod, *Mission Among the Blackfeet*, (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), pp. 4-5.

[5] Ibid., pp. 5.

[6] Clark Wissler, "Social Life of the Blackfeet Indians", in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. VII Part I, (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1911), pp. 1-64.

primary political units. For example, E. S. Goldfrank reminds us that, "equally significant in Blackfoot social organization were the mens societies which ... served to preserve order in the camp, on the march, in hunting parties."[7] Explorer Anthony Henday,[8] missionary Harry William Gibbon Stocken,[9] historian Hugh Dempsey,[10] and anthropologist Maurice Greer Smith,[11] however, suggest that the clans played a role subsidiary and subservient to the nation. Thus, for these authors, the nation and its position of power and collective leadership or system of governance was of greater significance and importance than the clans.

Generally, the eurocentric tradition had great difficulty coming to terms with traditional Blackfoot governance and understanding the Blackfoot reality or the context from which it emerged. One stumbling block has been determining where, or even if, structures or processes of governance existed. Often told amongst the Blackfoot is a story about one of their first encounters with a white man, most likely Henday, who, upon asking to speak with their king or chief, discovered that almost everyone present had some claim to that position. As a result of such encounters, many eurocentric thinkers simply dismissed the possibility that Blackfoot governance even existed, while others concluded that "Indians of the Plains had little formal government, because they had little need of it [and thus] continuous central authority was generally absent."[12]

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[7] E. S. Goldfrank, *Changing Configurations in the Social Organization of a Blackfoot Tribe*, (Seattle: publisher unknown, 1945).

[8] Anthony Hendry [sic], Lawrence J. Burpee (ed.), *A Fur Trader's Journal: York factory to the Blackfoot Country 1754-1755*, (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1973).

[9] Harry William Gibbon Stocken, *Among the Blackfoot and Sarcee*, (Calgary: Glenbow Alberta Institute, 1976).

[10] Hugh A. Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfoot*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972). Also see Hugh A. Dempsey, *Red Crow: Warrior Chief*, (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishing, 1980).

[11] Maurice Greer Smith, *Political Organization of the Plains Indians, With Special Reference to the Council*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978).

[12] Ibid., p. 73.

Most of the literature, however, accepts that the Blackfoot had at least some

semblance of governance. It generally characterizes Blackfoot governance as follows: each

of the nations, which together constitute the *Siiksikaawa*, were divided internally into

bands or clans which represented the primary social unit that people traveled and hunted

with for most of the year, each of which was led by a chief, often with the assistance of a

council or several headmen. According to Harrod, "as defender of the social order, the

band chief was responsible for preserving peace in the group and for arbitrating conflicts

which arose. ... The band chief was assisted in his task by the social pressure of ridicule,

which was used to control mild cases of misconduct."[13] Explaining this role, Wissler

states that,

> There is, in a general sense, a band chief, but we have failed to find good
> ground for assuming that he has any formal right to a title or an office. He
> is one of an indefinite number of men designated as head men. These head
> men may be considered as the social aristocracy, holding their place in
> society in the same indefinite way and uncertain manner as the social
> leaders of our own communities. ... These head men of uncertain tenure
> come to regard one or two of their number as leaders, or chiefs. Such
> chiefs rarely venture to act without the advice of some of the head men, as
> to stand alone would be fateful.[14]

Based upon these observations and the observations of others, one could conclude that

each band was led by one or several chiefs and head men who held this informal position

by reason of societal privilege and whose responsibilities in that position entailed the

maintenance of peace and order.

According to the existing literature, during the summer months, all of the bands would

come together and each nation would live together and travel as one social and political

unit. Within each of the nations, as Wissler explains, "political organization was rather

loose and in general quite democratic. Each band, gens or clan would informally recognize

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[13] Harrod, op. cit., p. 5.

[14] Wissler, "Social Life of the Blackfeet Indians", pp. 22-23.

an indefinite number of men as head men, one or more of whom were formally vested with the representative powers in the tribal council."[15] Everything of importance to the nation was dealt with in this council of chiefs. This council was headed by a chief (head chief), who may or may not have been a band chief, and whose position may or may not have been a hereditary office, depending on whose account one reads. What is clear, however, is that there was a national or tribal chief who resided over this council and exercised some limited authority, either as an individual or in cooperation with the council, to provide order and direction in 'tribal life'. This peace or civil chief was not the only chief who occupied a position of leadership at the national level. Instead, national leadership is said to have been situational as the national leadership included the position of war chief. As far as I can ascertain, the war chief came to power vis-á-vis his position of leadership in the 'warrior' societies and presumed leadership over the nation (without the assistance of the tribal council) during times of conflict, inter-tribal war, or civil unrest.

In summary, the discussion presented here is a brief overview of how traditional Blackfoot governance has been conceptualized in the existing western-eurocentric scholarly literature and in the historical record. *Siiksikaawa* governance is typically represented in terms of non-formal structures consisting of band chiefs, headmen, tribal or peace chiefs and war chiefs who occupy leadership roles in a fluid, non-coercive, and unofficial manner within their own communities and as representatives of these communities in sporadic national discussions and endeavors. While several authors allude to other structures that might or might not perform functions normally associated with governance (such as Bundles and societies), the vision of governance in this literature is of the chief and council. Thus, based on the existing literature, traditional Blackfoot governance is defined and explained in terms of the roles and responsibilities of band

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[15] Wissler, *North American Indians of the Plains*, , p. 96.

leaders at the sub-national and national levels, and to a lesser extent the war chief at the national level. The big question is would *Siiksikaawa* agree? In other words, have the western-eurocentric thinkers accurately understood and portrayed a system of governance that they had difficulty seeing in the first place because it was so different from their own?[16]

## MY UNDERSTANDING OF THE BLACKFOOT PERSPECTIVE

They say that your research either begins or dies in the field. On the occasion of my first 'interview,' I was beginning to feel as if my research had died and that I would be spending much of the summer searching for a new topic or finding a way to redefine my topic. I felt this way because, after spending a great deal of time explaining my quest for knowledge about the traditional political system, my 'informant' simply drew a number of dots in a collection of circles on a page in his notebook and exclaimed that this was the answer to my question, packed up his notebook and began talking about his life. I was shocked by how this 'interview' was proceeding, and wondered why so many people had advised me to see this person, and why he was insisting that he become my teacher when he admitted that he knew nothing of the governing structures that the early missionaries, traders, explorers and anthologists had written about. I left that 'interview' with mixed emotions, curious as to what was meant by the spherical 'join the dots' illustration, humbled by this man's life experiences and the interest that he showed in my research and in becoming my teacher. But I was extremely confused by his unwillingness, or his inability, to discuss what I considered to be traditional governance based on readings and previous discussions with Elders, political elites and other knowledgeable people.

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[16] This question relates back to the first encounters that the Blackfoot had with the white man, when the white man (likely Henday) concluded that they were *a 'kainaawa* - people of many chiefs, and no government.

The following collection of dots in a circle illustrates how Blackfoot governance was explained to me on the occasion of my first 'interview'.
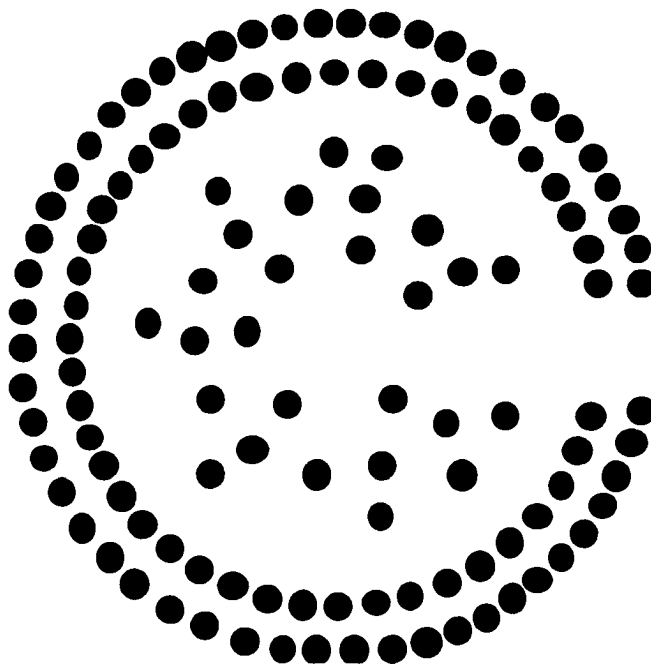


About a week later, I had the opportunity to meet with another Elder who had shown remarkable interest in my research and had made a commitment to become my teacher. I was hopeful. Having already spent four weeks 'in the field', maybe I would finally be provided the opportunity to start my research, and gain answers to my growing list of questions (including the meaning of those dots which were to have answered all of my questions). As I sat and listened to the Elder explain the cultural foundation or cultural nuances upon which traditional Blackfoot politics were based, two thoughts crossed my mind: finally, I was getting somewhere; and the manner in which I had constructed Indigenous politics as different from the western power-based construction of politics was correct. Then it happened. Humbled beyond words, I sat and watched as the Elder drew that same diagram of adjoining circles. Only this time there were no dots, but

instead tipis and other symbols representing the various Bundles and societies that exist at the heart of Blackfoot society (socially, culturally, spiritually and politically).

As the summer progressed this diagram of *okahn*, *oki 'kaa*, or *akóka 'tssin*[17] (the camp circle) was explained to me time and time again, and after a while I began to understand that the first Elder had indeed answered all my questions. Since what existed within those circles of tipis or lodges, was the *okahn*, then *okahn* was a representation of the Blackfoot paradigm, knowledge system or context. It was their circle of life and it contained all that existed within that circle of life: people, knowledge, structures, spirituality, politics and 'non-human people'. As a representation of their knowledge system and context, the circle itself was a non-linear construction of reality which had no segmentation, differentiation or fractionalization among the various elements, structures or functions within that circle. Everything existed as one, as a whole, as the circle of life. It is by examining this complexity, this circle that one starts to understand the internal flux and order of Blackfoot society, and the processes and structures that comprised traditional governance (clans, societies and bundles).

For all intents and purposes, the *okahn* was a representation of the Blackfoot world view, both concrete and abstract. It represented all social, political, spiritual, economic, ecological and educational knowledge, theory and practice.[18] Essentially, it was the formation in which a camp is struck, with the different rings of the larger formation representing the different responsibilities of individuals and collectives in terms of knowledge, spirituality, governance, security, territoriality and economic life. The *okahn* represented this shared Blackfoot reality, which is common to all the people and each of

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[17] The word which was given to me is *okahn* (possibly spelt *okaan*) meaning the camp circle. However, the most commonly used Blackfoot dictionary uses *Oki 'kaa* for camp and *akóka 'tssin* for camp circle. Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell, *Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots and Affixes*, second edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

[18] *Okahn* can also be explained in terms of lodges or tipis. The design and construction of which explain the entire Blackfoot world view, context or paradigm and thus, traditional Blackfoot governance and politics.

the nations. It also represented each of the nations individually, as each had distinct and separate camp circles which seldom (possibly never) joined as one. As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples explains,

> Existing as politically distinct nations, the members of the confederacy occupied well-defined territories and were economically self-sufficient. While the confederacy allied them in the protection of their lands and the security of their nations, each member nation was politically independent - laws and protocols did not allow interference in one another's internal affairs except by invitation.[19]

Regardless of their affiliation or how the Confederacy functioned, each nation had its own *okahn*, and that *okahn* identified and explained all knowledge, belief, practice and organizational frameworks which existed in each nation. More importantly for the purposes of my research, each camp circle explained governance or how clans, societies and bundles engaged and performed the primary functions of governance.

Consequently, the *okahn* really does answer the query that I posed to the Elders (i.e. could you explain traditional governance and politics) both at a theoretical and practical level. The circle answered all of my questions. Nevertheless, during the course of my research, I began to recognize that to truly understand its meaning and the knowledge system it represented, I had to experience it and the complexities of its design or components. Thus, much of my understanding of the camp circle comes from the stories, songs and words of my teachers. My understanding also comes from the experiences they afforded to me by taking me places that are seldom seen or spoken of to outsiders, such as the remains of 'camp circles', 'society jumps', and 'medicine wheels'.

One question that remains is 'why me'? By this I mean that the people who taught me so much could have explained traditional Blackfoot governance in the same terms that it had been explained to me at an earlier point in my life, just as it was explained by anthropologists, missionaries, historians, traders, and explorers. While I have no answer

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[19] Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol. 1, (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1996), p. 61.

to that question, other than to say that the time was right and the people themselves thought that I was ready for the knowledge I received and the responsibilities provided. I will proceed as instructed and tell their stories as I understand them. I will explain the camp circle and how clans, societies and Bundles performed functions of governance.

## STRUCTURES OF GOVERNANCE:
## CLANS, BUNDLES & SOCIETIES



Bundles    Clan Leaders    Non-Transfers
        Societies    Transfers
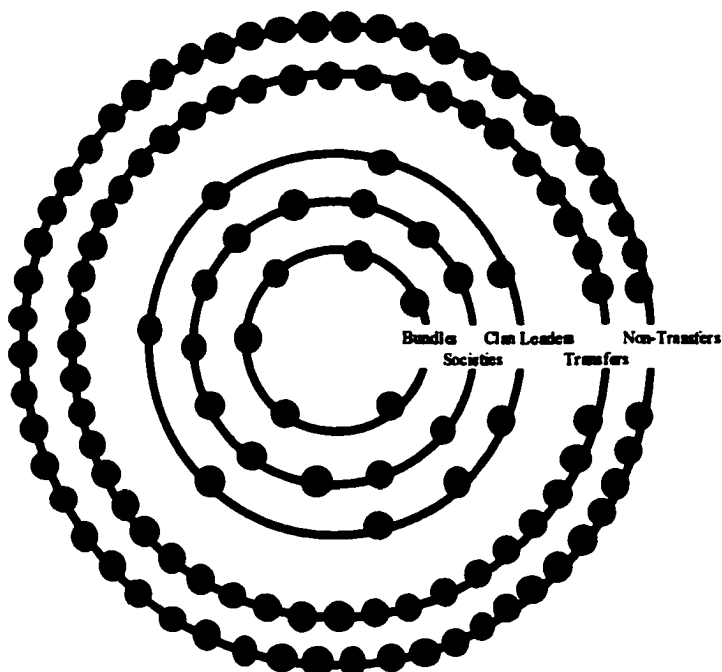
The *okahn* is simply the formation in which a nation camped when it was together. The circle within which one camped corresponded to one's responsibilities in the camp and thus the nation. This correlation between responsibility and the camp circle is visually explained in the following illustration of the *okahn* that identifies the circles that comprise the *okahn* and thus, people's responsibilities within the nation. While these responsibilities will be discussed at length later in this chapter, it should be noted that Bundles, societies and clan leaders were structures of governance. Transfers were those people who accepted spiritual, political, educational and social responsibilities through

their membership in societies or their 'possession' of personal bundles and other transferable 'objects'. Non-transfers were individuals who had not accepted 'extra' responsibilities for the well-being of the nation.

The structure of the camp circle was maintained throughout the year, even when the nation was not together as one. This is because the constituent units (the clans) which came together to form that camp circle maintained that same structure when they were camped as individual clans. The organizational foundation upon which the nation's camp circle was built was the clan (commonly referred to as the band) as all people struck their lodges with their clan. In other words, individual lodges were struck within the pre-determined sector belonging to their clan and in the circle corresponding to their responsibilities (i.e. whether they were society members, had transferred rites, or were bundle holders). This is illustrated in the following visual representation of the Northern Peigan camp.[20]

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[20] This is based on a diagram of the North Peigan camp circle in, Paul M. Raczka, *Winter Count: A History of the Blackfoot People*, (Brocket: Oldman River Cultural Centre, 1979), p. 11.
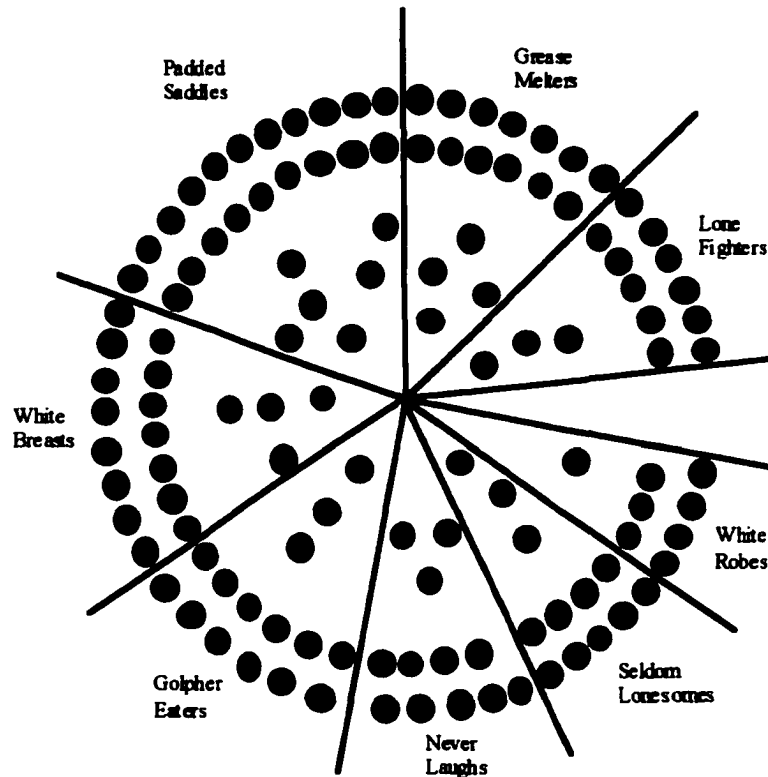
Much of the anthropological, ethnological, and historiographical literature sees clans as the base or primary organizational mechanism or unit of governance and politics. Indeed among the Blackfoot, governance was really about relationships and responsibilities and clans were the essence or foundation of all relationships (beyond the immediate family). As it was explained to me, clans can be equated with ones' extended family. This equation must be qualified, however, particularly for those who are not familiar with Blackfoot conceptualizations of 'family'. Similarly, such statements would have to be qualified when dealing with other Plains people who also conceptualize 'family' more broadly and differently than the eurocentric version of the extended family. In that, ones lineage is dependent on numerous generations of blood relations and the lineages of all those who have married in or been adopted in. Family necessarily includes all those human and non-human beings with which one has sustained or kin-like relationships and responsibilities.

As Reg Crowshoe, a young Peigan Elder, explained, "[clans] were not just residential groups of extended family members, but comprised several groups of people who were all members of an individual's mother's or father's lineage."[21] Given that Crowshoe states that clans were based on 'an individual's mother's or father's lineage', one would assume that clan composition was neither matrilineal nor patrilineal, but a combination of both resulting in an individual's ability to choose clan affiliation. This is not the case, however, for Crowshoe states that people "belonged to their father's band."[22] During the course of my research I heard this time and time again; clans were 'patrilineal institutions'. Over half of my teachers told of clans having some semblance of a patrilineal form. Nevertheless, I have reason to question the knowledge provided me, and thus the way in which I understand the composition and structure of clans.

Most of the Elders who taught about the patrilineal or patrilocal nature of clans, also spoke of the women-centred or matriarchal nature of traditional Siiksikaawa society (with most of them differentiating their traditions from those of the Haudenosaunee). Having seen the matriarchal tendencies of contemporary traditionalists, both in terms of how men speak of women, women's roles in the circle of life and in terms of the way in which traditional women act. I have to agree that traditional society was very much woman-centred, despite the fact that much of the historical record and early anthropological research on the topic addresses the derogatory treatment of Blackfoot women. Because of the nature of Blackfoot society and because several Elders taught about clans as matrilineal, matrilocal and matriarchal structures, I have reason to question the traditional nature of the clan structure.

[21] Reg Crowshoe and Sybille Manneschmidt, Akak'stiman: A Blackfoot Framework for Decision Making About Health Administration and Services, (Brocket: Oldman River Cultural Centre/Peigan Nation, 1997), p. 14.

[22] Ibid., p. 14.

My questioning of membership practices is not unusual if one considers that Wissler, who spent considerable time living among the Blackfoot in the early reserve period, explains:

> Each of the three tribes is composed of bands, *kaiyok'kowommostiijaw*, implying not only bonds of friendship but bonds of blood. ... [W]hile the band is a definite group in the minds of the Indians and every individual knows to what band he belongs, they manifest uncertainty as to how membership is determined.[23]

Based upon the teachings of those who are considered leaders and teachers within the Horn society (to be explained later), I would suggest that, traditionally clan affiliation was largely matrilineal, but that protocol was flexible enough to allow for deviation from this norm. I would suggest that, with the arrival of the horse and 'European sensibilities' these protocols were adapted to reflect the declining role of women as the economic, social, and spiritual centre of Blackfoot life. This is also reflected in the disappearance of 'the dog days'[24] or the emergence of a horse and trade-focused economy, and the demands of and influence wielded by the newcomers. This shift is also reflected linguistically and socially. A newer term emerged in the language after contact, which ridicules men for 'being led by their wife' if they choose to relocate to her clan upon marriage.

Regardless of how one became a member of a clan (i.e. through matrilocal or patrilocal residence, adoption or simply joining a clan in which one had no relatives), what is of particular importance is what membership involved. The clan systems of some other nations such as the Mohawk, Ojibway and Dakota were complex systems of fixed relationships which served to unite nations and define the roles and responsibilities of individuals. Blackfoot clans, however, were not societal sub-divisions demarcated by a spiritual relationship, a totem, or a bond that linked an individual to other individuals

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[23] Wissler, "Social Life of the Blackfoot Indians", p. 18.

[24] Plains peoples typically refer to life before the horse arrived on the plains as the 'dog days' for these societies were heavily dependent on the dog as a 'working animal' which performed many of the same tasks as did the horse. Hence the fact that in many languages the horse is referred to as a 'big dog'.

living throughout the nation or even beyond the nation's territory. So Blackfoot clans were not clans in the ordinary (read: anthropological) understanding of the term. Instead, they were loose affiliations or societal sub-divisions based on socially-constructed relationships and responsibilities, both for the clan's membership and its territory. Clans were the groups with which one lived and camped throughout the year, even when joining in the *okahn* of the entire nation. But they were much more than extended families or traveling partners; they were the means of individual, and more importantly collective survival, and they were relationships of responsibility political, economical, cultural, spiritual and territorial terms.

Clans varied considerably in terms of size, structure, importance and in what their responsibilities were to the larger nations; Blackfoot, Blood and Peigan. Given the complexity of Blackfoot conceptualizations of lineage, these groups were often quite large (for example, *Kainai's* Fish Eater's clan is said to have numbered in the thousands). Such clans would often disband for parts of the year into smaller sub-clans or bands, as was also the case with the Fish-Eaters clan of the *Kainai*. Similarly, smaller clans such as the Never Laughs and Coyote Cut-Bank of the *Pikani* would join together and share in their collective territorial, spiritual, economic responsibilities. Often such separation or cooperation would culminate in the formation of new clans. This occurred through the disintegration or division of an existing clan into several; or through the assimilation of smaller clans into larger ones (larger clans often consisted of subsidiary clans that retained their own identities and political structures). As stated previously, protocols governing membership were broad enough to allow individual affiliation to change, and this occurred as individual families joined other clans or struck out on their own because of individual aspirations, lack of resources and seasonal hardship, illness, external disputes, internal conflicts or dissatisfaction with clan leadership. Moreover, as the history of the Confederacy demonstrated, periodically clans, either individually or severally, chose to separate from their *okahn* (and thus, their nation) to form a separate camp circle and thus,

a separate nation. In fact, this is the history of the Confederacy as clans comprising the *Siksika* separated from those which became the *Pikani*, which was again divided when the *Kainai* struck out on their own, and again when it became the *Aputosi Piikani* and the *Amaskapi Piikani.*

Given the constant fluctuations in individual affiliation, clan affiliation (i.e. to which nation) and clan existence, it is difficult to discuss in absolute terms just how many clans there were traditionally in any of the nations. Further, there was a constant flux in clan names as names reflected factors such as location, general characteristics, leadership or significant events. That being said, I have been advised that originally, when the Confederacy lived together as one, there were twelve clans. But as time progressed, *Kainai*[25] clans numbered in the thirties, Siksika[26] had roughly twenty clans, as did the *Pikani*[27] before they divided, or were divided by the international border.

While the exact names, numbers and size of the each nation's clans are difficult to ascertain at any given point in history, there was an order to this flux. This is very important, for even in apparent chaos there is order; and, as it has been explained to me, it is the order inherent in the flux and the protocols which govern the flux that are most important. To further complicate matters, however, one must understand that, while there was an all-encompassing order to this complex and changing clan system, since each clan had its own internal order, protocols and means of governance. Therefore, my explanation of clans as a structure of governance is general and allows for variation.

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[25] *Kainai* clans included: the Sad Ones, Those Who Lived in the Centre, the Lonefighters, the People that Lived Along the River, the Scabby Robes, the Tall People, Many Children, Tall Tree, Buffalo Followers, and Fisheaters.

[26] *Siksika* clans are said to have included: the Skunks, Black Elks, Many Medicines, the Liars, the Biters, Bad Guns, Many Names, Big Pipes, Moccasins, Good Providers/Big Provision Bags, and Slapped Faces.

[27] *Pikani* clans are said to have included: the Strangulated, Seldom-Lonesomes, People of the Lake, Dried Meat Eaters, Many Pains, Red Shirts, the Homeless or Blood People, Fights Amongst Themselves or Those Who Fight Alone, Gopher-Eaters, White Breasts, Padded Saddles, Lone-Fighters, Never Laughs, Coyote Cut-Bank, White Robes and the Scabby Robes (those who became the South Peigan or *Amaskapi Piikani*).

## CLAN ORGANIZATION

As it was explained to me, every clan had organizational protocols and philosophies. I understand this to mean that each clan had developed internal protocols (read: legal structures) and philosophies regarding leadership, individual and community rights and responsibilities, and collective goals and aspirations. These protocols and philosophies existed to ensure order and good governance. A clan's understanding of the world, their place in the world, what was right and wrong, and what the roles of leadership and protocol were ensured good order or good protocol (law). Good protocol allowed for good leadership and thus good governance. This is similar to how constitutions enable good governance.

All people played a role in developing and maintaining these protocols and philosophies. Although they had developed over the life span of the Confederacy (since Creation), many protocols and philosophies held constant for reasons of spirituality, survival and territoriality. Nonetheless, everyone participated in maintaining and developing them through interpretation, dialogue and dissent. Just as every individual had a vested interest and a role to play in the survival of the clan, they also had a role to play in determining how that clan functioned. These roles should actually be viewed in terms of rights and responsibilities, for people had both a right to participate in clan life and a responsibility to do so.

The fact that all people had the ability to develop and maintain protocols and philosophies regarding good governance through interpretation, dialogue and dissent (including leaving one's clan), does not however, mean that there was no mechanism of governance or leadership. Each clan had its own internal leadership mechanism or structure of governance. Although these varied, structures of governance typically consisted of a *nina* (clan leader or clan father) and a *nah 'a* (clan mother). Occasionally, especially when clans joined together, or larger clans lived as separate entities for much of

the year, a *nina* and *nah'a* would accept the responsibilities of leadership or be recognized as having those responsibilities on a situational basis within each sub-clan or situational entity.

According to many of the Elders I consulted on this matter, *nah'a*, clan mothers or grandmothers existed at the centre of the clan. *Nah'a* played an extremely important role in all matters of clan life; not because of being elected or through inheritance but by virtue of recognition and consent. *Nah'a* were consulted on all matters of importance, and functioned as advisors and teachers rather than as decision-makers. The *nah'a* was an icon of respect for she was very learned in the protocols, philosophies, spirituality and history of her people. She was also one who was dedicated and giving to all, serving as their teacher, advisor, consultant and mother. She wielded considerable influence as a result of these attributes, and like many traditional Blackfoot women today, she was strong and unyielding, scolding those who broke protocol, and condemning people and decisions detrimental to the clan, the nation and the Confederacy.

Similarly, *nina*, clan fathers or clan leaders came to hold that position because of their virtues, qualities and personal histories. They were people who had exhibited leadership qualities throughout their lives. They were recognized and respected as leaders in other areas of life (e.g. they were recognized leaders in war, spirituality, hunting, and societies). *Nina* were also recognized as having the qualities becoming of leaders (i.e. they showed no anger, aggressiveness, jealousy, spite, and demonstrated humility, compassion, self-discipline, kindness, givingness, and had the ability to be a good provider). In other words, they acted in *ninah'sin* (chiefly or fatherly ways) and were *ninah'pok'sin* or *aanapohyii* (chiefly speaking). They were always concerned with survival of the clan, the nation, and the Confederacy (i.e. the sustainability and continuance of its people, culture, language, traditions, spirituality and territory) and the welfare of its members.

Though there are some internal differences as to the nature of traditional protocol, as I understand it, *nina* or clan leaders were selected in the same manner as clan mothers. All

leaders were chosen by the entire clan through informal affirmation or recognition. This process, though it may appear ill-defined, served the purposes of the clan as it ensured good governance, good order, and good leadership and was flexible enough to allow for a daily re-affirmation of leadership based on skills and abilities. It also permitted constant community involvement in both leadership selection and decision-making, and a concurrency in leadership in which other leaders could be selected to deal with a particular situation without displacing an existing clan leader.

While I will discuss situational leadership at length later in the chapter, the idea that leaders could be selected on a day-to-day basis, and that multiple leaders could co-exist at a given point in time is easily understood if one knows the roles and responsibilities of leadership. Clan leaders were essentially a constant, in that their roles and responsibilities were essentially those of fathers. The clan leader was charged with protecting and providing for his people, and like any father, he was dependent on the clan mother to achieve success in meeting the day-to-day needs of the clan. Since no one person, or very few people, had the ability, skills, and knowledge to deal with every situation that confronted a people, leadership protocols were flexible enough to enable people with the skills necessary to deal with a particular situation to fulfill their responsibilities to the collective if the collective so chose without replacing the actual *nina* (or *nah'a*). Therefore, if the existing *nina* had not demonstrated qualities necessary to lead a clan in 'war',[28] a suitable leader would be found to do so if the need arose. Often both would be referred to as leaders, with one replacing the other depending on the situation. Thus clan leadership structures were flexible processes adapted to meet the needs of a given situation.

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[28] I problematize the term 'war', because Blackfoot 'wars' were dissimilar to the wars which characterize western-eurocentric history in most respects. 'Wars' in this context were sporadic encounters with enemy nations within Blackfoot territory, or skirmishes into hostile territories for the purpose of revenge, horses stealing, or territorial expansion. It is typically argued that 'war' was not a 'blood sport' until after contact, and even then, greater honours were achieved through the counting of coup (humiliating or touching an enemy) and the stealing of horses.

Just as leadership structures or protocols were flexible and informal, so too were the decision-making processes and protocols. Although all discussions and subsequent decisions are said to have begun and ended with the consultation of the clan mother, this was not the only mechanism of consultation nor was she the only actor in traditional decision-making methods in the clans. While clan protocols varied, and decision-making practices were dependent on the situation, generally the clan leader would gather with those referred to as his supporters, typically fellow clansmen holding positions in the other structures of governance; fellow clan leaders, if the clan was large or consisted of sub-clans or a combination of smaller clans; or those who were simply respected and supported by the clan for a variety of reasons (leadership abilities, hunting abilities, defense etc.). Along with the designated runners (helpers), these people would gather to discuss whatever issue was at hand. Runners were used as a consultation mechanism for they had the responsibility of keeping the rest of the clan informed and of gathering the clan's input to enable the building of consensus. Simply put, runners acted as a continual intermediary between the clan and the decision-makers who were charged with the responsibility of relaying information (in both directions) and building consensus within the clan. Therefore, while decision-making was an arduous process taking days, months or even years to build consensus (come to one mind), it was an inclusive process governed by complex protocols which allowed everyone a say. Children and non-human beings were included as were all other structures of government.

In the historical record and existing scholarship, often the *nina* and this decision-making process were referred to as the chief and council, or the chief and his head men. This analysis is accurate to the extent that there was a council-like structure at the clan level and this council was headed by a 'chief'. The people themselves (or those with whom I have discussed the subject), however, explain the council as a much more fluid, egalitarian, non-elitist and inclusive process based on situational leadership. A similar analysis can be made with reference to the national level, where there existed several *nina*

occupied positions of civil, spiritual and 'military' leadership. Due to the complexity of governance at the national level and the interrelationships or interdependency of all three structures of governance, however, national leaders and structures of governance will be discussed in the final section of the chapter when I put all of the pieces together and demonstrate how governance worked on a day-to-day basis in the clans, at the national level and to a limited extent, the Confederacy.

## BUNDLES

Anthropologists, missionaries, traders and explorers perceived the clans as the base or primary political unit with the nation being a secondary level of association or political unit. Moreover, the existing literature perceives the *nina* (clan leaders) and their supporters as constituting the decision-making structure, 'the chief and council', within both the clan and the nation. These western-eurocentric thinkers are correct in their description of the traditional Blackfoot political system, to the extent that there were clan structures of governance. The existing literature, however, misses societies and Bundles, which since they too perform various functions of governance (substantive and distributive), must be viewed as structures of governance. While much of the existing literature concedes that societies performed some limited functions of governance under the direction of the *nina* (in their eyes, the chief and council), the governance roles of *akak'stiman* (Bundles) has not been previously explored.[29]

From what I can ascertain, the historical record and existing scholarship perceives Bundles as spiritual, ceremonial and medicinal objects.[30] This is not entirely incorrect, as Bundles had spiritual, ceremonial and medicinal roles and responsibilities. But, the

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[29] For the purposes of this dissertation, Bundles refer to the three Bundles (the *Natoas*, the Beaver Bundle and the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle) that reside at the centre of the *okahn* and not personal Bundles which carry limited (if any) political responsibility.

[30] For example, see: George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), pp. 276-286.

'object' analysis ignores the complexity of the traditional Blackfoot context, in which everything in the circle of life was interconnected. Instead, a modern, western-eurocentric concept of a separation between the spiritual and the political is applied to explain a social reality and world view which was not predicated on such a division. Thus, the existing literature ignores the fact that everything and everyone in the camp circle (the nation) had a specific and direct responsibility for the survival of the *Niitsitapi* as *Siiksikaawa* or the people as a nation. Moreover, it was those responsibilities and the relationships they were grounded in, in that they define how governance operated.

Three Bundles, the *Natoas*, the Beaver Bundle and the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle, existed at the heart of the traditional Blackfoot world, and in the literal and metaphorical centre of the *okahn*. These Bundles, which are both the physical 'object' and their human holders, had both shared and specific responsibilities for the economic, spiritual, territorial, physical, emotional, mental, and political survival and prosperity of the nation and the Confederacy. These responsibilities were complex, multifaceted and multidimensional, but they can be summarized in terms of a responsibility for all forms of leadership. By this I mean that both the Bundle and the Bundle holders shared specific leadership responsibilities which will be discussed in detail as this chapter proceeds.

Before explaining the responsibilities of Bundles and Bundle carriers, it is important to gain an understanding of the meaning of Bundles. Because Bundles were sacred, however, this explanation is limited. Crowshoe describes Bundles as "physical objects varying in size which contain a collection of particular articles regarded as sacred."[31] But Crowshoe would also agree that Bundles were more than physical objects or sacred articles since Bundles also included within them what is commonly referred to as the abstract. Abstract meaning the intellectual property or knowledge which was contained within the Bundles, and which took the form of songs, stories, ceremonies, and histories.

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[31] Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, op. cit., p. 13.

Bundles are both the concrete and the abstract, the physical objects and the intellectual objects, were both the male (concrete/substantive) and the female (abstract/knowledge). Bundles were the essence of balance, the teachers of life, the keepers of tribal philosophy and wisdom, the gifts of creation, the source of natural and spiritual law, the blueprints for survival as both *Niitsitapi* and *Siiksikaawa*, and the physical and abstract manifestation of all knowledge of, and gifts from, the physical and the spiritual worlds. These teachings or the knowledge embodied in the Bundles, existed in both the physical and the abstract manifestation of the Bundle. Thus, Bundles and the knowledge embodied therein was transmitted both in physical form (sacred objects) and abstract form.[32]

Simply stated, Bundles were the physical (the object) and abstract (the knowledge) manifestations of the teachings of Creator, gained directly or indirectly through messengers and visions. Their role was to ensure the sustainability and continuation of the *Nitsitapi* as individuals and as *Siiksikaawa*. Bundle carriers were members of the constituent nations who held the sacred objects, knowledge and responsibilities related to the Bundles transferred to them. Originally, Bundles were transferred from Creator and Creator's messengers to individuals deemed to have the qualities necessary to fulfill the responsibilities being transferred through *giimaks 'inn* (gifted rite). After the original transfer, Bundles were transferred through *poomaks 'inn* (transferred rite) or the process by which one purchases the rights and responsibilities of a Bundle from its owner.

Because *giimaks 'inn* (gifted rites) were extremely rare, the process through which Bundles were acquired was *poomaks 'inn* (transferred rites) whereby an individual would either be captured by or would confront the existing Bundle carrier to discuss the issue of Bundle ownership. If the candidate was worthy and demonstrated the dedication and qualities required to fulfill the responsibilities associated with the Bundle, a *poomaks 'inn* would be arranged. The candidate would offer payment for the Bundle (presently around

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[32] Ibid.

12, 000 dollars worth of gifts such as horses, blankets, and saddles). The existing carrier would train the candidate in the abstract manifestation of the Bundle and then transfer the physical manifestation of the Bundle to the candidate in a public ceremony. This transfer or *poomaks'inn* was not perceived as a selling of the Bundle, as I understand it. Rather, it was a mechanism which protects intellectual (and spiritual) property rights, a payment of tuition for educational purposes, a demonstration of one's ability and dedication to engage the responsibilities associated with the Bundle, and in many circumstances a demonstration of a collective's (family, clan, nation or Confederacy) support of the candidate.

It is also important to note that the responsibilities of a Bundle were always held by two people, and to a great extent, also remained the responsibility of all former Bundle carriers. Bundle carriers or custodians always consisted of both a male and a female. This was a spiritually 'married couple'. Although not necessarily partners in life or married in a sexual, Christian, or economic sense, a spiritual couple was a man and woman who had a bond or a partnership grounded in the spirituality and responsibility the Bundle involved. Collectively or as a spiritual couple, Bundle carriers "accept incredible responsibility by being knowledgeable carriers and ensuring through ongoing ceremonial practice the well-being of their community."[33] Collectively, the couple accepted this societal responsibility; and responsibility for both the physical and abstract manifestations of the Bundle. Individually, it was the woman who accepted the responsibility to care for both the physical and abstract manifestations of the Bundle (particularly the abstract); while the man accepted the responsibility for the physical practice of ceremony and all physical (action) responsibilities emanating from the Bundle. Therefore, although the man was the one who performed ceremonies and engaged the responsibilities of the Bundle in a physical sense, both were 'equal'. No ceremony could ever occur without the woman

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[33] Ibid., p. 20.

present, since she held the abstract manifestation of the Bundle, or the knowledge and instructions necessary to conduct ceremony and was the keeper of the Bundle itself (i.e. she kept it in her care).

This 'equality' shifted with colonization, however, and the role of women has declined with men becoming more predominant in ceremonial life as women were constrained by the new colonial order. Mainly this was because of changes in the economic realm, the introduction of real property and income and ideas and practices introduced by the missionaries, explorers, traders, government agents and early anthropologists who believed women were inferiors and treated them as such. Because I am more concerned with the pre-contact and early-contact periods in my research into traditional politics, I accept the commonly accepted contention that some semblance of 'equality' in the spiritual and physical domains of Bundles and Bundle carriers. Typically, this is not explained in terms of 'equality', which is a western-eurocentric concept, but in terms of one's place in the circle, one's responsibilities as a leader (*nina* or *nah'a*) and the power of women.

I now turn to the three Bundles at the heart of the Blackfoot society and in the centre circle of the *okahn* (the *Natoas*, the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle and the Beaver Bundle) and the roles and responsibilities of each of these Bundles in both politics and governance. Before I proceed, however, it should be noted that in my discussion of Bundles as structures of governance, I am referring to both the Bundles themselves or the physical and abstract manifestations of Creation and the carriers of these Bundles as constituting structures of governance. How physical (objects and ceremonies) and abstract (knowledge) manifestations of Creation or Creator's power can constitute a structure of governance that has decision-making and administrative abilities may be very difficult, even impossible, for a western-eurocentric thinker to comprehend. Because I have responsibilities to the people to whom this knowledge belongs and because one can understand Bundles as an institution of governance without the specific details of their

contents, I will not attempt to explain them further. It only remains to be said that the Bundles in and of themselves constituted structures of governance which were operationalized mainly with the assistance of their human helpers.

## THUNDER MEDICINE PIPE BUNDLE

As the name reveals, the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle originated from Thunder, who gave the Bundle to the first owner, and it contains the powers and teachings of Thunder. According to George Bird Grinnell, an ethnologist who lived amongst the Blackfoot in the 1880s and 1890s and later published many of the stories he was told, the origins of this Bundle are as follows:

> Thunder - you have heard him, he is everywhere. He roars in the mountains, he shouts far out on the prairie. ... He strikes the people, and they die. He is bad. He does not like the towering cliff, the standing tree, or living man. He likes to strike and crush them to the ground. Yes! Yes! Of all he is most powerful; he is the one most strong. But I have not told you the worst: he sometimes steals women.

> Long ago, almost in the beginning, a man and his wife were sitting in their lodge, when Thunder came and struck them. The man was not killed. At first he was as if dead, but after a while he lived again, and rising looked about him. His wife was not there. ... he went out and inquired about her of the people. No one had seen her. He searched throughout the camp, but did not find her. Then he knew that Thunder had stolen her, and he went out on the hills alone and mourned.

> When morning came, he rose and wandered far away, and asked all the animals he met if they knew where Thunder lived. They laughed, and would not answer. ... "Turn back! Go home! Do not look for the dwelling-place of that dreadful one." But the man kept on, and traveled far away. Now he came to a lodge, - a queer lodge, for it was made of stone; just like any other lodge, only it was made of stone. Here lived the Raven chief. [The man asked the Raven for help, and after considerable time, discussion and display of character, the Raven agreed. The man stayed on there with the Raven for some time, and learned much about himself and the ways of the Ravens. When the man came to understand the Raven's teachings, the Raven gave him an arrow and a Raven wing and advised him to go get his wife.]

So the man took these things and went to the Thunders lodge. He entered and sat down by the door-way. The Thunder sat within and looked at him with awful eyes. But the man looked above, and saw those many pairs of eyes. Among them were those of his wife.

"Why have you come?" said the Thunder in a fearful voice.

"I seek my wife," the man replied, "whom you have stolen. There hang her eyes."

"No man can enter my lodge and live," said the Thunder; and he rose to strike him. The man pointed the raven wing at the Thunder, and he fell back on his couch and shivered. But he soon recovered, and rose again. Then the man fitted the elk-horn arrow in his bow, and shot it through the lodge of rock; right through that lodge of rock it pierced a jagged hole, and let the sunlight in.

"Hold," said the Thunder. "Stop; you are the stronger. Yours is great medicine. You shall have your wife. Take down her eyes." Then the man cut the string that held them, and immediately his wife stood beside him.

"Now," said the Thunder, "you know of me. I am of great power. I live here in the summer, but when winter comes, I go far south. I go south with the birds. Here is my pipe. It is medicine." ... Thus the people got the first medicine pipe. It was long ago.[34]

This is how the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle came to reside amongst the *Nitsitapi*[35] and the *Siiksikaawa*. But this is not the exact story of origin that was conferred to me by my teachers. I have used this particular story because it already exists in written form in the public domain and because stories of the Thunder Medicine Pipe are considered by some to be 'sacred' knowledge or stories not intended for public consumption. Regardless, the rationale and purpose of Grinnell's story is essentially the same, for it explains both the origin of the Bundle and some of its responsibilities.

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[34] George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tales: The Story of a Prairie People*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 276-286.

[35] Here I use *Nitsitapi* to refer to all of the people of the Plains, for similar stories are told amongst the nations and Confederacies (most of which insist on the same locations) and most have some variation of traditions, responsibilities and physical and abstract manifestations of the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundles traditionally.

The way I understand it, Thunder is a powerful being, with abilities or responsibilities unique to Thunder, and Thunder alone. Thunder can strike and destroy, but out of this flux comes possibility and hope. For with Thunder comes rain, and rain refreshes the circle of life and allows everything to grow and sustain itself. Thunder can strike, destroy and kill all that it pleases, as it sees fit. It settles conflict and redefines the life circle as it strikes or as a result of its powers. Thus Thunder, or the powers and responsibilities of Thunder, are a balance of fear and hope, good and bad, the power of destruction and the power of rebirth, reawakening, of life starting anew and of the calm that supersedes the storm. Thunder is powerful, and there are very few (if any) whose power can match that of Thunder, or who can control Thunder.

This is how I understand the way of the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle. The power of Thunder is manifested in the Bundle, as is that of Raven and other beings who later contributed abstract and physical manifestations of Creation to this Bundle. Part of this power, as the origin story explains, is Thunder's ability to settle disputes by striking. As Thunder demonstrated at the outset of the story for the dispute between Thunder and the man regarding the wife was settled by Thunder's striking of the man and the taking of his wife. Typically, the story explains, no one has the ability to question the power (actions, songs and words - i.e. the decision or judgment) of Thunder. But, one man did, and with the help of his advisors (the Raven) and their gifts and powers (actions, words and songs - i.e. knowledge in its physical and abstract manifestations), he challenged the power of Thunder. He was able to settled the dispute using Thunder's power and the Raven's power and hence, obtained the responsibilities and the gifted rite to, among other things, settle disputes in his community.

Although this story only explains the origins and responsibilities of the first Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle, numerous Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundles were obtained by way of transfer rites or were captured from other nations. While each was a physical and abstract manifestation of the powers and responsibilities alluded to in the origin story.

There were rankings of Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundles, the most significant of which were the Long-Time Pipes. These Bundles were found in all of the nations which constituted the Confederacy (the most significant possibly resided with the *Pikani* or the *Aputosi Piikani*). These Bundles, the Long-Time Pipes and their carriers, were said to have been predominant leaders who were typically highly respected *nina* and *nah'a* with complex and multiple responsibilities, as clan mothers, clan leaders and society leaders.

Regardless of the exact name and history of the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle(s), the "function of the Thunder Pipe relates to its supernatural power and strength, its ability to decide life over death and ... settle conflicts and disputes between individuals or groups of people."[36] In other words, Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundles functioned very much like a judiciary. They contained the physical and the abstract tools and knowledge utilized to resolve disputes between individuals (intra- and extra-clan), between clans, societies, the nations that constituted the Confederacy and with all other nations.

Although it is said that the Bundle had these responsibilities, they were shared and exercised by the Bundle carriers; individually and collectively. The abstract and physical manifestations of the Bundle, and the oral tradition itself, set forth a mechanism for conflict resolution and knowledge as to how specific conflicts were resolved previously. This knowledge was used in decision-making as a foundation for good decisions and commences both a communicative process amongst the decision makers and a consultative process involving the affected populace and possibly the entire nation. More specifically, a number of processes and protocols which determined how conflicts were to be resolved, some of which I have a limited understanding of, others of which I know nothing about. In any case, I understand that, in some situations where the conflict concerned matters or individuals internal to a nation, disputes were brought forward using established protocol. Bundle carriers (both male and female) would have convened a

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[36] Crowshoe and Manneschmidt, op. cit., p. 24.

'meeting' of their supporters who were typically, fellow Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle carriers, advisors or past Bundle carriers, and helpers. Through established protocol and consensual decision-making they would use the Bundle to render a solution to conflict.[37] I also understand that in situations where conflict resolution was sought between nations, be they members of the Confederacy or otherwise, the Bundle was used to try to broker a deal. It was also used to sanctify any arrangement or treaty made, as was the case in the signing of Treaty Number Seven in 1876 with the Crown when this process was used. Any conflict resolution achieved or treaty made with the smoking of these pipes were sacred with the duration of as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the water flows.[38]

## BEAVER BUNDLE

The stories of the Beaver Bundle go back to the earliest of times; so far back that the story has taken on a multiplicity of forms and a divergency in content. Despite these discrepancies, there is a continuity among the stories that I have been told or read. The Beaver Bundle was a given to *Siiksikaawa* by Beavers; constituent elements or components of this gift were presented to both a man and a woman; and from this original transfer the Blackfoot received tobacco.

The following is one of the many versions of the Beaver Bundle origin stories that already appears in written form and in the public domain. This particular story was

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[37] The exact process is debatable, as many have argued that this was an independent process, while others stated that the Bundles function in an advisory capacity to the societies and the clans. This debate is discussed at length later in this chapter.

[38] This explains why many Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundles originated outside the Confederacy as they were often captured when conflict between warring nations could not be resolved.

recorded by Clark Wissler or D. C. Duvall sometime between 1903 and 1911 using a

*Siksika* informant.[39]

> There was a man who always went out hunting for deer and antelope. He
> was camping near a big lake fringed with bushes. He had two wives. One
> day the older took a pail to fetch water. She saw a young man, Beaver,
> who invited her to his tent. She went. When the man returned, he asked
> his younger wife for the older one's whereabouts. "I don't know. She
> went to the lake for water. When I looked for her, I could not see her trail,
> but only saw the pail." The man was sad, thinking his wife had gone to
> another camp. He went to another camp, but failed to find her, and
> returned. Then, after a night's sleep, he went to hunt early in the morning.
> The younger woman went for water. She saw the older wife rising from
> the water. The women kissed each other. The older said, "If my husband
> wishes, I will obtain for him the beaver-bundle which Beaver will give him
> for taking me away. He must burn sweet grass. All the creatures in the
> water will come to his tent. He is to prepare a feast for them Then he is
> to pray to the Sun, Moon and Morning-Star, begging them to come to him
> also." The man did as he was bid. The Sun and Moon came down and sat
> in this order: -
>
> | Sun | Man | Moon | Woman |
> |-----|-----|------|-------|
>
> The Sun burnt sweet-grass, and sang. [The man provided the Sun with
> gifts as payment for each of the songs that he sang. The Sun instructed
> him in the ways of the Bundle; providing the man with both the physical
> and the abstract manifestations of the Beaver's gift.] ...The Sun sang all
> night, giving the songs to the man. Before sunrise, he left to rise to the
> east. After four nights' singing, the beaver-bundle was given to the man.
> The Sun said, "Your people shall always have the beaver-bundle. Every
> spring, when the leaves are coming out, you should put seed [tobacco] in
> the ground, and dance. ... At sunset go into a large tent and feed all the
> Indians. You, the owner of the beaver-bundle and the old men shall
> dance." ... [This is how the Bundle came to the people.][40]

This, in part, explains how I understand the Beaver Bundle; the way it originally came

to the people; and the Bundle's roles and responsibilities in every domain of Blackfoot

life (i.e. the circle). Beaver is a wise and powerful being with a vast knowledge of its

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[39] Although this account varies from the teachings I received in preparing this study, it is used because it already exists in the public domain whereas many of the stories that were 'given' to, or shared with, me do not and it may not be considered appropriate for me to share such stories.

[40] Clark Wissler and D.C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 74-75.

territory, the life ways or greater circle of life (i.e. the greater environment, the seasons, etc.), and a demonstrated capacity for survival, living between worlds (the water, land and spiritual domains), making complex decisions, and for community living. These and other powers were transferred to the first Beaver Bundle carrier and have been transferred to subsequent generations of Beaver Bundle carriers either through *giinaks 'inn* (gifted rites) or *poomaks 'inn* (transferred rites).[41]

Many of Beaver's powers and responsibilities were manifested in the physical and abstract components of the Bundle. For example, in the abstract manifestation of the Bundle, lie the teachings, philosophy, theory and protocols regarding how decisions were made. Beavers are said to have taught the Blackfoot about the workings of collective decision-making, or the operationalization of council; and the desirability and strength of consensus-based decision-making. Meanwhile, in the physical manifestation of the Beaver Bundle lies tobacco. The Beaver people are said to have given this plant to the *Siiksikaawa* and instructed them in its use as a legislative mechanism or a mechanism for making legal or sanctioned decisions.

As I understand the abstract and physical manifestations of the Bundle, the Beaver Bundle was both politics and a structure of governance. The abstract manifestation of the Bundle was political philosophy in that the Beaver Bundle and the carrier's interpretation of the Bundle set forth the nation's, as well as the individual's, the clan's and the Confederacy's goals and objectives regarding the nature of politics and political protocols (i.e. having a collective orientation, a decision-making structure grounded in consensus and

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[41] The fact that there were subsequent Beaver Bundles acquired through *giinaks 'inn* means that there exist a number of Beaver Bundles; several of which are present in each of the nations that comprise the *Siiksikaawa* or the Blackfoot Confederacy. Together, these Bundles, their carriers and the supporters constitute a structure of governance at the national level. Recognizing the ever present flux and the situational nature of all structures of governance, however, individually, these Bundles also constitute political structures that may be used when all Bundles are not present. As I understand it, when Bundles are used individually, the Long-Time-Pipe takes precedence.

inclusion, equality, situational leadership),[42] and community living (the concept of *okahn*). The physical manifestation, on the other hand, has been described by many as having been a legislative process or structure of governance since the Beaver Bundle carriers and the Bundles (its goals, objectives and theory) could make decisions and they also had a supporting role in all decision-making protocols and practices.

The traditional capacity of Beaver Bundles and Beaver Bundle carriers to make decisions or function as a structure of governance or legislature was a culmination of the Beaver Bundle's power (language, song and action) or its abstract and physical components. By this I mean that like all *nina* (leaders), the Beaver Bundle carrier's capacity to make decisions was based not only on existing or operational protocols, but also on their commitment to their responsibilities, their abilities and the respect they were provided. In that sense, although the physical manifestation (ceremony and practice) of the Bundle allowed them the ability to make certain decisions, it was really the knowledge received through the Bundle that enabled the carriers to exercise their decision-making capacities. Beaver Bundles and their carriers were credited as being the 'memory-bank of the people', for they were the holders of the Winter Count. They are said to have had considerable knowledge of their territory, animals, the environment, weather and seasonal patterns, resources, and sustainability. As a result of this knowledge, Beaver Bundle carriers assisted in or made decisions regarding local survival, such as, where clans should winter, where the nation should meet and travel, where people should hunt. The process by which these responsibilities for decision-making practices and protocols were operationalized was the same as that which occurred in the case of the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle. That is, typically by council, and possibly in an advisory capacity.

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[42] This idea will be discussed at length at the end of this chapter. Essentially, it refers to the ideals and protocols of situational leadership addressed in my discussion of clans, where several leaders may co-exist with predominance or operationalization of ones role being dependent on the needs of the situation at hand.

The second way the physical manifestation of the Beaver Bundle involved a legislative process or structure of governance was through the supporting role played by Beaver Bundles and Beaver Bundle carriers in all decision-making protocols and practices. As the origin story explains, tobacco and its associated ceremonies and responsibilities was a gift from Beaver and as such is part of the physical manifestation of the Beaver Bundle. Because Beaver Bundle carriers were responsible for the growing, cultivation, harvesting and use of tobacco. Because tobacco was used to sanctify or legalize acts and decisions, the physical manifestation (the ceremony) of the Bundle has been described as a legislative process or as having operationalized governance and the legislative process. Thus, although the Beaver Bundle and Beaver Bundle carriers were not responsible for settling conflicts in either internal or external relations, they did function as a legislature or structure off governance. They performed functions of certification or registration typically associated with the state (marriages, deaths, births, naming, etc.). They made decisions pertaining to local survival. Further, they provided the means by which all decisions become sanctioned or legalized since to smoke the tobacco of the Beaver Bundle was to perform an official act or make a legal commitment and certification.

## NATOAS: THE SUNDANCE BUNDLE

As the name suggests, this Bundle is a central physical and abstract manifestation of the Sundance, which is the major spiritual event in the Blackfoot calendar. This Bundle existed amongst the *Siiksikaawa* long before the historical nation divided into separate nations and establishing the Confederacy. In fact, the Bundle predates the *Siiksikaawa* as we know them today, and has its origins in the period in which the Beaver Bundle was created. While some have argued that the Sundance Headdress Bundle once existed as part of the Beaver Bundle, many of my teachers have said otherwise. They insist that the Sundance Bundle's origins were independent of the circumstances which led to the creation of the Beaver Bundle. Walter McClintock, an employee of the U.S Forest

Service who lived amongst the South Peigan for several years in the late 1890s, explained

the history of the Bundle as follows:

We know not when the Sun-dance had its origin. It was long ago, when the
Blackfeet used dogs for beasts of burden instead of horses; when they
stretched the legs and bodies of their dogs to make them large, and when
they used stones instead of wooden pegs to hold down their lodges. In
those days, during the moon of flowers (early spring), our people were
camped near the mountains. It was a cloudless night and a warm wind
blew over the prairie. Two young girls were sleeping in the long grass
outside the lodge. Before daybreak, the eldest sister, So-at-sa-ki (Feather
Woman), awoke. The Morning Star was just rising from the Prairie. He
was very Beautiful, shining through the clear air of the early morning. She
lay gazing at this wonderful star, until he seemed very close to her, and she
imagined that he was her lover. ... When the leaves were turning yellow
(autumn), So-at-sa-ki became very unhappy, finding herself with child.
She was a pure maiden, although not knowing the father of her child. ...
One day when the geese were flying southward, So-at-sa-ki went alone to
the river for water [where she met a young man proclaiming himself to be
the Morning Star and the father of her child. Soon she realized that he was
speaking truthfully, and she agreed to return to the sky with him. There
she lived with her husband the Morning Star, his father the Sun, and his
Mother the Moon.]

... So-at-sa-ki lived happily in the sky with Morning Star, and learned
many wonderful things. When her child was born, they called him Star
Boy. The Moon then gave So-at-sa-ki a root digger, saying, 'This should
be used only by pure women. You can dig all kinds of roots with it, but I
warn you not to dig up the large turnip growing near the home of the
Spider Man. You have now a child and it would bring much unhappiness
to us all.' [So-at-sa-ki did not heed the warning, and with the help of
Cranes, she dug up the turnip. Doing so, So-at-sa-ki created a hole in the
sky, through which she peered and watched her people below. Seeing
them brought her great sadness. When she returned to the lodge of the sky
people] ...the great Sun Chief was still away on his long journey. In the
evening, when he entered the lodge, he exclaimed, 'What is the matter with
my daughter? She looks sad, and must be in trouble.' So-at-sa-ki replied,
'Yes, I am homesick, because I have today looked down upon my people.'
Then the Sun Chief was angry and said to the Morning Star, 'If she has
disobeyed, you must send her home.' [So So-at-sa-ki went home, bringing
with her the power (physical and abstract manifestations of it) which she
had obtained while living in the sky.]

It was an evening in midsummer, during the moon when berries are ripe,
when So-at-sa-ki was let down from the sky. Many of the people were

outside of their lodges, when suddenly they beheld a bright light in the northern sky. They saw it pass across the heavens and watched, until it sank into the ground. When the Indians reached the place, where the star had fallen, they saw a strange looking bundle. When the elk-skin cover was opened they found a woman and her child. [So-at-sa-ki and Star Child/*Poia* (Scarface) returned to the lodge of her parents, where she is said to have brought much bad luck and poverty to her people. When Poia was still a boy, both his parents and his grandparents died. The people shunned and ridiculed Poia as he grew, and soon he too vowed to return to the sky. Finally, after 'enduring hardships and great dangers' and traveling to the Pacific Ocean, Poia journeyed to the lodge of the Sun, the Moon and the Morning Star. Though they did not recognize Poia as Star Child, they took pity on the young man and allowed him to live there in the sky.]

Poia lived in the Lodge of the Sun and Moon with Morning Star. Once, when they were out hunting together, Poia killed seven enormous birds, which had threatened the life of Morning Star. He presented four of the dead birds to the Sun and three to the Moon. The Sun rejoiced, ... and the Moon was so grateful, that she besought her husband to repay him. On the intercession of the Morning Star, the Sun God consented to remove the scar. He also appointed Poia as his messenger to the Blackfeet, promising, if they would give a festival (Sun-dance) in his honour, once a year, he would restore sickness to health. He taught Poia the secrets of the Sundance and instructed him in the prayers and songs to be used. He gave him two raven feathers to wear as a sign that he came from the sun, and a robe of soft-tanned elk-skin, with a warning that it must only be worn by a virtuous woman. ...

Poia returned to the earth and the Blackfeet camp by way of the Wolf Trail (Milky Way), the short path to the earth. When he had fully instructed his people concerning the Sun-dance, the Sun God took him back to the sky with the girl he loved. When Poia returned to the home of the Sun, the Sun God made him bright and beautiful, just like his father, Morning Star. In those days Morning Star and his son could be seen together in the east. Because Poia appears first in the sky, the Blackfeet often mistake him for his father, and he is therefore sometimes called Poks-o-piks-o-aks, the Mistake Morning Star.[43]

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[43] Walter McClintock, *The Old North Trail: Life Legends and religion of the Blackfeet Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), pp. 491-499 It should be noted that McClintock's telling of this story is heavily influenced by Christianity and western-eurocentric 'sensibilities'. This is demonstrated by the fact that he recounts this story as the Blackfoot story of Christ and by the fact that he continuously emphasizes the point that So-at-sa-ki was a 'pure maiden' very much like the virgin Mary. Needless to say, in this respect, McClintock's version is quite suspect and is inconsistent with the renditions that I have heard told.

This explains the origins of the Sundance Bundle, and how the physical and abstract manifestations of the Bundle are understood. The Bundle was a gift from Creator's messenger, the Sun, and was intended as a celebration and to help the people endure and overcome their hardships. I tell the story this way because it demonstrates the power and significance of the Bundle and how the Bundle came to be; and also shows how the Bundle and its associated festivities and ceremonies have been misunderstood by the Christian or western world.

McClintock asserts that the story of *So-at-sa-ki* and *Poia* is the 'Christ story of the Blackfeet'. While certain parallels can be made, as *Poia* and Christ both existed as messengers from Creator who taught people to pray and act in a certain way, the two stories are separate entities and explanations of two distinct and irreconcilable world views. As I understand it, the Sun is not God, but merely a powerful being, a source of life, an ancestor, a husband to First Woman, and messenger from Creator. Thus, neither the *Natoas* (the Sundance Headdress Bundle) nor the Sundance itself, should be viewed as a simple ceremony or prayer to the Sun.

The Sun is a powerful being, and a giver of life (as has been demonstrated by western-eurocentric science). The *Nataos* was a physical and abstract manifestation of the Sun's power, as a messenger for and part of Creation or the Great Mystery, which came to the people by way of *So-at-sa-ki*. But because the people did not understand or accept *So-at-sa-ki* and her powers, the Bundle was not used or maintained until its physical and abstract manifestations were renewed by *Poia*. Still, it was a woman who first brought the Bundle and its knowledge to the people, and to this day it continues as a woman's Bundle, but a virtuous woman's Bundle, and not that of a 'pure maiden'. A 'virtuous woman' is said to have the wisdom, reason, compassion and qualities necessary to gather the people together as one (nation) and to understand and act upon the spiritual, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of her people.

To understand the political importance and functions of this Bundle, one must understand how and when the Bundle came to the people. The fact that the Bundle came from the Sun, and to some extent the Moon, and is the physical and abstract manifestation of powers (language, action, song) held by the Sun means that the Bundle is of extreme importance and significance in the Blackfoot world view or paradigm (spiritually, politically, socially, economically, physically, mentally, and emotionally). But the origin story tells us more. It came at a time of great sickness and poverty; and it came with lessons to assist the people in dealing with their spiritual, physical, societal, economic and political problems. As I understand it, one of the most important lessons was to gather together as a people or to make *okaan* or *okahn*, meaning, in this instance, the Sundance, or the gathering of the nation, as well as the camp circle itself.[44]

Since *okahn* is analogous with or a descriptor of the traditional Blackfoot political order, one could easily argue that the formative political lesson was governance, or a system of governance, itself. But that is only part of the political lesson inherent in the physical and abstract manifestations of the *Natoas* which *Poia* brought down from Sun (and his family). *Poia* brought with him instructions which form part of the abstract component of the Bundle to gather the people to celebrate, do ceremony and collectively engage the problems the people were encountering. These instructions and the way in which they have been operationalized, have been explained to me in terms of governance, sovereignty and nationhood.

The Elders who taught me that the Beaver Bundle functioned as a legislative mechanism and that the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle functioned as a judicial mechanism, also explained the Sundance Bundle as a mechanism or instrument of sovereignty. But, I did not by this understand that sovereignty was part of the Bundle as

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[44] It should be understood that the same word is often used to describe both the camp circle and the Sundance or gathering of the nation for the formation of the camp circle has its origins in the teachings of *Nataos* Bundle, and this is the time of year and the primary event for which the *okahn* was struck.

it was not vested in a singular objectifiable object or subject, human or non-human.

Sovereignty is a spiritual principle emanating from Creator, not from a secular authority.

It is a collective relationship of rights and responsibilities, and "the original freedom

conferred to our people by Creator"[45] that may be viewed in terms of self-determination,

nationhood, and governance. In that sense, the Elders' use of sovereignty to describe the

Sundance Bundle is that it existed as both a representation or expression of sovereignty

or nationhood, and as the vehicle through which sovereignty was (re-)conferred (or re-

iterated) by Creator. More specifically, the physical and abstract manifestations of the

Bundle, and its associated ceremony, may be viewed as having been the operationalization

of sovereignty or nationhood. As Crowshoe and Manneschmidt explain:

> The social function of the Natoas bundle can be clearly understood by the
> way in which it was celebrated by all members of the tribe. ... They would
> use this time for social exchanges to settle feuds and conflicts, make
> marriage arrangements and form other alliances, give names, and establish
> new allies. ... This ceremony [the so-called Sundance] thus offered an
> umbrella for all kinds of other individual or group activities as the unifying
> ritual for tribal collective rather than only the kinship group or band.[46]

Thus, the political significance of the Sundance Bundle or its functionality as a

structure of governance has to do with the fact that sovereignty was operationalized

through, and to a lesser degree vested in, the physical and abstract manifestations of the

Bundle. This is evident in two ways. First, the gathering was a celebration, enunciation

and re-affirmation of sovereignty or nationhood as is demonstrated in the Winter Count.[47]

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[45] RCAP, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 109.

[46] Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, op. cit., p. 21.

[47] The Winter Count refers to the means by which the Blackfoot recorded their history in 'written form' both prior to and subsequent to the invasion. A Winter Count is a pictographic or symbolic representation of the primary events of each year in history as recorded on a skin and recounted yearly by an individual whose task it is to record (and thus remember) history. It should be noted that Winter Counts almost always included a reference to the yearly Sundance or gathering of the nation for this was considered to be the most important part of year; economically, spiritually, politically and socially.

Second, many ceremonies associated with the Bundle were both a prayer, or an expression, of nationhood and for the survival of that nation and its people.[48]

## CONCLUDING THE STORY OF BUNDLES

During the course of my research, it was suggested to me several times that these three central Bundles were collectively synonymous with the traditional Blackfoot conceptualization and practice of governance (in their words, peace, good order and good governance). Based on these accounts, Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle functioned as a judicial mechanism; Beaver Bundle functioned as a legislative mechanism; and Natoas Bundle functioned as a mechanism of sovereignty. While I believe that most of my teachers would agree with this analysis, there is disagreement as to the functions, roles and responsibilities played by the two other structures of governance identified at the outset of this chapter (clans and societies).

On the one hand, several Elders taught that Bundles performed judicial, legislative and sovereign functions and that they were in and of themselves the traditional decision-making structures and that societies and clans merely performed administrative functions. This they justified on the basis that Bundles set forth a framework and theory of governance; that Bundles had internal protocol and structures which enabled them to operate as decision-making or governing structures in their defined areas; and that Bundles advised other societal structures on protocol, philosophy (goals, objectives, etc.), judicial, legislative and sovereignty or nationhood matters.

On the other hand, I was taught by other Elders, that Bundles did not fully constitute traditional Blackfoot governance. Some Elders suggested that clans and societies were the only true structures of governance, and that Bundles merely supported and advised them.

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[48] Many Elders insist that prior to mass colonization the entire Confederacy also joined together - for they were the nation prior to the creation of *Kainai*, *Piikani* and *Siksika* - the idea that the Confederacy itself is actually the nation is echoed by everyone.

It has been said that this ignores the historic interdependence, roles, and responsibilities of all three structures of governance and that all three performed various functions of governance and provided leadership and had decision-making capacities. As evidence, those who hold this view note that Bundle carriers, clan leaders and society leaders were all referred to as *nina*. It is impossible not to become engaged with this debate.

I understand all three structures (clans, Bundles and societies) to have performed functions of governance, and conclude that together they existed as traditional Blackfoot governance. While the relationship between these structures and how governance was operationalized is discussed at length at the end of this chapter, it is important to note that I view Bundles as having provided more than simple leadership and decision-making capabilities. Bundles, in my mind, provided the framework, theory and philosophy that defined traditional Blackfoot politics and enabled the operationalization of governance. This is demonstrated in my discussion of the Sundance Bundle and the Beaver Bundle and in the teachings of many Elders. The Natoas provided the opportunity and structure for *okahn* which enabled the nation, in whichever form it took at a given time, to come together and make decisions collectively. The Beaver Bundle provided the mechanism (tobacco) which enabled these decisions to be made and sanctified, as it legalized and legislated these decisions through protocol and ceremony. Thus, like many of my teachers, I see the Bundles both as having been separate structures of governance, and as supporting structures, since they provided the mechanisms and philosophy which enabled governance. In this way, they were similar to the conventions of modern, state-based constitutions; in that they were both literally and metaphorically the centre of the *okahn* and the place from which knowledge, ceremony, structure, balance, philosophy, and power originated.

## SOCIETIES

Also prominent within *okahn* were societies (*kanuh'kas*, *i'konnokatsiyiks* or *i-kun-uh'-kah-tsi*). Reflecting their status and existence as a structure of governance, societies were located near the centre of the camp circle; only Bundle carriers were more centrally located. The existing literature, for the most part, has tended to conceptualize governance mostly in terms of clan leadership, peace chiefs and war chiefs. But, it has recognized to a small degree, the roles played by societies in the operationalization of traditional Blackfoot governance. I will argue, however, that societies were a structure of governance which played a key role in the creation and maintenance of peace and good order within all levels of social organization; clans, nations and the Confederacy. This section, therefore, begins with a brief examination of the political attributes of societies as identified in the existing literature. It then discusses Blackfoot teachings about *kanuh'kas* as a structure of governance, and their roles and responsibilities in *okahn*.

A. P. Maximilian believed Blackfoot societies, like the parallel social organizations that existed in every 'American tribe', were "bands, unions or associations"[49] comprised mostly of men, which "have a certain name, fixed rules and laws, as well as their particular songs and dances, and serve in part to preserve order in the camp, on the march [and] in the hunting parties."[50] Edward Curtis provides a more functionalist definition seeing societies as occupying a position subordinate to the 'chiefs'. He states:

> the function of the societies was primarily to preserve order in the camp, during the march, and on the hunt; to punish offenders against the public-welfare; to protect the camp by guarding against possible surprise by an enemy; to be informed at all times as to the movement of the buffalo herds and secondarily by inter-society rivalry to cultivate the military spirit, and

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[49] A. P. Maximilian, quoted in Clark Wissler, "Blackfoot Societies", in Clark Wissler (ed.) *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, XI:I, (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1916), p. 365.

[50] Ibid.

by their feasts and dances to minister to the desire of members for social recreation.[51]

The observations of Maximilian and Curtis regarding Blackfoot societies are non-specific generalizations of a pan-Indian image of societies. As such they fail to explain the general or specific roles and responsibilities of societies vis-á-vis the preservation of order in Blackfoot society. Grinnell's explanation, however, provides more specificity and critical analysis. Grinnell explains societies, as "a dozen or more secret societies, graded according to age, the whole constituting an association which was in part benevolent and helpful, and in part military, but whose main function was to punish offenses against society at large. All these associations were really law and order associations."[52] Crimes said to have been punishable by societies included: murder ('a life for a life'); theft (restorative or retributive justice); adultery (facial mutilation or death); treachery/treason (death); and cowardice (forced to live and dress as woman).[53]

Aside from describing the general attributes and functions or responsibilities of societies, Grinnell further differentiates between the various societies and their responsibilities. Describing the Little Birds, Mosquitoes and Doves as pre-cursors to society life with minimal responsibilities or functions within *okahn*, he argues that the Kit-Foxes and Horns had more sacred/spiritual functions and responsibilities. Finally,

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[51] Edward Curtis, *The North American Indian*, Vol. 6, (Norwood: Massachusetts University Press, 1911), pp. 16-17

[52] Grinnell, op. cit., p. 220-221.

[53] Ibid., p. 220. There exists much disagreement in contemporary Blackfoot society regarding the punishment for adultery. While it is commonly argued that adulterous behaviour was a punishable offense whereby the adulterer was responsible for compensating their spouse or ex-spouse for causing harm to their honour, many men have also argued that women were punished by facial mutilation or death. While it appears that this punishment did exist subsequent to colonization, there is no evidence that this existed prior to colonization or that this activity was widespread. As I understand it, this style of punishment was mostly practiced by Christian converts as it went against all traditional beliefs and practices. For a discussion of the impact that Christianity and western-eurocentric 'sensibilities' had on sexuality throughout the Americas see: Richard C. Trexler, *Sex and Conquest: Gendered Violence, Political Order, and the European Conquest of the Americas*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). Also see: Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (eds.) *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, (Washington: University Press of America, 1983).

Grinnell describes the Braves to have been the "most important and best well known" society and as having had the responsibility or performing the functions of police and soldiers.[54] It should be noted, however, that while Grinnell conceives of societies as having many responsibilities (spiritual, military, judicial and otherwise) he views societies as holding a position subordinate to the band chiefs and tribal council (i.e. as their administration).

Wissler provides the most extensive account of Blackfoot societies in the existing literature. His explanation of societies is, however, simply a synthesis of the aforementioned accounts and his main focus is on the ceremonies, costumes and dances of each individual society rather than on their societal functions and their governmental responsibilities. Still, his discussion of the individual societies, their composition and their decision-making structures is very useful for the discussion which follows.

Probably the most comprehensive functional description of societies, as political, spiritual and economic structures, to date, was provided by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The Royal Commission states that the Confederacy used societies to "carry out particular administrative, spiritual and other functions."[55] While not every society was operationalized as a functional structures of governance (administrative or otherwise) at a given point of time, these responsibilities or delegations of authority fluctuated throughout the year, with groupings of up to eight societies performing different functions at different times. Some of the functions or responsibilities carried out by the societies include serving as police, settling disputes, punishing offenders, rehabilitating offenders, directing the hunt, and engaging in both defensive and offensive military or para-military pursuits. Societies carried out these delegated responsibilities

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[54] Grinnell, op. cit., p. 222.

[55] RCAP, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 1 68.

under the authority, control and direction of the 'political chief' or 'war chief' depending upon which was in control at the time.[56]

As I understand *kanuh'kas* based on the teachings of Elders, the contemporary Blackfoot teachings regarding societies are not entirely different from those observations made by, or teachings received by, the anthropologists and ethnologists who have occupied Blackfoot territory since the late nineteenth century. The points of differentiation are, however, quite substantial and of great significance for the purposes of this project. The teachings I received differ with respect to the functions and responsibility of societies, and the position occupied by societies within *okahn*, especially concerning ethnologists' contention that societies were subordinate to clan leaders. The significance of these two points will be clarified in the process of explaining how I understand societies based on the teachings of contemporary Elders.

According to the teachings I received, the term societies represented a plurality of pan-clan, and often pan-national or Confederal, social groups or club-like organizations. These were comprised of both genders either independently or cooperatively. That is, there were women's societies, men's societies and 'men's societies' in which women were members as part of a 'spiritual couple'. Societies, then, were nation-wide, and in some cases, Confederacy-wide, organizations of common purpose and shared responsibility which emphasized survival, historical, spiritual, and political education and provided members with relationships and responsibilities that extended beyond the family and clan. With the notable exception of the *Motokix*, Holy Woman's society or Buffalo Woman's society, most are classified in the existing literature as men's societies through which men progress with their peers (age group). Like almost everything in the traditional Blackfoot world, however, societies emphasize balance, and thus membership in most societies was a joint venture between the physical and abstract (male and female). Furthermore, as

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[56] Ibid., p. 68.

Wissler points out, even in societies where this gender parity was not emphasized or required, several female members would be included and membership in any society was open to 'manly-hearted women'.

As a grouping of social structures, societies reflected the circle of life; a circle with many paths, phases and stages which together constituted one's pathway. Often referred to in the anthropological literature as age-grade or all-comrades, people joined different societies at different stages or phases in their personal life cycle or pathway in the circle of life. Societies were, therefore, associations of those who share the same pathway as well as the same phase in that pathway. Collectively, societies were a succession of organizations, conglomerates or aggregates of peers with individual societies reflecting the flux of an individual's life cycle. Just as there was no single pathway through the circle of life, or a single mould from which all people were cast, there was no single pathway through the societies nor a single society which would have reflected the needs, aspirations, personalities and attributes of a specific age or peer group. Membership in a particular society was said to be a reflection of an "individual's interests and personality."[57] Membership was also a community's recognition of an individual's qualities and characteristics since not everyone sought membership nor was everyone permitted to join a society. Therefore, while societies can be explained as age-grade structures, there was no single pathway through them all, although there was a fixed hierarchy among them.

It should be noted that while the lack of a completely open mobility through the societies' hierarchy may be perceived as being attributable to elitism, as I understand it, this is an unjustified assessment. Society membership entailed great expenditure, currently estimated to be approximately twelve thousand dollars in possessions. This, in itself, did not constrain mobility because an individual viewed as worthy, responsible and

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[57] Crowshoe & Manneschmidt, op. cit., p. 15

dedicated, the individual would have been sponsored by her/his family. If the original family were unable to do so, adoption into a wealthier family would likely occur. Societal mobility was constrained, however, and could be perceived as having been elitist, in the sense that societies and their leaders controlled membership to ensure certain standards. Membership was viewed as an honour and a privilege, not a right. The expenditure (tuition) was viewed as an investment in the individual, and their family, clan and nation. Membership was as a testament to one's dedication to the society's' mandate and one's responsibilities to the nation as a whole.

Although societies are fluid structures that changed over time and varied among the nations of the Confederacy, there are many accounts of the exact name, function and number of societies. According to Curtis, Peigan societies consisted of the Doves, Flies, Braves, All Brave Dogs, Tails, Raven Bearers, Dogs, Kit-Foxes, Catchers and Bulls.[58] Grinnell's list of Peigan societies "named in order from those of boyhood to old age" includes the Little Birds, Pigeons, Mosquitoes, Braves, All Crazy Dogs, Raven Bearers, Dogs, Tails, Horns (obsolete amongst the Peigan), Kit-Foxes, Catchers or Soldiers and Bulls (also obsolete).[59] Wissler lists the Peigan societies, in ascending order, as Pigeons, Mosquitoes, Braves, All-Brave Dogs, Front-tails, Raven-bearers, Dogs, Kit-foxes, Catchers and Bulls; the Blood societies as Mosquitoes, All-Brave-Dogs, Braves, Black-soldiers, Raven-bearers, Dogs, Horns, Catchers and Bulls; and the Blackfoot (*Siksika*) societies as Mosquitoes, Bees, Prairie-Chickens, Crows, All-Brave-Dogs, Bad-horns, Black-Soldiers, Braves, Raven-Bearers, Dogs, Horns, Catchers, Bulls and Kit-Foxes.[60] Societies, as well as the underlying hierarchy or progression of societies, were fluid structures which changed and were adapted over the course of a season and a lifetime.

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[58] Curtis, op. cit., p. 6.

[59] Grinnell, op. cit., p. 221.

[60] Wissler, "Blackfoot Societies", op. cit., p. 369.

Furthermore, as the list provided by Wissler demonstrates, the number and rank of societies differed among the nations that constituted the Confederacy. As such, the deviance in the names and numbers of societies does not need explaining.

The teachings of Elders about societies also differ individually and nationally. For example, from what I can ascertain, the Bumble Bee society, is said to have existed and to exist only among the *Pikani* and then, possibly only amongst the North Peigan. While the functions and responsibilities of this society are carried out by the Mosquitoes society among the *Kainai* and *Siksika*, I would argue that these societies were synonymous. At the same time, though the Horns were the most significant society amongst the *Siiksikaawa*, it is unclear if this society existed in each of the constituent nations. As far as I know, the Horns were the predominant Blood society, however, there is disagreement concerning the existence, and the roles and responsibilities of the Horn society in the other nations. On the one hand, according to several of my teachers, a smaller independent Horn society existed amongst the Blackfoot, and a smaller independent Catcher society amongst the Peigan. Other Elders, meanwhile, have taught me that there was only one Horn society, which combined all nations within the Confederacy, and that it was a society which was active in each constituent nations under a different name.

## SOCIETIES & GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Whatever name a society assumed in each nation, and however many in each nation, societies played an important role within *okahn* that is best conceptualized in terms of governance. In the introduction to this section, I explained how various written sources perceived societies as playing an administrative function. The idea was that societies administered the decisions and executive orders of the Chief, and presumably the council, in various capacities or areas of influence. According to the existing western-eurocentric literature, the executive exercised its influence through societies in policing, acting as the

military, controlling the hunt, maintaining order when moving camp, acting as a judiciary and maintaining moral standards.

As a structure of governance, societies performed a wide array of administrative functions. I will not provide an exhaustive discussion of the societies and their corresponding responsibilities, but I will demonstrate the extent of the administrative functions performed by societies by discussing three societies. Among the *Piikani*, the Bumble Bee society was responsible for providing or administering what could be termed social services or social assistance. They were the helpers. The nature of their responsibility is demonstrated in the moving of camp. When camp was struck, Bumble Bee society members went around the camp and made sure that everyone who required it received assistance. This society was also charged with the responsibility of punishing those who, because of laziness, were not taking responsibility for themselves in preparing to move.

Amongst the *Siksika*, the Crazy Dog society was responsible for providing and assisting in the administration of defense. The society was responsible for both the defense of the nation (the people) as well as assisting clans in defending their particular territory from other nations who were not members nor allies of the Confederacy. I understand the operationalization of these responsibilities based on the teachings of Elders and my own experiences in *Siksika* territory. One day when I was out taking a drive with an Elder and discussing the roles and responsibilities of the various structures or components which constitute *okahn*, it was decided that we would take a walk on what seemed to be the drive lanes leading up to a buffalo jump. I must say, I had an eerie feeling that was only exacerbated when the Elder began to sing. My reaction was normal, for I soon discovered that we were not at a buffalo jump but at the place that the Blackfoot call Cree Jump. The song being sung belonged to the Crazy Dog society. The story goes that shortly after the break up of summer camp (mid 1870s), the Crazy Dogs heard of a Cree war party in the territory of a clan devastated by a recent epidemic (likely

small pox). Knowing that the clan, though well endowed with horses, could defend neither itself nor its territory, the Crazy Dogs assembled, found the Cree party and drove them off a jump. It is through this story, this song and the jump that the roles and responsibilities of the Crazy Dogs are recounted (and arguably, experienced).

Amongst the *Kainai*, the Crooked Mouth Speakers was a secret society responsible for maintaining peace and good order or administering justice in *okahn*. From what I know, this society operated during the celebration and ceremonies referred to as the Sundance, although given its function, it may have operated at other times of the year. Crooked Mouth Speakers operated in secrecy (its membership is unknown) and administered 'justice' or kept peace and good order under the darkness of the night sky when everyone was in their lodges. This was accomplished by walking around *okahn* telling stories of people's wrong-doings, gossiping and laughing at the actions of individuals in camp, and instigating ridicule of the wrong-doer the following day. No one knew who these people were, and since no one wanted to hear their name or the name of a relation spoken of in this fashion, the 'national inquirer' of the Blackfoot acted as a non-coercive, non-violent means of administering peace and good order in *okahn* and possibly throughout the year.

These examples demonstrate that societies did indeed act as a component of administration, but what is not clear is whose orders societies followed or whose decisions they administered if any. The existing literature would have us believe that societies were the administrative arm of the executive, or functioned on the orders of the national Chief, and presumably the council. This contention, however, is not entirely consistent with Blackfoot teachings. Several of my teachers agree with the existing literature, although, with some notable limitations on the Chief's authority and thus, the independence of societies. But, most do not view societies as having had the role of administering the decisions of the national Chief or any of the clan leaders.

As I understand it, societies were a separate and virtually independent structure of governance, much like the clans and Bundles. Each society had its own roles and responsibilities; and so each society had administrative and decision-making responsibilities and capacities. For example, the Braves, Brave Horse or Brave Dog society of *Kainai* was the main warrior or military society in that nation, the main decision-making body on issues of a military, peace and security nature. The leader of this society was often referred to in the existing literature as the War Chief, since he led his own society and had the added responsibility of advising all similarly-minded societies and the entire camp during times of military necessity (situations of war). The Horn society had the responsibility of providing spiritual and political leadership throughout the Confederacy. Therefore, the Horns and their affiliates in each of the nations had the responsibility for: decisions regarding ceremony; advising all other societies; making and advising on decisions that were of importance to the entire Confederacy; and, advising individuals on all matters of life.

To operationalize its decision-making capacities and its administrative responsibilities, each society had its own internal decision-making structure, logic and laws or protocols. Protocols prevent me from explaining these in general terms. Generally, each society had a leader or sometimes a combination of leaders (*nina* and *nah'a* or chiefs), a council of Elders and several helpers.

As in all Blackfoot decision-making structures, a decision is said to begin and end with the women. I take this to mean that in societies such as the Horns, protocols required a man and woman join the society together as one. As such, decision-making would have involved both those women who were members of the Horns and those women who were members in the *Motokix*/woman's society as the *Motakix* was consulted on most decisions. In situations where a gender balance was not a matter of membership, the decision-making process began with each member's long-time partner (not necessarily their spouse) and the *Motokix* was usually consulted. Whatever the case may be, I am

told that all decisions began and ended with women. Thus, while women may not have been included as participants in the councils which had the responsibility for making decisions, they were not excluded from the decision making process as their wisdom guided the decision-making process, and their approval provided legitimacy to the decision. All decisions began and ended with women, who were the holders of the abstract manifestation of life, reason, and balance. Moreover, women also had the responsibility of holding these societies and men in general accountable and responsible, individually and collectively through the *Motokix*/Holy Woman's Society.

Once the advice of women was obtained, the leaders of a society also had the responsibility of asking the Elders for their advice. This is a very important process for it is said that, if you followed the advice of the Elders, a decision would never be wrong and the correct protocols and processes would be used. The advice of the Elders also helped to generate good discussion within the membership of the society, led them in a good direction and reminded them of both the importance of their responsibilities and of being of one mind (consensus). Following this step, advice from other leaders, structures of governance and individuals would be sought. Once all advice had been obtained, discussion within the society as a whole commenced. At this point in the process, only the members of the society took part in the discussion. During discussion, runners were used to gain advise and generate support throughout *okahn* or specific elements of *okahn*, usually with the assistance of other structures such as the clans. Therefore, when a consensus was achieved, and a decision was made, no matter how long it took, the consensus was generated not only within the decision-making process itself, but also in the nation or Confederacy as an entirety.

The nature of this decision-making process is important, for it invested authority in no one person but in the process, in the society and in the nation at large. The importance of the process and the absence of an externalized or institutionalized authority and power is demonstrated in the following stories involving the leadership of the

contemporary Horn society. As I understand it, it is a woman's responsibility to ensure that proper protocol is maintained and to ensure that members are acting 'in the best way possible'. Thus, I was not surprised to be told stories about or to witness the act of women scolding their husbands or spiritual partners for breaching protocol or not acting in the best way possible. Another example which demonstrates the importance of process and the lack of institutionalized authority involves situations where leading members of the Horns were asked for advice or a decision regarding a matter or situation to which they know the answer. The fact that the member had dealt with similar issues before did not matter. Nor did his position of leadership or presumed authority. No member and no leader of the Horns has the authority to deal with any issue as an individual. All matters must be decided collectively, using the proper decision-making protocols.

## CLOSING THE CIRCLE: CONCEPTUALIZING BLACKFOOT GOVERNANCE

The historical record and the existing scholarly literature conceive of *Siiksikaawa* governance as having had three separate yet interdependent levels: the clan, its chief and head men; the nation and its council of chiefs, its peace chief and its war chief; and, the Confederacy which had no separate governing authority. In other words, traditional governance is presented in terms of a chief who presided over the sub-national clan and who represented that sub-national unit in a council which presided over each of the nations which comprised the Confederacy. Each of the national councils was headed by a chief and assisted in governing by various societies. Societies administered the executive orders and directives of the chief vis-á-vis all matters that affect the nation as a whole. War chiefs replaced the entire governmental process during times of crisis or perceived crisis.

As I have argued, Blackfoot governance also involves Bundles and societies, not just the clan leadership or 'chiefs' as identified in the existing literature. Nonetheless, clan

leaders were an integral part of governance both at the level of the clan and at the level of the nation. Thus, the way Blackfoot political system has been described in the existing western-eurocentric literature is inaccurate, mainly because it is incomplete. Yet, even the incomplete description of governance offered by the existing western-eurocentric literature provides a means by which one can conceptualize traditional Blackfoot governance; as the often told story of Henday's first encounter with the Confederacy attests, the Blackfoot are a people of many chiefs (*a 'kainaawa*).

As it has been explained to me, there are two ways to conceptualize traditional Blackfoot governance and politics, *okahn* and *a 'kainaawa*, both of which will be useful in understanding how traditional governance was operationalized. Henday's explanation of Blackfoot society, governance and politics as consisting of many chiefs is accurate. As my discussion of clans, Bundles and societies attests, there were many chiefs (both *nina* and *nah 'a*) and all people who held positions of leadership in any of the three structures together constituted governance. Add to this the fact that leadership was situational and dependent on or part of the structures themselves, and it becomes even clearer why *a 'kainaawa* is a valid conceptualization of Blackfoot governance. There were many leaders (actual and potential) and many decision-making structures. Similarly, *okahn* is a valuable, culturally-generated means of explaining and conceptualizing governance. It explains and defines the positions, roles and responsibilities of both the many chiefs and the three structures from which these chiefs emanate. *Okahn* illustrates Blackfoot governance as a whole; not as three separate, independent and autonomous structures of governance but as *a 'kainaawa* existing together as one, one nation, one camp circle, one system of governance, one *okahn*.

Despite the fact that there are so many chiefs and three distinct structures of governance, there was order in the *okahn* and little chaos, anarchy, competition or domination among the various leaders and the structures of governance. As I understand it, order began with or emanated from Creator and Creators' teachings. As the physical

and abstract manifestations of these teachings, Bundles (and Bundle carriers) helped to create and maintain this order. The *Natoas* Bundle was responsible for bringing the *okahn* (and its structures) to the *Niitsitapi*. Each of the three Bundles set forth a philosophy, guiding principles, and direction for the Confederacy. Therefore, Bundles provided the framework or structure of governance, and they also provided all leaders and all people with a philosophical and spiritual foundation for a good life and they provided direction to leadership by operationalizing and demonstrating good decisions and good practices.

Guided by the physical and abstract manifestations of the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle, the Beaver Bundle and the Sundance Bundle, and guided by the decisions and practices of the Bundle carriers, the societies were charged with operationalizing the teachings and philosophies of the Confederacy. As the living transmitters of knowledge, societies had many responsibilities. They were to ensure and maintain: the educational and spiritual structures; ensure discipline, structure and order; operationalize the philosophy, teachings, decisions of the Bundles and their carriers; administer the teachings of Creator; and, interpret and teach the principles that guide life within the circle. Though each society was quite independent, having its own structure and functions, they were woven together in interdependence and presumed hierarchy. The teachers and helpers in one society were also members in another. Each was guided by the directives and teachings of Creator. Each was assisted in performing its mandate by the Horns and the *Motokix*. Thus, Bundles provided the framework, foundation, philosophy and direction for governance. The societies were charged with operationalizing the teachings of the Bundles, teaching, guiding and disciplining the nation, and seeing to the nations' and the Confederacy's continued existence by providing good leadership and making good decisions.

Clan leaders were charged with the responsibility for actualizing decisions of the nation within their local community and for meeting the day-to-day needs of their local community, be it a clan, a collection of clans or a sub-clan. Thus, while clans and their

leaders were the basic unit of governance, as is claimed in the existing literature, clan leaders ('chiefs') were not the sole source, structure or instrument of governance. Rather, they were part of an intertwined web of relationships and responsibilities and as a constituent part of a system of governance grounded in situational leadership.

Just how intertwined this system was, is demonstrated by the fact that clan leaders were not simply part of the day-to-day administration of the decisions of the *okahn*. Nor were they simply charged with the responsibility of making day-to-day decisions vis-a-vis clan decision making structures and protocols. Clan leaders were also active participants in all realms of governance as they were an integral part of the consultation process which facilitated the decision-making capacities in all three structures of governance. Moreover, clan leaders (both *nina* and *nah 'a*) typically also were involved in societies, usually as members of the Horn society or the Buffalo Woman's society, and were often Bundle carriers.

The idea that leadership is situational is a constant theme throughout my discussion of my understanding of traditional Blackfoot governance. Governance was based on the premise that leadership, structures, politics and all social relations are fluid and in constant flux (as is the world around them). Based on the belief that flux (internal and external demands, pressures and influences) is constant, traditional Blackfoot governance was an attempt to establish peace and good order in a manner consistent with the nature of the world in which they lived. The idea of flux was therefore inherent in traditional Blackfoot governance. Leaders had different responsibilities and personal capacities. Different situations demanded different leadership. Day-to-day leadership was dependent upon the nature of the situation. Thus, the people and structures that had the right attributes and qualities to meet the demands of that situation were deemed responsible for providing governance.

Reliance on situational leadership, or leadership by those who were most able to meet the immediate needs of the community, however, should not be equated with chaos or the

lack of sustained governmental structures and protocols. Rather, traditional Blackfoot governance had constant structure and order. In fact it was the structures and protocols that allowed for flexibility and the situational predominance of a specific structure of governance. Thus, protocols and procedures created the possibility for order, balance and harmony in *okahn* despite flux or the constantly changing political and economic environment (external and internal pressures, influences and demands).

Situational leadership allowed different structures of governance to engage their responsibilities to varying degrees at different times. Situational leadership, however, did not nullify the roles and responsibilities of the structures of government who were not actively engaging their responsibilities. As I understand it, the structures of governance affiliated with clans were not (typically) dominant within the traditional or camp circle of the nation. Nonetheless, clan structures were still an integral part of governance because their leadership were commonly involved in the other structures of governance, and clan structures were utilized in the consultation and consensus-building protocols and procedures of both Bundles and societies. Moreover, as I understand it, all structures acted interdependently and interchangeably as decision-makers, supporters and advisors. It must be remembered, however, that each of these structures had different roles and responsibilities vis-a-vis governance or the types of decisions they made, their capacity and responsibility for, and role in, enforcement, and the nature of their leadership roles and responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, Bundles set forth a framework and philosophy for governance and provided guidance and decisions on certain issues. Societies acted as transmitters of knowledge and provided guidance, direction and discipline to the nation and on matters of importance to the nation. Clans met the day-to-day needs of the localized community and enforced the decisions of the nation. While together these structures constituted a

whole, and a system which would not function without each of its constituent structures, many of my teachers perceive a hierarchy of structures. What is interesting in their discussions of a 'hierarchy of structures', is that the hierarchy is perceived and explained differently by different individuals. Most perceive the societies or more accurately the Horns (and to a lesser extent the *Motokix*) as having been the true decision-makers, and the centre of governance (although not the literal centre of *okahn*). Others suggested that the clan leaders were the predominant decision-makers. Still others suggested that Bundles were the centre of both the *okahn* literally and politically.

Interestingly, this debate coincided with national affiliation. For example, many *Pikani* explained traditional governance in terms of Bundles believing Bundles and Bundle carriers were the true decision makers, while societies acted as the administrative branch of governance and societies and clans functioned to enforce those decisions. By contrast, several of my teachers from *Siksika* perceived the clan leaders as having constituted the main and most predominant structure of governance operationalized through a council of clan leaders and a national chief. While several of my teachers explained that this council of clan leaders was synonymous with the Horn society, I am not totally convinced for two reasons. First, it is possible that internal differentiation existed within the Confederacy. Second, it is possible that the so-called 'chief and council' was actually a misrepresentation of the Horn society.

In raising these contentions, by no means do I mean to invalidate, disregard or disrespect the teachings of the Elders. Nor do I think that the way in which I see the circle unfolding is a more accurate portrayal of reality. It is simply how I see traditional Blackfoot governance and interpret the internal debates over internal differentiation and the national chief and council. The way I see it, clans were represented in every society including the Horns. So, while the Horns accommodated the clan structure and may be viewed as a national and even a Confederal council that supported and accommodated clan

representation, it is likely that a national council of clan leaders also developed along side of and independent of societies.

I base this position both in the teachings of some of the Elders, and the written tradition which presents this council as constituting traditional Blackfoot governance. While there might well have been an ad hoc council of clan representatives throughout history, I believe the institution or structure of Chief and council owes its emergence and continued existence to colonialism. More explicitly, the council probably owes its existence as a structure of governance to those who deemed it necessary to have one spokesperson for the nation and thus, created the idea of there being one national chief responsible for all things.

This contention is supported in the oral tradition, for I have been told many times that chiefs were the creation of explorers such as Henday and the Hudson's Bay Company traders. I also find support for this idea in the existing literature, for these anthropologists, ethnologists, missionaries, explorers and traders were not imagining the existence of a national or peace chief and council. They were explaining what they saw. Furthermore, the more recent biographical literature on predominant chiefs also provides grounding for the idea that this is a recent institution.[61] This interpretation explains how it is that the chiefs' relationship to the Europeans and European's favouring of these individuals indirectly and directly resulted in their ability to gain a position of influence in the nation. This, despite the fact that they had not succeeded in doing so using the standard means of aspiring to and obtaining predominance, influence and responsibilities (i.e. societies, Bundles and to a lesser extent the clans).[62] It is important then, to

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[61] Hugh A. Dempsey, Red Crow: Warrior Chief, (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishing, 1980).

[62] Here I am thinking of Chiefs Red Crow and Crowfoot. Both of these leaders had favoured relationships with key traders, and as a result of this status vis-à-vis the Europeans, both were able to act as national spokespeople and gain positions of power which became institutionalized as a result of colonization and the interference of the Canadian government.

recognize the influences colonialism has had on traditional Blackfoot governance, and the possibility that there exists inter-national divergency.

Traditional Blackfoot governance can and should be understood and conceptualized in terms of *a'kainaawa* and *okahn*. Doing so recognizes that governance existed where most Europeans typically saw only anarchy and chaos. As Elders have said, peace and good order was and, to some extent, continues to be created and maintained through traditional structures, processes and protocols. In this chapter, I have begun to explain in a very cursory and linear fashion the structures, processes and protocols involved in *okahn*, and the roles and responsibilities of the many chiefs. It is clear that order is created and maintained by the three structures of governance working together in a harmonious fashion and in a way which incorporates and responds to a constant state of flux. Viewed in terms of situational leadership, this system of governance is designed to meet the needs of *Niitsitapi* at every level of social organization from the extended family, clan, nation on through to the Confederacy.

# CHAPTER 4

## INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE FROM A EUROCENTRIC PERSPECTIVE:

## 'IMAGINARY INDIANS' AND 'PRIMITIVE SOCIETIES'

## IN ANTHROPOLOGY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

According to Mark Dickerson and Tom Flanagan, the Blackfoot diverge from the

'norm' with respect to how government is conceptualized in political science:

> In the so-called primitive government of tribal societies, there is little or no
> specialized structure. Necessary activities are performed by all qualified
> members of the tribe, usually males who have passed the age of maturity.
> As required, they hear and settle disputes, decide when to travel or rest,
> punish lawbreakers, and fight to defend the tribe. Good examples are the
> tribes of native peoples, such as the Sioux and Blackfoot, that once roamed
> the great plains of North America. There were tribal chiefs, but they did
> not wield the coercive power we today associate with government. ...
> Indeed, during much of the year the tribe was split into small wandering
> bands that were little more than extended families. A specialized structure
> of government existed only when the families assembled for collective
> action, such as the buffalo hunt ... but when the hunt was over, this
> primitive apparatus of government disappeared. ...
>
> From now on, when we speak of government we mean this sort of
> enduring, specialized structure that is found in all complex societies.
> Another word meaning much the same thing is state ...There is no such
> thing as a society without government, at least without the process of
> government, but it is quite proper to speak of a *stateless society*. Indeed,
> that is a common way of describing societies such as the Sioux or
> Blackfoot, which had no or little specialized structure of government.[1]

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[1] Mark O. Dickerson and Thomas Flanagan, *An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach*, (Toronto: Methuen, 1986), pp. 12-13.

For Flanagan and Dickerson, and others in political science, government is synonymous with the state and the study of government within political science is thus generally restricted to the study of the "enduring, specialized structure that is found in all complex societies."[2] Accordingly, political science does not study 'primitive government' because it is not classified as 'true government' since it lacks those attributes typically associated with government. While there is no denying that the *Siiksikaawa* was a stateless society prior to colonization, Dickerson and Flanagan's characterization of the Blackfoot political tradition is incorrect. The Blackfoot *had* specialized structures, 'necessary activities' *were not* "performed by all qualified [male] members of the tribe"[3] and the specialized structures *did not* disappear when 'the buffalo hunt or collective action was completed'. The existence of such specialized structures, however, does not mean that the traditional Blackfoot political system is synonymous with state-based government as it is understood within western-eurocentric thought.

As explained previously, the Blackfoot world view is predicated on an understanding of power as an individualized expression of Creation, one which explicitly denies power as understood in the dominant western-eurocentric tradition. It is a political tradition without the coercive structures of power, not because it failed to develop political institutions, but because *Siiksikaawa chose not to develop* coercive and hierarchical governmental structures. Therefore, it is not that the Blackfoot lacked 'government' because they lacked specialized institutions and the statist structures which Dickerson and Flanagan equate with government. It is simply a matter of having a different political tradition, a different way of organizing relationships, a different way of constructing specialized political structures, and a different way of conceptualizing government. Thus, the presumption of universal applicability in which government is conceptualized in

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[2] Ibid, p. 13.

[3] Ibid, p. 12.

political science must be 'destabilized' and a post-colonial understanding of government, must emerge which recognizes the existence and legitimacy of different political traditions.

Recognition and acceptance of difference is imperative: the Blackfoot political system is not synonymous with western-eurocentric or state-based government, but it is nevertheless government as it is understood within the Blackfoot intellectual tradition and Indigenist thought. As I understand it, the Elders conceive of Blackfoot government as a undifferentiated part of the circle of life or as *a 'kainaawa* (the many chiefs or all the people). Despite the fact that the *Siiksikaawa* had government, because the Blackfoot conceive of government as an undifferentiated part of *okahn* and the larger circle of life and because *Siiksikaawa* government exists as part of a separate and distinct political tradition, my use of western-eurocentric terminology is problematic. Because the eurocentric thinker is likely to equate 'government' with western-eurocentric statist uses of the term. Thus, in an attempt to differentiate between these two political traditions, I use *governance* to refer to government as it is understood within the traditional *Siiksikaawa* political system.[4]

Given that *Siiksikaawa* governance is 'government', and that political science must be destabilized in order to 'bring Blackfoot political traditions in', how does one proceed? It is not enough to recognize that the structures of *okahn* constitute governance in the Blackfoot context since my institutional description does not explain how Blackfoot governance is to be understood. Nor does it show how the 'Indigenous' can be 'brought in' without perpetuating misunderstanding and intellectual colonization. Moreover, description is not analysis. My explanation of Blackfoot structures of governance in the previous chapter is insufficient for conveying an understanding of a political system, its development and its operation. Thus, how does one engage in a study of Indigenous political traditions? What conceptual, theoretical and analytical approaches could be used

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[4] The term governance and its utilization in this dissertation will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

to study, analyze, theorize and conceptualize Blackfoot governance? Is it possible to do so using the analytical approaches and theoretical frameworks developed in previous studies of Indigenous political traditions?

In this chapter, I consider this possibility, by scanning the approaches used previously in political science and political anthropology. I do this to explore if a trustworthy understanding of traditional Blackfoot governance can be built using the analytical tools of these disciplines. More specifically, this chapter explores the questions: How do we study, understand, explain, analyze and theorize Indigenous forms of governance once Indigenous political traditions have been brought into political science? How do we ensure that a trustworthy understanding is attained? How do we ensure that western disciplinary knowledge and its assumed universalisms are destabilized and decolonized?

I have suggested that a trustworthy account of Indigenous political traditions is best attained by using Henderson's ecological context approach. Nonetheless, to substantiate my choice it is necessary to discuss why I consider existing approaches to the study of Indigenous political traditions to be inadequate. Hence, this chapter functions as a literature review in which I outline major trends in how Aboriginal governance has been conceptualized previously. I also expose the significant shortcomings in the existing literature and the ways in which Indigenous politics is studied which led me to my choice. Because of the enormity of this task, I provide a partial scan of the literature and its major trends and their deficiencies, beginning with anthropology and culminating with a brief discussion of political science. I argue that this literature has been unsuccessful in building a trustworthy understanding of Indigenous political traditions, and that the approaches currently used in the study of Indigenous politics are insufficient. I conclude this chapter by asking if there are any acceptable western-eurocentric approaches that can be used in my study of Indigenous political traditions, specifically traditional Blackfoot governance.

# THE 'INDIANS' IN ANTHROPOLOGY: UNDERSTANDING PRIMITIVISM

As Kuper explains:

> The idea of primitive social structure which crystallized in the late
> nineteenth century was remarkably simple. Primitive society was
> originally an organic whole. ... There were no families in the accepted
> sense. Women and goods were held communally by the men in each
> group. Marriage took the form of regular exchanges between them. The
> groups worshipped ancestor spirits. These social forms, no longer extant,
> were preserved in languages (especially kinship terminologies) and served
> in the ceremonies of primitive peoples. After countless generations this
> system gave way to a form of society based on territorial units, the family
> and private property and, eventually, the state.[5]

Anthropologists have long concerned themselves with the study of politics and

governance in 'primitive' societies. Since the 'age of exploration', many explorers,

traders, missionaries, adventurers and amateur anthropologists have written extensively

about the 'New World' and its peoples. Many produced journals, letters and

publications which included only brief mention of Indigenous politics. Others

contributed to the creation of the 'imaginary Indian' (both the savage and the noble

savage) and developed an ideology of 'primitivism'. Despite this long intellectual history,

the creation of the field of political anthropology is credited to Lewis Henry Morgan

whose 'scientific' study of the Haudenosaunee (League of the Ho-de'no-sau-nee,

Iroquois, 1851) inspired Engels and Marx.

Given that my purpose is to demonstrate the value of using James (sákéj) Youngblood

Henderson's theory of ecological contexts to study Indigenous political traditions, it is

not my intent to provide a synthesis of the long-standing tradition of studying the

politics and governance of American Indians within anthropology. Indeed, an intellectual

history of the political anthropology and its corresponding conceptual frameworks and

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[5] Adam Kuper, *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformation of an Illusion*, (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 231

analytical tools has already been written by Joan Vincent.[6] Thus, the purpose of my discussion of the intellectual history of political anthropology is limited to demonstrating that a new approach is necessary for a post-colonial analysis of Blackfoot governance to emerge. Therefore, I do not attempt to reproduce the work of Vincent.

Within the parameters of a limited scan of this enormous body of knowledge and how it portrays Indigenous politics, this chapter begins with a brief discussion of some of the dominant scholars, showing how they conceptualized Indigenous political traditions and identifying some of the intellectual tools which they used to explain Indigenous governance. In so doing, I will also draw attention to the idea or ideology of 'primitivism' and the role that it played in both the development of political anthropology and how Indigenous political traditions were constructed by anthropologists. Following my limited scan of political anthropology, I proceed with a brief discussion of how Indigenous politics has been dealt with in political science and I conclude this chapter by exploring other western-eurocentric approaches that might be used in my study of *Siiksikaawa* governance.

## MORGAN AND THE FOLLOWERS OF EVOLUTIONISM

Probably the most renowned and influential of all amateur anthropologists in the English-speaking Americas is Lewis Henry Morgan; a lawyer, business man, and lay-preacher who lived in Rochester and worked mainly amongst the Iroquoian in the later half of the nineteenth century. Although Morgan is known for his studies of the *Haudenosaunee*,[7] he is most known for his theorizing of the 'primitive' based on evolutionism and his application of Darwin to the study of Indigenous politics.[8]

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[6] Joan Vincent, *Anthropology and Politics: Visions, Traditions and Trends*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990).

[7] Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee, or Iroquois*, (Rochester: Sage & Bros, 1851).

[8] Lewis Henry Morgan, *Ancient Society: Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarianism to Civilization*, (New York: Holt, 1877).

Although not supported by Charles Darwin's doctrines, social Darwinism became the history of 'winners and losers'. Losers, or Indigenous peoples, were unlikely to evolve because they were a 'dying breed'.[9] Europeans, by contrast, were the selected race for they were the civilized or evolved 'species'. Social Darwinism and scientific racism altered how Indigenous peoples were viewed in international and domestic law and provided a justification of colonization. Social Darwinism and scientific racism also promoted and enabled the invention of the doctrine of the 'primitive' or 'primitive societies' and other similar evolutionist doctrines that were absorbed into the social sciences. These doctrines defined the very existence of 'primitive' government as an impossibility.

The history of these doctrines explains why Indigenous peoples are widely perceived as having no government and why Indigenous politics came to be excluded from the study of the 'civilized' traditions in political science. Indigenous politics was relegated to anthropology because Indigenous political traditions were viewed as 'primitive' and so completely separate and different from the 'civilized' traditions of the European states. 'Primitive societies' were seen as inherently different than civilized societies for they were based on kinship (blood) not citizenship, sovereignty and territoriality.[10] Moreover, 'primitive' and 'civilized' were hierarchically organized by the evolutionary theory imposed by scientific racism, which defined evolution teleologically as the progression from 'savage' to 'barbarian' to 'civilized'.

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[9] Kuper, op. cit., pp. 1-7. It should be noted that there is great disagreement amongst social Darwinists or proponents of scientific racism, and evolutionists. While social Darwinists, such as Spencer, tend to believe that inferior races were 'dying breeds' who would die off regardless as to the extent of their contact with the superior (Aryan) race, evolutionists typically viewed social transformation and the evolution of 'savages' into 'civilized' societies as a natural progression. This distinction will be further clarified in the following chapter as it addresses the manner in which evolutionists have conceptualized Indigenous political traditions within the existing anthropological literature.

[10] Ibid., pp. 6-9. It should be noted that the disciplinary assumptions of social anthropology have changed with time. Particularly since post-modernism was introduced and gained predominance, anthropology has become associated not with the study of the 'primitive' but the study of all societies as the scope of inquiry has been broadened and the ideology of primitivism has declined in influence.

Throughout his career, Morgan conceived of Indigenous politics in terms of kin-relationships and argued that the type of kin-relationships that were dominant within a given society (family, clan, individual, nation) directly corresponded with a society's level of political development. Expanding on this idea, Morgan, who "was to prove the most influential of those who developed the anthropological idea of primitive society,"[11] perceived evolution in Darwinian terms and developed an elaborate system of classifying kin-relationships, which he understood as blood-based political relationships. He purported to map the political development of all peoples of the world on this basis. Morgan argued that, "[i]t can now be asserted upon convincing evidence that savagery preceded barbarism in all of the tribes of mankind as barbarism is known to have preceded civilization. The history of the human race is one in source, one in experience, and in progress."[12] Based on this assertion and the desire to prove his hypothesis, Morgan argued that political systems and political development could be studied via kin-relationships and the types of property relationships which certain kinship systems enabled (collective versus individual). Thus, societies exhibiting similar kinship systems, such as the Iroquois and the Ojibway, could be classified together in terms of their level of political development, regardless of variations in forms of political systems. To reiterate, this is presumed possible because the development of social relationships, from those based on blood to those based on territory, defined the stages of political development or Morgan's Social Darwinist, teleological history of savagery, barbarianism and civilization.

While Morgan is credited as being the father of political anthropology in the United States, as a field it owes its development to the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology for which most of early research into Indigenous politics was completed in the nineteenth century in order to control Indians. Headed by Indian Wars veteran Major John Wesley Powell, the

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[11] Ibid., p. 42.

[12] Morgan, *Ancient Society: Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarianism to Civilization*, op. cit., p. 6.

Bureau set out in the 1880s to continue the work of Morgan, to incorporate "Native American political institutions within the political bounds of an expansive U.S."[13] and to 'capture the Indians on paper' before they vanished forever. Given the reasons for which the research was done, it is not surprising that the Bureau 'catalogued' some of the most extensive studies of Indian politics ever written.

The Bureau of Ethnology, however, went far beyond simply 'capturing the Indian on paper', for some of its work is as analytical as it is descriptive. For example, based on his study of Wyondotte government, Powell argued that all Indigenous societies were comprised of and structured around four 'groups', social formations or units; gens or clans, phratries, tribes and families or households, each of which was responsible for performing a different function of government. Powell defined the function of Indian government to be the preservation of individual rights and the enforcement of collectively defined duties. Similarly, he argued that the various functions performed by each of these societal groupings was directly dependent on the type of right being preserved or duty being enforced (i.e. familial, personal, collective, property or spiritual).[14] These societal structures, Powell argued, also fulfilled a governmental role by mediating controversy and helping to maintaining a peaceful 'kinship state', and along with kinship, muted conflict by enforcing what Powell called the two 'savage laws' "(1) controversy should be prevented; and (2) controversy should be terminated."[15]

To the idea that Indigenous polities comprised four, interwoven societal groupings, each of which performed a function of government, Powell added the belief that kinship was the foundation of these four interdependent social units. "The fabric of Indian

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[13] Vincent, op. cit., p. 39.

[14] John Wesley Powell, "Wyendotte Government: A Short Study in Tribal Society" in *First Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881), pp. 59-69.

[15] John Wesley Powell, "On Kinship and the Tribe" in *Third Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1881-1882), p. vii.

society is a complex tissue of kinship. The warp is made of streams of kinship blood, and the woof of marriage ties."[16] For Powell, deeply rooted in the primitivist ideology of Morgan and Spencer's Social Darwinism, the presumed primacy of kinship differentiated traditional Indian societies from more evolved societies. Hence, he asserted, the survival of Indigenous peoples was dependent on their evolution from a 'kinship polity' to a 'body politic'.

Morgan's evolutionist theory of primitivism argued that the primacy of kinship, or the kinship state, differentiated Indigenous (blood) societies from European (territorial) states. This theory was the foundation of all work at the Bureau and it also became a fundamental construct in political anthropology. According to Vincent, James Owen Dorsey, an employee of Powell, was the first to provide a clear delineation of this theoretical construct in *Omaha Sociology* (1883). He defined the kinship state as "one in which the governmental functions are performed by men whose functions are determined by kinship, and rules relating to kinship and reproduction of the species constitute the larger body of law."[17] While this appears to be a departure from Powell's 'theory' of government within 'pre-political' (read: traditional) Indigenous societies, it is not because Dorsey continued to recognize the primacy of kinship and argued that all specialized roles within Omaha society were defined by kinship.

## BOAS & THE ANTI-EVOLUTIONISTS

These problematic evolutionist and primitivist assumptions of these early anthropologists are problematic continued to define the work of the Bureau of Ethnology well into the early twentieth century. After all, the goal of the Bureau's research was, as Vincent suggests, to reconstruct each nation's "political organization in order to place

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[16] Powell, "Wyendotte Government: A Short Study in Tribal Society", op. cit., pp. 68-69.

[17] James Owen Dorsey, *Omaha Sociology*, (New York: Johnson Reprints, 1970), p. 215.

them within a strategic evolutionary schema"[18] prior to their presumed 'disappearance'.

The primitivist orientations of the followers of Morgan (the Bureau and the Smithsonian

Institute), however, did not, go unchallenged. Adam Kuper describes this challenge:

> At the turn of the century, the increasingly dominant Anglo-American
> anthropology was challenged by a distinctive German ethnological
> tradition. The central issue was the validity of evolutionism. This
> engagement was fought out not only in Europe but in the United States,
> where Boas and his students and his students were ranged against the
> disciples of Lewis Henry Morgan. ... the Boasian critique of evolutionism
> was enormously significant; and as American anthropology grew, so the
> Boasian critique became increasingly influential.[19]

Beginning in the 1880s, Franz Boas argued that the classification schemes that had

been developed by the followers of Morgan's evolutionism, primitivism and Darwinian

anthropology did nothing to explain Indigenous peoples and their traditions. Simply put,

he asserted that 'classification is not explanation'.[20] Studies done for the sole purpose of

advancing primitivistic ideas or Social Darwinian were not acceptable nor were they

scholarly. Boas' research amongst the Kwakiutl, moreover, showed no validity in these

theoretical hypotheses. Boas asserted that evolution was not a simple teleological

progression and so there was no essential Indian social formation or universal standard.

Each 'specimen' had to be studied independently and ethnographically, not according to a

pre-determined theoretical grid. Thus, Boas promoted a very different research

programme than the Bureau, mainly because he was an ethnographer and was not

interested in propagating a myth of political and social evolution.

Boas encouraged students of anthropology to do research that met two main

objectives:

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[18] Vincent, op. cit., p. 76.

[19] Kuper, op. cit., p. 125.

[20] Franz Boas, "Race, Language, Culture", in George W. Stocking (ed.), *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 61-67.

> One was ethnographic and documentary. There were vast gaps in the knowledge of the North American Indians, and these had to be filled. The students were expected to combine research in linguistics, folklore, material culture and social organization. The final goal was to establish the local historical relations between aboriginal cultures. The second task was theoretical, or, rather, critical. The facts had to be allowed to speak for themselves ... In particular, the Boasians were determined to root out evolutionist schemas and crude natural science classifications.[21]

While Boas' anti-primitivism is an important theoretical contribution in and of itself, it was his student, Robert Lowie, who made the greatest Boasian contribution to the understanding of Indigenous political traditions.[22] Writing in the 1920s and working independently, Lowie contributed greatly to the understanding of Indigenous governance within political anthropology. Lowie's descriptive work produced two main contributions to the growing body of knowledge.

First, although Lowie agreed with the generally accepted proposition that kinship was the basis of the 'governmental organism' (the idea of the kinship state), he argued that blood was not the only basis of governance. Other factors contributed to solidarity such as the 'agencies' which Powell addressed.[23] This is of great importance given contextual realities of Indigenous societies, despite the fact that Lowie's discussion of kinship leaves much to be desired for it does not address the association between relationships and governance.

Second, accepting the idea that Aboriginal societies (even those lacking political institutions) had their own 'functional equivalents' to institutionalized governance, but felt this did not go far enough in explaining the relationship between 'governmental

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[21] Kuper, op. cit., p. 143.

[22] It should be noted that while Boas encouraged anti-evolutionist, ethnographic research, several students (including Margaret Mead) continue to explore evolutionism, primitivism and universalism in their ethnographic and theoretical scholarship.

[23] Robert Lowie, *Primitive Society*, (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1920), 350-396

agents' and the society at large.[24] Drawing upon his own fieldwork among the Dakota, Lowie argued that not all American Indian societies were the same. Rather, they differed on the degree to which 'democratic individualism' (contingent authority) was entrenched within the social fabric (collective memory and structure). This resulted in different political traditions, ranging from the highly decentralized egalitarian practices of the plains to centralized and stratified oligarchic 'monarchies' of the Natchez and the 'ancient civilizations' of Central America.[25] This second contribution is of utmost importance because it recognizes the existence of various levels of governance (not simply the tribe) and recognizes the importance of contingent authority rather than conceptualizing power only in terms of hierarchies, coercive authority.

## THE DEBATE CONTINUES OVER PRIMITIVISM

Despite the worked of scholars such as Boas and Lowie, primitivism and evolutionism remains at the core of the intellectual history of political anthropology. In the 1960s, a belief in evolutionism and primitivism re-emerged with particular vigor as scholars once again sought to construct theories addressing the evolution of politics from the pre-political 'primitive' polity to the modern state. Some, like Elman Service, in *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, even attempted to take evolutionism one step further and to explain the development of Indigenous polities from their formative roots in the animal kingdom. While I fundamentally disagree with the approach taken by evolutionists and their teleological theories, there is much to be gained from this body of knowledge.

Service makes a number of important contributions that may be of use in conceptualizing governance in pre-colonial non-state Indigenous polities. Service argued

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[24] Ibid., p. 358.

[25] Robert Lowie, *The Origin of the State*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1927).

that evolution is an adaptive process or a reaction to environmental, cultural and historical factors, but one which needs specific formative events to move it in the direction of centralized authority and state-building. As a result, Service actually placed Indigenous political traditions outside the realm of the western-eurocentric tradition. Although he still perceived Indigenous polities as analogous to the 'ancient ancestors' of the western-eurocentric tradition, he argued that most Indigenous people would never have evolved into state-based polities because the specificity of their adaptation to cultural, environmental and historical factors precluded such a development.[26] As a result, Service actually looked at Indigenous political traditions as being separate from and different than the western-eurocentric political traditions.

Though still accepting the construct of the kinship state, Service argued that kinship and individualism had to be understood independently of how the western world view them. He argued that kinship in Indigenous societies refers to the "web of all interpersonal relationships in a community"[27] and it should be viewed as an ideology, a system of governance and a means of integrating individuals and societal groupings.

Scholars continue to react to the scholarship of evolutionists such as Service. As with the Boasian critique of Morgan, scholars such as Max Gluckman continue to react to the overly simplistic theories of evolution as constructed by primitivist and evolutionist scholars such as Service and the overt eurocentrism or racism upon which their theoretical and conceptual insights have been based. For example, Service argued that Indigenous political systems in the Americas and possibly all primitive societies evolved in the same manner. Like Morgan in the mid-nineteenth century, modern evolutionists claim that polities can be categorized according to their stage of political evolution with no information about the polity's pre-colonial history. They assume one needs to know

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[26] Elman R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 5-8.

[27] Ibid., p. 18.

only where they lived on the continent or how their camp was organized to determine whether they were a pre-political 'tribal' society or a 'primitive' state or chiefdom.

Rejecting evolutionism, scholars such as Gluckman assert that Indigenous systems of governance were extremely complex and diversified. Despite this diversity, however, Gluckman agrees with previous scholars to the extent that he too asserts that kinship was a primary foundation of social organization throughout much of the Americas. Gluckman proceeds to reconstruct how kinship is conceived, however, by adding that territoriality is a basis of both political organization and political identity. According to Gluckman, the idea that kinship is the basis of social structure holds little value as a theory of political development or an explanation of governance. He argues that kinship has been misunderstood and that it is really about the fictitious genealogical links that form the basis of Indigenous polities since "they absorb people of alien stock and base their association on territorial lines."[28] The 'kinship idiom' is therefore, not about the politicization of the family or using the family as the unit of politics. Rather, kinship is an expression of intersecting multiple relationships within a given territory and within a peoples, defined in relationship to a particular territory. For Gluckman, kinship or the intersecting multiple relationships is a means of transgressing divisive allegiances or 'conflicts of loyalty' within a society and thus, kinship is used to control disputes. Consequently, it allows a style of leadership which is not based on subjugation or coercion as intersecting multiple relationships control disputes and maintain order. Thus, Gluckman's conceptualization of kinship and its functions emphasizes the interrelationship between kinship, governance and territoriality, and it introduces territory or territoriality into the discussion of non-state Indigenous governance.

Rejecting political evolutionism because "it assumes a neat progression in the formalization and centralization of political power that does not accord with historic

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[28] Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society*, (Chicago: Aldine, 1965), p. 85.

reality,"[29] Eleanor Leacock describes and theorizes power and political organization in Indian polities. Noting that more research is necessary, Leacock asserts that political organizations of Indigenous polities were different than those that developed in Europe because they were not predicated upon hierarchical structures of power. She concludes, "[n]onetheless as nations, peoples or "tribes", they were well integrated politically, in that they had highly developed principles and practices for effecting group organization and coesion."[30] This is an important point, for in recognizing that fundamental differences exist between the two paradigms, Leacock does not dismiss one as being pre-political or primitive. Instead, of dismissing Indigenous political systems or viewing them in relation to western-eurocentric polities, Leacock attempts to understand this paradigm on its own terms and as such, she departs from the models imposed by her predecessors.

Although her analysis is underdeveloped as it is not the purpose of the article, Leacock does raise a number of interesting ideas. The basis of power and structure in North-Eastern forms of governance was a recognition of the autonomy of both individuals and the sub-units of each nation. Leacock asserts that because autonomy was unquestioned, power and structures must be viewed in terms of influence as they were non-binding. This means that those who did not agree with a decision were not forced to comply with that decision. Nevertheless, Leacock also advances the idea that politics was about 'effecting group organization and coesion'. Given that the coercive use of power was rare or non-existent, Leacock concludes that power could not have been the basis of governance. Rather, she argues, other forces were at play such as kinship, societal groups, 'savage law', democratic individualism and territoriality. While this is by far the most developed and most expansive conceptualization of Indigenous political

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[29] Eleanor Leacock, "Ethnohistorical Investigation of Egalitarian Politics in Eastern North America", in Elizabeth Tooker (ed.), *The Development of Political Organization in Native North America*, (Washington: American Ethnological Society, 1983), p. 17.

[30] Leacock, op. cit., 17.

traditions examined thus far, Leacock's work does not present a clear, logically argued or fully articulated conceptualization of governance.

A more complete theorization of governance which is not fixated on issues of political evolution or primitivism is found in the work of anthropologist Pierre Clastres. In *Society Against the State*, Clastres describes traditional Aboriginal polities as:

> a vast constellation of societies in which the holders of what would elsewhere be called power are actually without power, where the political is determined as a domain beyond coercion and violence, beyond hierarchical subordination; where, in a word, no relationship of command-obedience is in force. This is the major difference in the Indian world, making it possible to speak of the American tribes as a homogenous universe despite the extreme diversity of the cultures moving within it.[31]

This is the most elaborate and inclusive conceptualization of Indigenous political traditions (not restricted to a 'level of primitive development') thus far. But, the real genius of Clastres' work is that he challenges the assertion that traditional Indigenous polities were societies void of power. After suggesting that the political is without power in the Indigenous 'universe' or paradigm, Clastres demonstrates that this proposition is valid only because of how power is conceptualized in the western world and by the eurocentric mind. He concludes that traditional conceptualizations of power are problematic:

> It is not evident to me that coercion and subordination constitute the essence of political power *at all times and in all places*. Consequently, an alternative presents itself: either the classic concept of power is adequate to the reality it contemplates, in which case it must account for non-power wherever it is located; or it is inadequate and must be discarded or transformed.[32]

Perceiving the conceptualization of power as inadequate and in need of transformation, Clastres discusses traditional forms of governance. He conceives of

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[31] Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: The Leader as Servant and the Humane Uses of Power Among the Indians of the Americas*, Robert Hurley (trans.), (New York: Urizen Books, 1974), p. 5.

[32] Ibid., p. 6.

Indigenous polities as characterized by non-coercive forms of power, expressed independently of violence, coercion and hierarchy, possibly in ways not easily decipherable. The most important way in which power is expressed in 'primitive society', according to Clastres, is through the spoken word and not coercive force or mandatory compliance. According to Clastres, power is expressed through speech or the ability to influence others using oration and not hierarchical structures of coercion. As such, he argues that, "language is the very opposite of violence, [and] speech must be interpreted as more than just the privilege of the chief; [but] as the means the group provides itself to maintain power outside of coercive violence."[33]

While I agree with Clastres' analysis and his assertion that "to speak is above all else to possess the power to speak,"[34] he fails to consider speech as a vehicle through which power is exercised traditionally, both in terms of influence (generally) and in terms of consensual decision-making processes. This is because Clastres seems to ignore or be ignorant of the power of story and oration within Indigenous society, except in so far as it is related to the daily orations given by the Chiefs in many of the more 'civilized' 'state-like' societies in South America. Still, having that authority to influence and the authority given to a person's words is indeed an expression of power and a power relationship in and of itself, even though this expression of power is not limited to chiefs as Clastres asserts.

Arguing that speech cannot be separated from discussions of power in either the state or the 'primitive', Clastres asserts that what differentiates the two is the state's ability to determine the relationship between the speech and power. This is why Indigenous polities are actually societies against the state and not simply societies without the

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[33] Ibid., p. 36.

[34] Ibid., p. 128.

state.[35] They are societies against the state because the state links power to speech, through hierarchical authority, coercive power relations and subjugation. Because the state links coercive power to speech, the development of a state was 'impossible' and 'undesirable' for most Indigenous peoples. While the state is said to be the product of the history of class struggle, the state is also that which many Indigenous polities stand against as it is "the instrument that allows the ruling class to bring its violent domination to bear on the dominated classes."[36] This is an important point, for several reasons. First, it recognizes that there exist two separate traditions (societies against the state and the state), and not a single tradition in which Indigenous peoples are the 'primitive ancestors' who either failed to evolve or who were evolving. Second, it provides a means by which to differentiate between the two forms of society and traditions of governance vis-a-vis the state, and thus, different forms of power (coercion and oration) and its relationship to the state.

Though Clastres provides answers to a number of my questions, there are still many that remain unanswered concerning the nature of non-state governance in pre-colonial North America. Moreover, like the anthropologists that preceded him, Clastres has not provided a broadly-focused, analytical framework or theoretical approach which would enable me to provide a post-colonial analysis of traditional Blackfoot governance from the interpreted perspective of the peoples themselves. So, while political anthropologists such as Clastres, Leacock and Service provide useful means of analyzing and theorizing 'power' and 'kinship' and the means by which they are operationalized in Indigenous political systems, they do not provide me with approaches that could be used in my examination of traditional Blackfoot governance. They are either too narrowly focused or

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[35] It should be noted that Clastres does not conceive of societies without the state as being 'incomplete' or as not being 'true societies' as a result. Rather he says that this traditional means of analyzing and categorizing the 'primitive' is simply eurocentric and based on the idea that the civilized state is the only true society.

[36] Ibid., p. 172.

predicated on an understanding of 'Indigenous' as 'primitive'; and they are grounded in a western-eurocentric understanding of the world. Thus, while I draw on some of their ideas, I will not utilize any of the approaches.

Instead of providing a basis from which I could begin to construct a post-colonial framework of analysis from the interpreted perspective of the Blackfoot, political anthropology could only provide tools that would perpetuate misunderstanding and intellectual colonization. Although there are lessons that can be gained from this body of literature and ideas and conceptualizations of governance that can be, political anthropologists do not offer an acceptable approach with which to study the traditional Blackfoot political system, mainly because it cannot escape the primitivism and evolutionism out of which it was born. Most of the anthropological literature that I have read is more intent on explaining why Indigenous peoples do not have 'civilized' forms of government, than describing and analyzing of Indigenous forms of governance. Most of the literature catapults Indigenous political traditions into an evolutionary time warp which classifies governance in accordance with demonstrably fictitious kinship systems, rather than political systems.

Most political anthropologists who studied traditional or pre-colonial Indigenous political traditions were fixated on explaining Indigenous governance as 'primitive'. This is even the case for Boas and his followers, who were fixated on refuting evolutionism and reconstructing the 'primitive' as a non-universal and internally differentiated state of being. Furthermore, much of this literature fails to analyze and theorize political structures in terms of governance or the operationalization of governance as it is focused on kinship structures and categorizing polities within the evolutionary schema. Those who discuss Indigenous political systems fail to provide adequate interpretations and descriptions of these systems which they see through western eyes.

Although this body of literature is helpful in constructing an understanding of Indigenous politics, I conclude that it is too narrowly focused to provide an acceptable

approach that can be utilized in my study of traditional Blackfoot governance. Political anthropology has not provided trustworthy knowledge or post-colonial understandings of Indigenous governance which respects the truth claims of Indigenous peoples and which enables an understanding of governance from the perspective of the peoples themselves. Thus, while much of this body of literature provides an analysis of governance in 'primitive societies', it does not address the nature of governance in actual polities, nor does it provide an acceptable or post-colonial means of analyzing specific Indigenous political systems.

## THE 'INDIAN' IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Modern political science, by and large, has rejected the study of the 'primitive' as polities with their own political traditions. Comparative politics studies the 'primitive' in terms of development and modernization (read: primitivism and evolutionism). Political theory has suffered a form of intellectual amnesia as it denies the 'red roots' of the enlightenment. Canadianists, however, have been forced to grapple with Aboriginal politics because of the 'strange multiplicity' of constitutional visions or 'constitutionalism in an age of diversity' and issues such as self-government. But few scholars have dealt with the proposition that Indigenous peoples had governance prior to colonization. So although 'Indigenous people have been brought into the study of Canadian politics', Canadianists have not really studied 'Indigenous' politics and governance. Instead they mainly have begun to study the interplay between Indigenous people and the settler-state. For example, when Aboriginal politics is addressed in the field's main introductory texts,[37] Aboriginal people are typically portrayed as

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[37] It should be noted that Aboriginal politics is not addressed in all introductory texts, and that the 'level of inclusion' varies from a single page in Gibbins' *Conflict and Unity* to a complete chapter in Whittington and Williams' *Politics in the 1990s*. Roger Gibbins, *Conflict and Unity: An Introduction to Canadian Political Life*, (Scarborough: Nelson, 1990). Michael S. Whittington & Glen Williams, *Canadian Politics in the 1990s*, (Scarborough: Nelson, 1995).

representing an 'ethno-linguistic cleavage'.[38] Meanwhile, self-government is typically

depicted as a claim against the state resulting from historical governmental policies,[39]

contemporary constitutional and policy debates,[40] or as the result of demographic

changes within Aboriginal communities with respect to education, urbanization and

acculturation and the resulting reactions to perceived immorality and injustice of

colonization which has resulted in abnormally high rates of substance abuse, suicide,

incarceration, and unemployment.[41] What is most interesting is how Aboriginal politics

has been shaped and presented in these introductory texts. Depicting Aboriginal politics

as the interaction of Aboriginal people and the state, the existence of Indigenous political

traditions are ignored and the entire pre-colonial - and in some cases the pre-constitutional

- histories of Indigenous people is also ignored.

With few exceptions, even studies of 'Aboriginal governance' focus on the interplay

between Aboriginal peoples and the state and on the operationalization of self-governance

within the confines of the state. Thus, self-governance is rendered as a contemporary (or

future) phenomenon and the past and present existence of Indigenous political traditions

is not acknowledged. For example, in her article, "The Federal-Provincial Power-grid and

Aboriginal Self-Government", Radha Jhappan addresses issues surrounding the

implementation of self-government, focusing only on the reality of implementing self-

governance within a federal system whereby all jurisdictions are currently held by other

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[38] Robert Jackson & Doreen Jackson, *Politics in Canada: Culture, Institutions, Behaviour and Public Policy*, 4th ed., (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1998).

[39] Whittington & Williams, op. cit..

[40] Kathy L. Brock, "Native Peoples on the Road to Self-Government", in Robert M. Krause & R. H. Wagenberg, *Introductory Readings in Canadian Government and Politics*, 2nd ed., (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995).

[41] Rand Dyck, *Canadian Politics: Critical Approaches*, 2nd ed., (Scarborough: Nelson, 1996).

governments, while ignoring the prerogatives of traditional political systems.[42] In *Citizens Plus*, Alan Cairns similarly discusses self-governance as a contemporary political demand which emerged as "... part of a major effort to overturn a historic pattern of inequality between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians."[43] In presenting self-governance only as a contemporary reaction to colonization, Cairns chose to ignore the fact that First Nations were once sovereign nations with their own political traditions and that they continue to have an inherent right to self-determination. Instead, he focuses on the terms of a new relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, suggesting that the way forward will not be grounded in a recognition of parallelism or a modernization of Aboriginal traditions, but on a recognition by the Canadian government of Aboriginal peoples as 'Citizens Plus'. This formulation of 'allowing' Aboriginal people to realize some of their demands, of course maintains "Canadian solidarity firmly based on a common, shared, equally valued citizenship."[44] The only justice for Aboriginal people, for him, must rest on recognizing the 'reality' of colonization as conquest.

While I could easily disagree with the way in which much of the literature has conceived off self-government, what is important to understand is that political science, for the most part, has ignored Indigenous political traditions. This does not mean that the literature looking at current issues such as self-government is insignificant or that the scholarship is worthless because it does not express an Indigenist perspective or acknowledge the existence and relevance of Indigenous political traditions. While I take issue with several authors who have written in this field, and while I believe that some of the authors 'got it wrong' or failed to understand Aboriginal aspirations, this literature

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[42] Radha Jhappan, "The Federal-Provincial Power-grid and Aboriginal Self-Government", in François Rocher & Miriam Smith (eds.), *New Trends in Canadian Federalism*, (Peterborough: Broadview, 1995), pp. 115-185.

[43] Alan Cairns , *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), p. 43.

[44] Ibid., p. 115.

should not be 'tossed aside' or discredited. In fact, this literature has contributed to my understanding of contemporary self-governance and the realities of implementing it within the modern Canadian state. Furthermore, this literature should not be 'tossed aside' simply because it does not address traditional governance, for much of it has as its focus contemporary realities such as federalism; issues which have little or nothing to do with traditional governance.[45] That this body of literature does not deal with Indigenous politics as 'Indigenous' politics does not diminish the quality or the necessity of this scholarship. It does, however, mean that it does not address Indigenous political traditions and so continues the legacy of ignoring Indigenous political traditions within political science. It is also the case that by failing to acknowledge the existence and relevance of Indigenous political traditions, this research fails to grasp fully the aspirations of Indigenous people.

There are some exceptions, however, of scholars who have engaged Indigenous political traditions in their studies of self-government. Primarily, they have done so in two ways: first within a framework defined by the ideology of primitivism and evolutionism; and second, from a framework which rejects primitivism. What follows is a brief review of this diverse body of literature, focusing on how scholars have approached the 'primitive'.

## PRIMITIVISM PERSISTS

While Canadianists have all but excluded those defined as 'primitive', political science has done little to exclude primitivism as an ideology and an approach. The best example of this is the work of Thomas Flanagan. In his most recent book, *First Nations, Second Thoughts*, Flanagan asserts that Indigenous peoples were 'uncivilized' at the time of contact and so claims that, as a consequence of their 'primitiveness', their contemporary

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[45] Jhappan, *op. cit.*

claims to self-government lack historical basis and legal justification.[46] Flanagan asserts

that Europeans brought 'civilization' and thus, governance and politics to the 'Indian'.

Flanagan also suggests that this process of 'civilizing' Indigenous peoples is far from

complete: so Canadians should not 'grant' self-government to the yet 'uncivilized' First

Nations. Instead they should remember their responsibilities to bring 'civilization' to

First Nations.

Flanagan's work rests on a primitivist and evolutionist discourse, and his ideological

stance is the basis of his claimed 'expertise' in the field of Indigenous politics, despite the

fact that he proudly claims never to have visited a reserve. He openly employs

evolutionist concepts, rejecting the existence of Indigenous governance, nationhood, law

and territoriality prior to colonial occupation on the grounds that 'Indians' lacked all

attributes of 'civilization'.[47] Responding to Boldt and Long's article, "Tribal Traditions

and European Western Ideologies: The Dilemma of Canada's Native Indians", Flanagan

argues that nationhood is incompatible with Indigenous societies because nationhood is a

product of western history that is inextricably linked to statehood, an assertion that is

commonly made in his work on Aboriginal politics.[48]

While some political scientists dismiss Flanagan's work as 'pseudo scholarship', thee

support of others shows that the 'imaginary Indian' of the 'white man's imagination' and

the evolutionist and primitivist ideologies continue to exist within the field.[49] Indeed,

they continue to exist because political science is grounded in enlightenment universalism

and its ideology of primitivism. In fact, recent doctorates have been granted for

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[46] Thomas Flanagan, *First Nations, Second Thoughts*, (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2000).

[47] Thomas Flanagan, "Bands, Tribes or Nations?", in *Pimohtewin: A Native Studies e-Journal*, (www.ualberta.ca/~nativest/pim/flanagan.html, 1998).

[48] Thomas Flanagan, "The Sovereignty and Nationhood of Canadian Indians: A Comment on Boldt and Long", in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, XVIII (June, 1985), pp. 367-374.

[49] Taiaiake Alfred, "Of White Heroes and Old Men Talking", in *Windspeaker*, June 2000.

perpetuating this illusion.[50] Greg Poeltzer, for example, provides a more scholarly analysis of pre-colonial Indigenous political traditions using ideas of primitivism. While he *claims* that he recognizes that Aboriginal polities have their own internal 'logic of political development', at the same time Poeltzer rejects the idea that "at the time of first contact with Europeans, indigenous societies were self-governing communities."[51] He asserts that "tribal peoples did not have government" prior to colonization and thus, contemporary claims of self-government are the result of "radical changes in tribal political communities."[52] Given his view that self-government is a recent phenomenon, Poeltzer, proceeds to develop a 'theory of Native self-government' which purports to explain why demands for self-government arose.

Using the Metis settlement at Gift Lake Alberta and the Evenk settlement at Tyanya Siberia as case studies, Poeltzer argues that the idea of self-government is an Aboriginal reaction to modern state-building and the societies which resulted. More specifically, he argues that experiences with state-building have transformed Aboriginal communities and this "transformation of aboriginal communities has introduced state-like conceptions of territoriality and government into indigenous political communities, and has produced an educated aboriginal elite and politicized aboriginal masses."[53] Using the western-eurocentric paradigm as the benchmark by which all other political traditions must be measured, Poeltzer argues that Aboriginal societies did not have government. Thus, by ignoring his own assertion that Aboriginal polities have their own 'logic of political development', and by failing to deal with Aboriginal political traditions as something different from and independent of the western-eurocentric political tradition, Poeltzer is

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[50] Greg Poelzer, *Toward a Theory of Native Self-Government: Canada and Russia in Comparative Perspective*, (Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta, 1996).

[51] Ibid., p. 26.

[52] Ibid., p. 11.

[53] Ibid., p. 3.

able to subjugate and colonize the histories of Aboriginal peoples and sustain the

argument that government did not exist prior to the arrival of Europeans and the state.[54]

## SEEING BEYOND THE 'PRIMITIVE'

Primitivism and evolutionism are endemic within political science as is demonstrated

by the fact that modernization and development theories are predicated on these

ideologies. Nevertheless, there are many scholars who now are attempting to 'see beyond

the primitive' by disengaging themselves from the 'imaginary Indian' and primitivism and

exploring Indigenous governance as 'Indigenous' governance. For example, in his article

entitled, *Public Administration Questions Relating to Aboriginal Self-Government*, C.E.S.

Franks argues "... politics and government in traditional aboriginal societies were not

crude or unsophisticated. The word 'primitive' is not appropriate. In contrast with ...

the use of ridicule to resolve disputes and punish anti-social behaviour, it is the western

law courts and systems of justice and incarceration that are crude, violent and

insensitive."[55] While Franks' study of traditional Indigenous political traditions is based

on the problematic scholarship of anthropologist Diamond Jenness and while his

discussion is overly simplistic, he succeeds in his attempt to escape primitivism and

concludes that Aboriginal Governance is based on an entirely different political tradition.

Franks discusses some of the major differences between traditional, stateless Indigenous

governance and modern state-based governance, such as the lack of specialized

administrative apparatuses and the lack of coercive, hierarchical leadership. Franks,

however, does not provide a systematic way of approaching the study of Indigenous

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[54] By selecting the Metis settlement at Gift Lake Alberta as a case study, Poelzer's hypothesis that government did not exist until confronted with a state-based tradition is compromised. Because the Metis nation is a product of the colonial experience they had no political tradition independent of state-building project, since they did not exist.

[55] C.E.S. Franks, *Public Administration Questions Relating to Aboriginal Self-Government*, (Kingston: Institute of Intergovernmental Relations, 1986), p. 13.

governance that I could have used in this dissertation as the purpose of his study was to demonstrate that Indigenous governance is not new; not to devise a new way of studying it.

The scholars who have been most successful at engaging Indigenous governance as 'Indigenous' governance are Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long. In "Tribal Traditions and European-Western Political Ideologies: The Dilemma of Canada's Native Indians", they examine the compatibility of the concept of sovereignty with 'traditional Indian culture' and the appropriateness of its usage in modern self-government discourse.[56] The authors argue that nationhood is a far better basis for claims of self-government than is sovereignty, which they believe assumes an authoritative, hierarchical ruling entity, statehood and territoriality. Though they subject Aboriginal assertions of sovereignty to western-based theories of sovereignty, Boldt and Long do not sustain their eurocentric analysis of Indigenous politics throughout the article. Instead, they support the idea that Indigenous peoples have a distinct political tradition and that Indigenous peoples conceived of various political concepts in a manner which is incompatible and distinct from normal usage in the western-eurocentric paradigm, both in theory and practice.

While the authors do not attempt to provide an alterNative conceptualization of governance in this article, they do discuss what they see as the main characteristics of Indigenous political traditions; characteristic attributes that both authors have discussed in other publications. In an article which explores the ability of First Nations to incorporate traditional structures of governance into federally sanctioned self-government (i.e. self-government agreements), Long provides a cursory description of traditional Blood and Peigan governance focused on leadership and decision-making practices.[57]

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[56] Menno Boldt & J. Anthony Long, "Tribal Traditions and European-Western Political Ideologies: The Dilemma of Canada's Native Indians", in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, XVII (September 1984), pp. 537-553.

[57] J. Anthony Long, "Political Revitalization in Canadian Native Indian Communities", in *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 23:4, (December, 1990), pp. 751-773.

Long's functional descriptions, while lacking critical analysis, are useful in providing an understanding of how governance operated without coercive, authoritative power relations. Similarly, in *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government*, Boldt provides a thorough examination of leadership and decision-making practices in traditional Indian societies[58] and provides some understanding of the relationship between kinship, spirituality and governance.

Nonetheless, while they address issues of kinship, spirituality, ethics and values in their descriptive discussions of 'traditional governance', Boldt and Long continue to conceive of governance in terms of power relationships, both structurally and distributively. They fail to offer a concrete and explicit conceptualization of politics in traditional Indigenous societies, but they do demonstrate how coercive power relations were essentially nullified through governmental arrangements and practices (such as leadership selection), kinship structures, spirituality, values and ethics. This, despite the fact that their discussion is grounded in western-eurocentric notions of power and a eurocentric conceptualization of governance. These authors do not fully colonize the Indian experience by using the essentialist eurocentric paradigm. Instead they demonstrate how characteristic attributes of western-eurocentric governance were actualized and operationalized in a different tradition. This is evident in Long's discussion of the nature of authority in traditional Indian societies. Defining authority as "the ability to channel the behaviour of others in the absence of the threat or use of sanctions and noting that authority was vested in the Creator, customs and traditions"[59] Long discusses how authority was exercised by the Chiefs and through a consensual

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[58] Boldt generalizes excessively in this text and rather than limiting his discussion to the Blood and the Peigan (as did Long) or recognizing that significant differences existed in the manner in which governance was operationalized amongst Indian nations, Boldt falls victim to the universalisms and essentialisms of eurocentric scholarship. Menno Boldt, *Surviving As Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government*, (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1993).

[59] Long, op. cit, p. 753.

decision making mechanism. Thus, while these authors fail to provide a different conceptualization of governance as it applies to traditional Indian polities, both augment the existing eurocentric definition or understanding of governance to explicate differences between the two traditions and to show how power was operationalized in Indian society. In so doing, they provide a foundation on which to build an understanding of governance in traditional Indigenous societies, despite the fact that the foundation is still eurocentric in orientation. While the authors have not escaped the confines of western-eurocentric thought and its primitivist orientation completely, they do attempt to begin exploring the 'Indigenous' as a political tradition in its own right.

While scholars such as Boldt and Long are attempting to escape the primitivist and evolutionist ideologies endemic within political science, the problem with this body of literature is not simply one of primitivism. The problem is really like a double-edged sword. On the one hand, primitivism allows political scientists to simply dismiss Indigenous political traditions as 'uncivilized' and therefore, non-existent. On the other hand, those who ignore or refute primitivism *may* accept the idea that Indigenous peoples had governance, but their analyses remain eurocentric as do their reconstructions of Indigenous political traditions. Either way this literature is problematic, and the problem is essentially the same; both use the western-eurocentric political tradition as the norm or universal. The difference is simply that one uses the universal to argue that the 'primitive' is a deviant or a non-evolved form of the universal and therefore is not politics. The other argues that, although these polities are fundamentally different, they can be re-constructed and re-imagined from the perspective of the universal.

Using a western-eurocentric conceptualization of the political does not allow me to address adequately the nature of governance in pre-colonial stateless Indigenous collectivities such as the Blackfoot Confederacy. This eurocentrism is problematic, for while political scientists have argued that Indigenous political traditions lack the attributes which characterize the western-eurocentric political tradition, few of the scholars

addressed in this chapter have overcome their paradigmatic paralysis enough to conceive stateless Indigenous governance as a separate and independent tradition. Falling victim to the essentialist and universalist assumptions of the discipline results in the colonization of Indigenous political traditions. Scholars either ignore the fact that Aboriginal political traditions are fundamentally different, or they recognize this difference but continue to colonize the 'other' using the knowledge of the discipline to re-construct and re-imagine the Indigenous in the image of the European. The problems associated with the assumed universalisms and this failure to theorize (or at least fully understand) difference are evident even when Boldt and Long (and to a lesser extent Poeltzer) attempt to examine the differences between the two traditions; they are still constrained by their disciplinary knowledge and their paradigm paralysis which does not allow them to discuss politics without reference to coercive forms of power. As I show in the next chapter, however, there has been some movement as scholars have begun the process of intellectual decolonization and thinking beyond the paradigmatic paralysis that has limited the work of Flanagan, Poelzer, Cairns, Boldt and Long.

## ALTERNATIVES TO PRIMITIVISM: STUDYING INDIGENOUS POLITICS

As Kuper argues, primitivism is an illusion based on the 'imaginary Indian', scientific racism or social-Darwinism and a desire to justify colonization. Whether conceptualized in terms of evolutionism or anti-evolutionism (Boas), primitivism is unfounded and it should be dismissed. Like the 'imaginary Indian', both are 'fantasies of the master race' which deny scholars the ability to see beyond the eurocentrically defined universal or the unfounded conceptualizations of 'the Indian'. Primitivism denies eurocentric thinkers the ability to see Indigenous political traditions on their own terms and as Indigenous governance. Indigenous structures of governance need to be studied as Indigenous political systems, and not as a deviant, 'primitive' or 'uncivilized' expressions of the western-eurocentric tradition and its pre-historical past. We need to start asking different

questions in the study of Indigenous governance. Asking how a polity fits within a teleological construction of history does not constitute a study of Indigenous governance. We need to escape the universal in political science by seeing Indigenous polities as having a separate intellectual, cultural, and historical evolution and in a manner consistent with the approaches defined by students of Traditional Knowledge (TK). We need to examine Indigenous political traditions not as a single, stereotyped whole, but as many different political systems (which range from extended family groupings to hierarchically defined states). If these requirements are to be met, is it possible to conduct a non-primitivist study of Blackfoot governance using the existing disciplinary tools of political science? Given that my goal is to create a post-colonial understanding of traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance from the interpreted perspective of the peoples themselves, is there an existing approach that would work? In this section, I consider several approaches and assess their utility.

## STATIST APPROACHES

Because my goal is to create a detailed interpretive study of Blackfoot governance and to create a broadly-defined, contextualized analysis of the traditional *Siiksikaawa* political system, insights from a state- or institution-centred approach are useful. Statist approaches have as their focus describing and analyzing 'the black box' of the state, independently or in relation to society. Statist approaches, therefore, offer the researcher the opportunity to engage in a detailed, descriptive analyses of structures of governance by exploring governance in terms of both structure and its operation. Because statist approaches deal specifically with formal institutions, procedures and structures, however, the application of a statist approach to a study of Indigenous political traditions may be considered problematic.

By broadening the scope of this approach to consider a wide range of structural arrangements, including Indigenous forms of non-state governance, however, I have been

able to utilize elements of a modified statist approach (institutionalism) in my description of traditional Blackfoot governance in the previous chapter. Thus, despite the fact that the *Siiksikaawa* did not have a state, modified statist approaches have proven to be useful because of their descriptive capacities. Although my use of a quasi-institutionalist approach has proven that statist approaches are useful because of their descriptive capacities, however, the analytical value is questionable.

A modified statist approach could be a worthy avenue to pursue. But given that this approach is grounded in a western-eurocentric tradition and is predicated on the idea that power and power relationships between state and society (and within each) defines state structures and policy responses, whereas the Blackfoot conceive of governance and its evolution as being defined by Creation and through their relationship with Creation, this approach as a method of analysis is of limited value. My Blackfoot teachers believe governance to have been defined by the relationship between society and Creation and not society and the state (as was demonstrated in my discussion of Bundles), hence a statist approach is an inappropriate method of analysis which will not permit me to create a post-colonial understanding of Blackfoot governance from the interpreted perspective of the peoples themselves.

## PLURALIST APPROACHES

Pluralist approaches explain politics in terms of the behaviors of individuals and groups, and government output as the allocation of benefits among interested parties. Because pluralist approaches focus on observable, characteristic behaviors and attitudes of groups in society rather than formal structures or state institutions, and because Indigenous polities lack states, a pluralist approach may seem to offer the tools and analytical frameworks necessary to engage in a study of traditional Blackfoot governance. More specifically, pluralist approaches such as those used by Gabriel Almond, G. Bingham Powell, Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte look promising for my study of the

*Siiksikaawa* political system as they seek to explain political evolution and differences in political systems

Development theory generally does not consistently address nor seek to explain Indigenous governance. But, several scholars have attempted to explain the differentiation between Indigenous non-state polities and modern or eurocentric states. In their attempt to construct theories of political evolution they have theorized Indigenous political traditions and offered up possible approaches for their study. Disagreeing with much of the cold-war literature which perceived Indigenous polities as pre-political and anarchical, Almond and Powell contend that:

> ... there is no such thing as a society which maintains internal and external order without a political structure of some kind. In very simple political systems the interactions, or structures, may be occasional or intermittent. They may not be clearly visible, but to say that there are no structures would be to argue that the performance of the political functions is random.[60]

Recognizing that all societies (including simple family units) have some semblance of a political structure, Almond and Powell suggest that, political systems exist in all societies, and that one can compare all of these systems "in terms of the relationship between functions and structures."[61] Almond and Powell develop a more encompassing theory of political development by comparing functions and structures in a variety of locales, and accepting Almond and Sidney Verba's theory of development which views political development as an evolutionary process resulting from changes in a community's political culture.[62] Based on their typology of three different types of political systems (primitive/intermittent, traditional and modern), their theory of development views

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[60] Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 31.

[61] Ibid., p. 31.

[62] Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

political development as a natural occurring phenomenon which occurs when "the existing structure and culture of the political system is unable to cope with the [internally or externally derived] problem or challenge which confronts it without further structural differentiation and cultural secularization."[63]

Based on this evolutionist theory of political development, one could conclude that *Siiksikaawa* and western-eurocentric political traditions differ because Blackfoot governance was less developed. Further to this, Almond and Powell would likely argue that Blackfoot political traditions should be studied in light of these author's understanding and theorization of the early stages of development and in light of the dominant, 'civilized' and more developed nation states. While this theory of political development provides a method of analyzing political development, and while I seek to understand and explain the development of the Blackfoot political system, the question remains, is this method of analysis applicable?

I reject the use of this teleological understanding of political development because traditional Blackfoot governance developed independently of the assumed universal and is predicated on its own distinct understanding of history, development, governance and politics. Further, I reject this teleological understanding of political development because it is predicated on ideologies of evolutionism and primitivism; ideologies that need to be discarded in favour of a non-essentialist understanding of history which is not grounded in an acceptance of social darwinism and scientific racism. Moreover, given that my goal is to create a post-colonial understanding of Blackfoot governance from the vantage point of the *Siiksikaawa* political tradition, I must reject this approach as inappropriate..

Almond and Powell are evolutionists who purport to explain Indigenous political traditions in terms of stages of political development which may or may not have a natural progression. Robert Dahl and Edward Tufte, by contrast, offer an alternative

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[63] Almond and Powell, op. cit., p. 35.

approach to explaining the evolution of democracy and thus, the researching and conceptualizing Indigenous political traditions. In an attempt to determine what the optimal political system would be their book, *Size and Democracy* explores the "historical search for a political system that would maximize both citizen effectiveness and system capacity."[64] While they conclude that "no single type or size of unit is optimal for achieving the twin goals of citizen effectiveness and system capacity", they do point out ways in which the size of the polity impacts on the functioning of a political system and stages of democratization. Dahl and Tufte do not deal with non-western polities in this classical study of the relationship between size and democracy, but their analysis may help explain some aspects of Blackfoot governance and other Indigenous political traditions. Their main claims regarding the impact of size on the functioning of a political system demonstrate that many of the primary characteristics of Blackfoot governance, may be attributed to size (demographic and geographic) as the Blackfoot Confederacy was demographically small, relatively homogeneous and self-sufficient.[65]

The applicability of this theoretical framework to the study of Blackfoot governance is further evidenced by the proposition that "smaller democracies provide more opportunity for citizens to participate effectively in decisions."[66] This may help explain why the traditional *Siiksikaawa* political system was participatory and based on a consensual method of democratic governance rather than representative democracy and majority rule. Historically, Blackfoot political units were quite small (ranging in size from small clans which consisted of extended families to the nations which consisted of tens of thousands) and the political system was operationalized and maintained through the

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[64] Robert A. Dahl and Edward R. Tufte, *Size and Democracy*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 137.

[65] Unlike the polities discussed by these authors, most Indigenous polities were not defined by small territories and thus, they do not fit Dahl and Tufte's criteria in every respect.

[66] Ibid., p. 13.

politically defined sub-divisions of clans, Bundles and societies. For Dahl and Tufte, the idea that "smaller democracies make it easier for citizens to internalize norms and values"[67] is based in part on a claim that "smaller democracies are likely to be more nearly homogeneous with respect to beliefs, values and goals."[68] Since the *Siiksikaawa* are often characterized as being nearly homogeneous,[69] this *presumed* lack of internal differentiation may explain the existence of governance based on principles of consensus rather than majority rule. The idea that "smaller democracies make possible greater speed and accuracy of communication among all members of the system"[70] may explain why a participatory system of consensual democracy was able to survive despite the complexity of consensual processes and the potential for limited capability. The contentions that "citizens in a smaller democracy are likely to understand their political problems better than citizens in a larger democracy", and that "leaders are likely to be more responsive to citizen views in smaller democracies"[71] may explain why Blackfoot governance is conceptualized as an undifferentiated part of society (*okahn*). This might also explain why Blackfoot structures of governance have limited capacity and operate non-coercively as a dynamic, fluid and continual response to internal and external influences and pressures.

The foregoing demonstrates the value of applying Dahl and Tufte's understanding of a polity's size and its relationship to the ability of a democracy to meet the competing goals of citizen effectiveness and system capacity as a means of analyzing and explaining *Siiksikaawa* governance. While analyzing and explaining difference using size as the

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Boldt, op. cit.

[70] Dahl and Tufte, op. cit, p. 15.

[71] Ibid.

explanation offers great potential in and of itself, it is also useful because it is not based on ethnocentric assumptions and a teleological view of history and development which views Indigenous peoples as something less-than the civilized European. That being said, it is not possible to explain the entire scope or nature of Blackfoot governance using this analytical framework, nor is it possible to use this method of analysis and engage the *Siiksikaawa* political system from within its own world view or context. The Blackfoot do not perceive size as a defining characteristic of their political history, nor do they perceive it as an attribute which differentiates traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance and the Canadian nation-state. Although size may have contributed to the development of a political system predicated on the idea of 'being of one mind', the analytical framework offered by Dahl and Tufte is too narrowly focused for the purposes of this study. It would not permit me to explore those attributes which my teachers have identified as the formative characteristics of Blackfoot governance. Thus, both the focus of and questions asked by this approach are too narrowly defined to meet the goals of this project and the approach is far too limited by its contextuality.

## MARXIST APPROACHES

Although scholars have argued that argued that marxism has always contained within it a rather ambiguous and underdeveloped theory of the state, up until the 1960s, marxism was primarily a society-centred approach that was economically determinist and societally reductionist. Actually, marxism is both a society-centred and, more recently, a state-centred approach. As a society-centred approach, marxists typically conceive of politics in terms of the wider class struggle, focus on relations of productive and reproductive power, and concern themselves with the structural determinants and agents of power in historical materialism. Neo-marxists shifted their focus to the state as an agent in the class struggle. Post-marxism, which focuses on discourse, is a more society-centred approach which differs from marxism because it typically concerns itself with

relations of power which are not necessarily tied to the state or historical materialism (the power relations of production and reproduction).

Marxism, as an approach to the study of traditional Blackfoot governance, however, offers minimal explanatory capacity as this society was not, according to Marx, engaged in a class struggle. Moreover, the relationship between governance and Creation (animals such as the buffalo) is best explained using ecological contexts rather than historical materialism (the relationship between political development and the economy or subsistence). Contextuality explains this relationship from an Indigenist perspective, one which does not colonize the terms of this relationship nor the Blackfoot political system from a western-eurocentric perspective.

While a marxist approach does not offer the explanatory capacity that ecological contexts offers, and while I will not use neo-marxist approaches because their analysis of structures of governance is tied to the class-struggle, it might be possible to use a post-marxist approach, such as that used by Foucault in explaining governance. Briefly, Foucault conceives of government not as the locus of power (the state or the institutions of the state) but as the complex web of relations in which power is manifest. Foucault does not deny that relations of power exist within the state, Further to this, he does not deny the existence, or the predominance of the form, of state power. Rather, he is simply attempting to "[re]draw the line that exists between the power of the prince and any other form of power"[72] and he is more concerned with those relations of power which are typically disregarded in political theory. That is to say, he views government not simply in terms of the sovereign or the state but including the whole complex web of power relations that manage "problems" specific to the population"[73] and economy or the art of governing (governmentality) of populations. Foucault 'cuts off the kings head' and urges

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[72] Michel Foucault, "Governmentality", in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, (Toronto: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 91.

[73] Ibid, p. 99.

the reader to think beyond the sovereign (institutions) and to see government as the complex web of power relations that are dispersed throughout the population and that exist for reasons of economy and the act of governing the population. While this way of conceptualizing government is useful in so far as it enables one to label as government non-institutional relationships and non-loci of power, Foucault's conceptualization of governance cannot be used to explain the functioning of governance in Blackfoot society. This is because, his concept of governmentality assumes a western-eurocentric understanding of power (coercion and authority), and an understanding of governance which is all but synonymous with coercive and hierarchical power. That is, while Foucault uncouples power and governance from institutions, his understanding of governance is fundamentally tied to his understanding of power as coercive, hierarchical and authoritative relations. Governance is the complex web of all power relations within a society which exist for reasons of economy and the act of governing the population.

Because the Blackfoot conceived of power as the essence of all beings, and because it was believed that all beings are 'self-governing' (the doctrine of non-interference), hierarchical, coercive and authoritative power relationships did not exist within traditional Blackfoot governance. Applying Clastres' analysis, the *Siiksikaawa* were a 'society against the state', as traditional Blackfoot governance intentionally denied the operationalization of an individual's power (essence) through coercive, hierarchical and authoritative relationships, be they institutionalized relationships or otherwise. Foucault would probably criticize my acceptance of Clastres' analysis of Blackfoot governance as 'society against the state' and suggest that this is merely an obfuscation of reality or a denial of the fact that coercive and hierarchical power relations do exist. Nevertheless, a Foucauldian explanation of government is not an adequate conceptualization to understand traditional Blackfoot politics. For while his conceptualization of government can be molded to fit the Blackfoot context, it is nevertheless grounded in a completely

different understanding of governance (as power relationships) and it is an expression of an entirely different intellectual and political tradition.

Nonetheless, like Foucault, I use 'governance' in a way which does not differentiate between the governing and the governed and I do not limit the applicability of this term to specialized political institutions. I see governance as involving processes of leadership, decision-making, and decision-implementing. Governance also means the structures that perform functions normally associated with government and that have the capacity to involve the entire circle of life (human and non-human beings).[74] Understanding governance in this manner and understanding that traditional Blackfoot governance is predicated on an entirely different world view should enable the reader to overcome, at least in part, the incommensurability of the two worlds.

## CONCLUSION

How could I explain governance in pre-colonial Indigenous polities using the tools of the colonizer, when the eurocentric tradition either ignores and/or dismisses the idea that Indigenous peoples had complex political traditions, or proposes that those traditions can be studied using kinship as the basis of analysis and classification? Furthermore, how can I use the 'intellectual tools of the colonizer' when the 'tools' used speak of politics in terms of coercive power, while Indigenous politics has been described as being void of power (defined as force, hierarchy and subordination). Simply put, it is all but impossible. The existing anthropological and political science scholarship has all but confirmed that 'you can't get there from here'. Consequently, I have concluded that it is impossible to conduct a trustworthy study of Indigenous political traditions using this literature or the approaches used in constructing this literature since much of this

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[74] I use the term 'structures of governance' and not political institutions to differentiate between Blackfoot and western-eurocentric political traditions. While Blackfoot structures of governance may be viewed as political institutions, they are not synonymous with western-eurocentric institutions as they are manifestations of a totally separate and independent political tradition.

scholarship is grounded in racist assumptions and the perpetuation of the 'imaginary Indian' or the illusion of primitivism. Even if we could escape the confines of the ideology of primitivism, the existing tools of the discipline do not permit the study of Indigenous as Indigenous traditions or from Indigenous perspectives, since they assume the continued colonization of Indigenous governance by eurocentric thought through their assumed universalisms.

Thus, I am left questioning how we can study traditional Indigenous politics in a trustworthy and respectful way as the existing literature and disciplinary knowledge has not provided solutions. It is impossible to even conceive of using a political science approach because, as I have argued, 'you cannot get there from here' as the existing literature and tools of the discipline would perpetuate a lack of understanding. Furthermore, my inability to place myself in or accept the western-eurocentric tradition and the manner which it portrays the 'Indian' as inferior and 'primitive' or subject to be conquered and studied, means that I cannot attempt to use the existing literature or the 'traditional' approaches. My search to find an acceptable 'traditional' western-eurocentric approach has been unsuccessful. Heeding the voices of the ancestors, heeding the wisdom of those that have walked before me, and inspired by Henderson's vision of post-colonialism, I have overcome paradigm paralysis and discovered ecological contexts as an alterNative means of studying Indigenous politics; an alterNative approach which will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 5

## PICKING BERRIES WITH OLDER BROTHER:

## AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO STUDYING GOVERNANCE

Dissatisfied with the means by which Indigenous political systems have been conceptualized in political science and anthropology, and dissatisfied with the 'traditional' approaches of political science, I have been forced to look elsewhere to find an adequate means of describing, analyzing and studying traditional Blackfoot governance. But is it possible to 'bring Indigenous political traditions into political science' without perpetuating the colonial, 'primitivist' and racist legacies of the discipline? Is it possible to forge a trustworthy understanding of Indigenous politic systems by escaping the paradigmatic paralysis that defines political science? Is it possible to understand governance from an Indigenist perspective? How would one understand governance from an Indigenist perspective? Is it even possible to study Indigenous politics from outside the confines of the western-eurocentric tradition? If so, how would one approach the study of politics? These are just a few of the questions that will be explored in this chapter. I will argue that it is possible to create a trustworthy understanding of Indigenous political traditions if one does so 'from within' or by using an Indigenist, post-colonial approach. In this chapter I explore how to the study Indigenous politics from within and I propose an alterNative approach which is situated in Indigenist thought and which allows one to do research from the inside out.

This chapter will proceed as follows. This chapter begins with a discussion of literature which has attempted to study Indigenous politics from an Indigenist perspective. Having shown that it is possible to study politics from an Indigenist perspective and necessary if one is to obtain a trustworthy understanding of Indigenous political traditions, I then discuss two possible frameworks: Unger's theory of contextuality and Henderson's theory of ecological contexts. Finally, I argue that Henderson's theory of ecological contexts presents the best approach to the study of Indigenous political traditions from an Indigenist, post-colonial perspective.

## STUDYING INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE

How do we study Indigenous political systems such as traditional Blackfoot governance so that intellectual colonization does not occur so that colonial myths and misunderstandings are not perpetuated? For the answer to this question, it is worthwhile to consider a growing body of literature that seeks to escape the confines of western-eurocentric thought and engage Indigenous political traditions from the perspective of Aboriginal people. My discussion of this body of literature serves the purpose of 'scanning' the ways in which other authors are approaching the study of Indigenous political traditions. But it also lays a foundation for my own study of *Siiksikaawa* governance.

In his book, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors*, Gerald (Taiaiake) Alfred addresses the issue of Kahnawake nationalism as both a historic reality and a contemporary phenomenon which is fundamentally rooted in Mohawk culture and which exists independently of both the state and 'modernity'.[1] Alfred demonstrates that Indigenous political traditions can be understood independently of the western-eurocentric tradition based on unique Indigenous conceptualizations of nationalism, rights and governance.

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[1] Gerald R. Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and Aboriginal Nationalism*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Alfred's approach is problematic, however, because he excludes women and chastises non-Iroquois for their lack of fully developed political systems and nationalisms. Moreover, he too has yet to escape completely the confines of western-eurocentric thought. Nevertheless, his approach and analysis are useful because they show, for example, that it is possible to create an alterNative understanding of nationalism within the confines of political science while heeding the voices of the ancestors and not promoting intellectual colonization. Thus, he provides a foundation upon which to build an alterNative conceptualization of governance within political science.

Alfred's second book, *Peace Power and Righteousness*, is more firmly grounded in Indigenist thought.[2] As a critique of modern Indigenous politics from the vantage point of traditional Indigenous political ideas and practices, Alfred demonstrates that it is possible to construct an analysis using traditional Indigenist political thought, or more specifically, Indigenist ideas, beliefs and practices pertaining to governance, sovereignty, rights, leadership and nationalism. Alfred also demonstrates that it is possible to convey an understanding of these ideas and practices to non-Native audiences using a non-conventional theoretical framework which is an adaptation or appropriation of a Mohawk idea, construct or ceremony.

Russel Barsh's article, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems", is an attempt to explicate what he perceives to be the primary characteristics of traditional Indigenous political ideas and practices. Although Alfred reacts to the 'problems' that define and confine contemporary Aboriginal politics and how western-eurocentric ideas and practices have been adopted or adapted into contemporary Indigenous politics, Barsh explores the 'nature and spirit' of traditional governance and politics using Indigenous theology and cosmology. Barsh is a non-Indigenous scholar, nonetheless, he has an extensive knowledge of traditions and a demonstrated ability to

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[2] Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1999).

work respectfully within the confines of Indigenist thought. As a result, Barsh has all but overcome the confines of western-eurocentric thought and begun the process of identifying and explaining attributes of 'North American social theory'; "individual conscience, universal kinship, and the endless creative power of the world."[3]

Both Alfred and Barsh have focused their attention on delineating key tenets of Indigenist political philosophy, paying little attention to how these tenets are operationalized in specific political systems. James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, by contrast, has begun the process of explaining a specific system of governance. His purpose in writing *The Mikmaw Concordat* was to create a post-colonial reconstruction of the early history of colonization and the relationship which followed between the Mikmaw and the colonizing nations. But Henderson also provides the reader with a brief overview of traditional Mikmaq governance, how it emerged and how it operated during this period of mass upheaval.[4] Henderson also demonstrates by example that it is possible to convey a limited understanding of a traditional system of governance and traditional Mikmaw political thought using a post-colonial methodology which emphasizes the creation of understanding 'from within' rather than from the vantage of western-eurocentric thought or by using 'traditional' academic approaches such as primitivism.

## ESCAPING EUROCENTRISM, AN ALTER-NATIVE APPROACH IS NECESSARY

None of these studies provide a detailed interpretive study of a specific traditional Indigenous political system institutionally (structurally) or philosophically. Still, all of these authors demonstrate that, by studying politics 'from within', or from an Indigenist perspective, one can avoid the pitfalls of eurocentrism and provide a more representative

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[3] Russel Lawrence Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems", in *American Indian Quarterly*, (Summer 1986), p. 181.

[4] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, *The Mikmaw Concordat*, (Halifax: Fernwood, 1997).

understanding of Indigenous political traditions. The difference between this body of literature and the bodies of literature discussed in the preceding chapter is not simply a matter of perspective or bias. Indigenist scholarship is grounded in a different world view and so it does not approach the study of Indigenous governance from a pure western-eurocentric perspective.[5] Instead, it accepts Indigenous knowledge and truth claims, and it seeks to understand the 'Indigenous' on its own terms as Indigenous. But while these authors have demonstrated that it is possible to study, understand and explain Indigenous governance from the vantage point of Indigenous thought, the question that remains is how is this done? Yes, it is possible to study Indigenous political traditions from within, and yes these studies have produced the most valuable analyses of Indigenous traditions, but how does one conduct such a study? Context clearly matters. Alfred demonstrates that it is difficult to create a truly alterNative understanding of 'Iindigenous' within political science because governance is conceptualized and operationalized within Indigenous polities so differently from the discipline's universal. Hence, meaningful understanding is difficult to achieve when one is writing within political science. Thus, it is important to ask if it is possible to bridge these political traditions and to construct a meaningful and trustworthy understanding of 'the Indigenist' within a western-eurocentric discipline.

Is it possible for political scientists to understand Blackfoot governance through their observations of a herd of buffalo? Is it possible for me to convey an understanding of Blackfoot governance within political science by relaying stories about the buffalo? Will a western-eurocentric thinker gain a meaningful understanding of governance, if I do so? The point of me suggesting that one can understand *Siiksikaawa* governance by studying

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[5] It should be noted that in using the term 'Indigenist scholarship' I am *not* implying a racialization of scholarship. Rather I am suggesting that it is scholarship which incorporates and respects Indigenous understandings. Likewise, I am not suggesting a racialization of western-eurocentric thought. Thus, it is possible for authors such as Barsh to write Indigenist scholarship, just as it is possible for Indigenous writers to be eurocentric thinkers.

buffalo is not to claim incommensurability nor to justify studying Blackfoot governance from within. The existence of a different world view and a different knowledge system are not simply methodological issues.

The proposition that one can study the Blackfoot political system by observing a buffalo herd suggests that the foundations of *Siiksikaawa* political traditions may lie outside those typically considered in the western-eurocentric tradition. Indigenous political traditions reflect Indigenous world views and the histories of those civilizations and since most Indigenous knowledge systems are predicated on the idea that the world is alive and are derived from and are a reflection of the living earth, some Indigenous political traditions were derived from and were a reflection of Indigenous people's understanding of the living earth and their relationship to it. Since the natural world is claimed as the source of knowledge, it is plausible that a people's knowledge of governance was derived from their understanding of and experiences with the natural world. Hence, ecological contexts may be the foundation of *Siiksikaawa* political traditions, as I have hypothesized.

## PARADIGMS

The proposition that knowledge systems and their corresponding world views define and confine both physical and social reality and knowledge can be understood with reference to the works of philosophers of science like Thomas Kuhn.[6] Kuhn's purpose was to explain the history of (western) science or the progression of scientific thought, and to explain how and why paradigmatic shifts occur, based on historical analysis and a theory of scientific revolutions. His discussion of how paradigms define and confine scientific thought during periods of normal science has influenced numerous social scientists as they attempt to explain the historic evolution of the social sciences and

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[6] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Thought*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

knowledge in general. Kuhn's theory of scientific revolution is not without its problems, however, nor is it without its critics.[7] Nonetheless, it is useful for explaining how ontology, epistemology and methodology both create and then confine scientific thought and its progression.

Challenging the predominant conception of science as a linear progression of rational and objective inquiry, Kuhn argues that each branch of science has developed historically alternating between normal and revolutionary phases. Each normal phase is characterized by paradigms or universally recognized standards that provide practitioners and students of science with problems, rules, modes of inquiries and possible solutions.[8] Kuhn asserts that these paradigms define and confine thought as they "determine normal science without intervention" because individuals are educated within a particular paradigm and unconsciously work within the confines of that paradigm and its "concepts, laws, and theories" as though they were natural. As a result, almost unknowingly or intuitively, everything occurs within the confines of that paradigm "so long as the relevant scientific community accepts without question the particular problem-solutions already achieved."[9]

It is important to consider Kuhn in relation to the broader issue of how it is possible that world views and knowledge system define and confine social realities and their corresponding intellectual histories. Previously I raised the idea that a way of knowing the world was defined and confined by a world view. This contention is supported in the literature pertaining to Traditional Knowledge. Does Kuhn's theory help explain this? Kuhn himself does not address this issue, but his concepts of paradigms and normal

[7] Karl R. Popper, "Normal Science and its Dangers", in Imre Lakatos & Alan Musgrove (eds.) Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 51-58. Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" in Imre Lakatos & Alan Musgrove (eds.) Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 91-196. Paul Feyerabend, "Consolations for the Specialist", in Imre Lakatos & Alan Musgrove (eds.) Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 197-230.

[8] Kuhn, op. cit. pp. 43-48.

[9] Ibid., pp. 46-47.

science have been used by Roberto Unger and Henderson to explain how knowledge is constructed within the confines of specific cultures and world views. Thus, while Kuhn's work is important for introducing the idea of paradigms and normal science into mainstream social thought, my interest is mainly with Unger and Henderson who used Kuhn's concepts to explain the historic evolution and incommensurability of different knowledge systems.

## ARTIFICIAL or ANTI-NATURALISTIC CONTEXTS

Kuhn explains how paradigms define and confine the development of science and why paradigms (historic and contemporary) are incommensurable. Two broad questions remain, however, as to the applicability of Kuhn in explaining divergent world views and how these world views, paradigms or knowledge systems structure social ideas and phenomena. I will consider Unger's adaptation of Kuhn, and Henderson's interpretation of Unger, to explore how paradigms or knowledge systems define and confine the development of both social thought and social structures.

What may be viewed as paradigms in the 'hard' sciences, are often understood as contexts in law and other social sciences; "just as a paradigm reflects current scientific thought about the natural world, so a context reflects current social, political, and legal thought about the human social order."[10] Using the idea of contexts, Unger asserts that "the idea of the contextual or conditional quality of all human activity. To say that extended conceptual activity is conditional is to say that its practice depends on taking for granted, at least provisionally, many beliefs that define its nature and limits."[11] He argues further that "the idea [is] that we can always break through all contexts of practical

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[10] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "The Context of the State of Nature", in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of Vancouver Press, 2000), p. 12.

[11] Roberto Mangabeira Unger, *Social Theory: Situation and Its Task; A Critical Introduction to Politics, A Work in Constructive Social Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 18.

or conceptual activity" but that, while we continuously think beyond the conditionality and make small scale adjustments to existing contexts, "context-breaking is exceptional and transitory."[12] Finally, he argues that while the conditionality of contexts or our dependence on them may lessen over time, and while their existence may seldom be acknowledged, they continue to exist and during times of normalcy or routinization "remain relatively immunized against activities that bring it into question and that open it up to revision and conflict."[13].

I will limit my discussion of Unger to his theory of contextuality, as appropriated and modified by Henderson to explain Indigenous world views, languages and social phenomena. According to Unger, modern western-eurocentric society is predicated on a world view captured ontologically as a fragmented world in which man exists at the earthly centre; man has dominion over the earth; everything can be deconstructed, constructed and reconstructed; and, all beings (including humans) can be objectified. Unger asserts that these assumptions are contextual (i.e. they are part of modern, western-eurocentric contexts) and, as elements of contexts, they define and confine the nature and limits of modern social thought and society. He asserts that modern social thought and society are grounded in their artificiality, derivatives of an artificial context or the assumption that society can be imagined and created. Modern society is not natural but exists as a human artifact constructed in reaction to the 'state of nature'. Hence, it is an anti-naturalistic product of the human imagination; or how 'great men' have imagined and attempted to create a new utopia so as to escape the natural order (the state of nature). While it may be argued that all societies and all social phenomena are human artifacts or artificial in the sense that they are all human creations, what Unger is suggesting is that the western-eurocentric tradition has been defined and confined by an

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[12] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[13] Ibid., p. 22

artificial context of inquiry. Thus, it is not society or social phenomena that he is labeling 'artificial'. Rather, he is suggesting that these human artifacts have been forged in reaction to nature and so are anti-naturalistic and based on the ideas of 'noun gods' and 'great men'. In other words, society is a human artifact which has been imagined (an artificial context of inquiry) and not created through a relationship with the natural world (a natural context of inquiry).

According to Unger,

> Modern social thought was born proclaiming that society is made and imagined, that it is a human artifact rather than the expression of an underlying natural order. This insight inspired the great secular doctrines of emancipation: liberalism, socialism, and communism. In one way or another, all these doctrines held out the promise of building a society in which we may be individually and collectively empowered to disengage our practical and passionate relations from rigid roles and hierarchies. ... No one has ever taken the idea of society as an artifact to the hilt. On the contrary, the social theories that provided radical politics with its chief intellectual tools balanced the notion that society is made and imagined against the ambition to develop a science of history, rich in law-like explanations.[14]

While I would not claim the total contextuality of all social thought and all social forms, Unger argues that historical experience and practical knowledge confine social development and that the dominant forms of artificiality are bound by the same context. Accordingly, he assumes that all western-eurocentric knowledge is predicated on the same assumptions and is essentially a reaction to how nature and human nature were constructed historically by both Christian theologists and philosophers and 'ancient' philosophers. That is to say, there is a continuum of ideas and methods of creating knowledge (the context of inquiry) in western-eurocentric thought which has enabled, and arguably constrained, modern society. It should be noted that while Unger's understanding of contextuality and the history of social thought seems essentialist, Unger himself is not an essentialist. He has theorized the artificial context to explain the current

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[14] Ibid., p. 1.

state of paradigm paralysis in western-eurocentric thought and to emphasize the necessity of breaking free of the current context of inquiry if society is to be liberated from the 'science of history' or the 'noun gods' and 'great men' and the structures of domination which they created.

What Unger's theorization of contexts means for the purposes of this dissertation is actually quite simple; to understand governance necessitates an understanding of the nature of its context since contexts of inquiry define and confine the way humans create social phenomena. Unger argues this holds true in the case of western-eurocentric political thought, and Henderson argues that it also holds true with respect to the Indigenist intellectual and political tradition(s).

## ECOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

Although Unger does not address Indigenous knowledge systems specifically, Henderson appropriates his theory of contextuality and applies it to Indigenous thought. According to Henderson, the western-eurocentric knowledge system has been defined by artificial or anti-naturalistic contexts of inquiry, whereas ecological contexts of inquiry have defined Indigenous knowledge systems. Henderson's asserts that within the Indigenous world, knowledge, 'science', languages, and societal phenomena are not based on artificial contexts of inquiry or "the instructions of a noun-god or on the reductionist thoughts of great men"[15] but on an ecological context of inquiry and the understanding of individuals and collectives of the ecological order and their relationship with a localized or specific ecological order. For Henderson, an ecological context is not an imagined, artificial context of inquiry or an imagined, 'cosmological order'. Rather "it is the result of millennia of field observations and direct experiences"[16] of a peoples with Creation as it is

[15] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "*Ayukpachi:* Empowering Aboriginal Thought", in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of Vancouver Press, 2000), p. 256

[16] Ibid, p. 257

defined by an immediate ecosystem. Understanding what is meant by an ecological context of inquiry means understanding that "the earth and its forces are the living context that instructs Aboriginal teachings and order."[17]

An ecological context, is the context of inquiry provided by natural world. It is a peoples' understanding of the local ecological order and their place within that order that exists as a people's context of inquiry. It is not the visions of 'noun-gods' or 'great men' that defines and confines social reality and scientific inquiry. Thus, it is not the utopian ideals of the elite or the interpreted messages of 'noun gods' that the 'great men' use to construct doctrines about man and nature; ideals, messages and doctrines which in turn define and confine the masses. Instead, it is the entire knowledge of a whole people and their history within a specific ecology. It is the collective knowledge of a people based on individual and collective understandings of that ecology and a people's relationship to the natural world. It is how this knowledge has been used to forge or create human artifacts such as language, world view and social phenomena such as governance. In terms of politics, an ecological context of inquiry is about learning how all beings live together in the best way possible and using this knowledge, and a people's experiences with a local ecological order, to create and maintain a political system in which all beings (human and non-human) can live together in the best way possible.

Unlike western-eurocentric knowledge and social phenomena which have been constructed or imagined 'against nature', an Indigenous people's "understanding of their natural context establishes the vantage point from which they construct their world view, language, knowledge and order."[18] Aboriginal world views, knowledge, languages, and practices are the result of how a people understands its local ecological order and how a

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[17] Ibid, p. 259.

[18] Ibid, p. 257.

people sees itself as fitting within that order based on a millennia of cumulative experiences and observations of individuals and collectives.[19]

According to Henderson, "*most* Aboriginal world views and languages are formulated by experiencing an ecosystem ... Aboriginal languages are empirical relationships with local ecosystems, and Aboriginal languages are an expression of these relationships."[20] Thus, in many respects, an ecological context may be viewed as both a context of inquiry and a resulting social order. While the resulting social order is constructed by human beings (just as the western-eurocentric tradition is), it is a representation or an expression of Creation and a peoples understanding of Creation, not artificial constructs or the imagined utopias of 'great men' or the teachings of abstract 'noun gods'. For Henderson then, an artificial context is about creating institutions, languages and world views as something that are imagined and created independently of the local ecological order or as a reaction to a 'state of nature' and a proclamation of man's dominion or ability to rule the earth as 'he' so chooses. By contrast, an ecological context is about creating human structures, languages and world views by experiencing Creation, and learning 'how to exist' from and with Creation. But it is also about the way Creation, or a people's knowledge of and experiences with Creation, are manifested in language, world view, and social phenomena. Therefore, it is the idea that humans (and their 'creations') exist as a undifferentiated part of the circle of life with languages, world views and social phenomena existing as a undifferentiated part of the circle. In other words, it is about creating languages, world views and social phenomena within an ecological context and ensuring that those 'creations' exist as part of that local ecological order.

Thus, Henderson is not suggesting that are western-eurocentric social phenomena are artifactual while all Indigenous social phenomena are natural. Both are human creations or

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[19] Ibid, p. 260.

[20] Ibid. emphasis added.

artifacts. The difference between them is the context of inquiry, and the way in which many Indigenous people's have created human artifacts as part of, or as representations of their understanding of the local ecological order and their perceived place within that order. It is about where people get their ideas, and how they create human artifacts as primarily anti-naturalistic or primarily ecological. This was recently explained to me in terms of architecture.[21] While there are exceptions, most Indigenous forms of architecture were forged as a relationship to a local ecological order, with buildings such as the Longhouses of the *Haudenosaunee* both incorporating a knowledge of a people's environment and expressing a people's relationship to the circle of life. Meanwhile, with few exceptions, western-eurocentric architects have constructed monuments of 'civilization' which rarely express any relationship to the natural world, or any semblance of respect for a local ecological order.

All social phenomena are human artifacts. Henderson is *not* promoting an essentialist understanding of Indigenous social phenomena by claiming that they can be explained and analyzed using his theory of ecological contexts. Instead, he is promoting an anti-deterministic and anti-essentialist view of Indigenous people and the societies they created in which the human artifacts of every society were developed in an ecological context of inquiry. This can be seen with language. According to Henderson, people forged a language as they sought to understand Creation, to define how people related the rest of Creation and subsequently to represent this information through language or the sounds which represent the forces of, and relationships in, Creation.

While Henderson is able to demonstrate the relationship among ecology, language, knowledge and world view, can this proposition be sustained with respect to politics and governance? The answer to this question lies in the fact that the ideas of 'noun-gods' and 'great men' did not define or confine most Indigenous political traditions. Rather, for the

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[21] Bill Woodsworth, "The Incorporation of Aboriginal Design in Architecture", public lecture (Trent University, Friday, September 22, 2000).

most part, Indigenous political traditions were forged in relation to a local ecological order and in relation to all beings in that order. Indigenous, non-state, political traditions are about being part of the natural world and not claiming dominion over 'it' nor over any of the beings (human or non-human) that live within a local ecological order.[22] Politics is about finding and maintaining 'peace and good order' or the 'way we live best together' with the rest of Creation. Moreover, it is about learning how to govern or how to live together in the best way possible within an ecological context of inquiry, where the teachers are other beings and not 'noun-gods' or 'great men'. Thus, it is quite plausible that Indigenous peoples structured their societies on what they learnt from the world around them (i.e. from beings such as the buffalo) and how they saw themselves relating to or 'living *together* the best way possible' within a common ecosystem.

The plausibility of such an approach is explored by Henderson:

> Most Aboriginal thought teaches that humans are the youngest life form on Earth, and the most dependent and the least knowledgeable. Our gift is our ability to think and learn. Traditionally, Aboriginal people studied the behaviour of life forms and the seasons to develop an understanding of the dynamics of a space and the role of each life form within it. They also studied life forms and seasons to create a lifestyle that was harmonious with the local ecosystem. The ecosystem in which they lived was their classroom; the life forms who shared the land were their teachers.[23]

Several western-eurocentric scholars argue explicitly that traditional Indigenous political structures, ideas and practices were forged through a relationship with the ecological order. Jared Diamond, Fred Eggan and Symmes Oliver, have also theorized a relationship between politics and ecology. In the next section, I explore whether the

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[22] While it is not my intent in this dissertation to do so, it has been suggested that Henderson's idea of ecological contexts may also be used to explain Indigenous state-based polities such as those that existed on the west coast. This is because, it is entirely possible that these political systems express a people's understanding of and a relationship to a local ecological order; an ecological order that was perceived as being hierarchically structured (as is demonstrated by totem poles) and predicated on hierarchical, coercive and authoritative power relationships.

[23] Henderson, "*Ayukpachi*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" op. cit., p. 264.

approaches used by these scholars could be used in my study of traditional Blackfoot governance.

## ECOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

While working in New Guinea studying bird evolution in 1972, Jared Diamond, a biologist, was asked: "Why is it that you white people developed so much cargo and brought it to New Guinea, but we black people had little cargo of our own?"[24] Taking this question to mean "why did human development proceed at such different rates on different continents,"[25] Diamond set out to explain human development (agricultural and technological, not biological) and to explain why colonization occurred as it did. Despite the fact that his analysis covers 13,000 years of history and some four hundred pages, Diamond's conclusion is really quite simple.

> History followed different courses for different peoples because of the differences among peoples environments, not because of biological differences among the peoples themselves. Naturally, the notion that environmental geography and biogeography influenced societal development is an old idea. Nowadays, though, the view is not held in esteem by historians; it is considered wrong or simplistic, it is captured by environmental determinism and dismissed, or else the whole subject of trying to understand worldwide differences is shelved as being too difficult. Yet, geography obviously has *some* effect on history; the open question concerns how much effect, and whether geography can account for history's broad pattern.[26]

Although Diamond does not address how Indigenous peoples such as the Blackfoot experienced their local ecosystem and developed governance vis-a-vis their experiences, knowledge and relationship with the natural world, his argument that environmental

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[24] Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997), p. 14.

[25] Ibid., p. 16.

[26] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

factors and how a people used their environment influenced political development confirms that Henderson's thesis has parallels in western-eurocentric thought .

According to Diamond, the relationship between politics and nature can be explained as follows. The development of a complex, specialized system of governance comprised of full-time specialists (rulers or administrators) required a continuous surplus of food "essential for feeding non-food-producing specialists."[27] Since nomadic lifestyles did not permit surplus food production and storage, the development of complex and differentiated political structures is dependent on the development of a sedentary society and food surpluses derived from agricultural activities.

Aside from the relationship between agriculture and political development, Diamond also argues that there is a relationship between political development and geographic and environmental considerations. He demonstrates the existence of a relationship between political development and geographical and environmental factors by comparing the Moriori people of the Chatham Islands with the Maori people of New Zealand. While these people both descended from the same Polynesian people who had developed craft specialists, armies, bureaucracies and chiefs prior to their emigration, the development of the Moriori and Maori societies could not have been more different. Whereas the Maori were able to sustain and even invigorate their previous economic system and social organization in New Zealand, the Moriori of the Chattam Islands were forced to adapt to a climate and environment ill-suited to agriculture and a sedentary lifestyle. Therefore, while the Moriori are said to have 'digressed', the Maori 'developed' technologically and politically.

Diamond's theory and method of analysis demonstrate the importance of theorizing the relationship between governance, political development or 'social evolution' and the environment. This also provides an alternative analysis situated in the western-

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[27] Ibid., p. 89.

eurocentric tradition with which to explain the relationship between Indigenous political systems (such as traditional Blackfoot governance) and local ecosystems. That is to say, the existence of few plants suitable for domestication in Blackfoot territory may be useful in explaining the relationship between politics and nature, at least insofar as one is interested in exploring the relationship between nature and the development of agriculture, a sedentary society, and a complex political system premised on the rule or the dominion of a sovereign.

Despite the fact that Diamond's analysis supports the idea that there is a relationship between politics and the natural world, Diamond's analysis is not without its problems. To be fair, it should be noted that, Diamond's purpose is not to explain a particular society's historical development, but to replace biological (racialized) explanations of development with ecological explanations of development. Still, his analysis is problematic because it assumes that the domestication of species and the development of agriculture provides the conditions necessary for the development of complex political organizations. Further to this, Diamond's analysis lacks a consideration of culture, world view and a peoples' relationship to their local ecological order. Such considerations are extremely important for, while the modern western-eurocentric tradition has been pre-occupied with its superiority and the domination of 'other' (be they plants, animals or humans), Indigenous peoples such as the Blackfoot have been more concerned with discovering or coming to terms with how humans fit, or should fit, into the world around them so as to ensure the continuity of the world as one, a single circle of life. Thus, human evolution is not teleological but is dependent on both environmental or geographic factors and a peoples' knowledge of, and relationship to, a local ecology.

Therefore, while Diamond's analysis supports the idea that there is a relationship between politics and the environment, his theory does not explain this relationship from an Indigenist perspective. Moreover, it does not reflect and respect the nature of Indigenous knowledge and the necessity of doing research from within. Despite the

problems inherent in his analyses and the limitations of his theory, I agree that there is a relationship between governance and ecology, and that the carrying capacity of an environment and the existence of species that can readily be domesticated can affect political development.

Two qualifications are needed for me to use Diamond's insights in my analysis of traditional Blackfoot governance. First, world views influence how ecological factors influence, define and confine governance and its development. Second, in accepting the idea that world view and a peoples' relationship to, and conceptualization of, the natural world qualifies how geography and environment define and confine politics and its development, one also rejects the idea of a direct, causal or essentialist relationship between ecology and political development.

## ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINISM & PLAIN(S) POLITICS

I reject the idea of environmental determinism and instead suggest that governance is forged through a relationship with Creation. That is to say, Indigenous people, such as the Blackfoot, construct political systems within an ecological context of inquiry, such that there is a relationship between governance and a people's understanding, experiences, relationship and interpretation of a localized ecology and their place within it. Thus, by asserting that ecological contexts can be used to explain Indigenous political systems, I do not mean that environment *determines* political development, or that the relationship between governance and ecology can be studied as a *causal* relationship driven by 'instinct', without the mediation of rationality, reason and human creativity.

Although Henderson, and possibly Diamond, would agree with my anti-positivistic interpretation of this relationship, several authors assert that specific political forms on the plains were environmentally determined. In this section I consider environmental determinism and its relationship to the idea of ecological contexts, and its applicability to my study of traditional Blackfoot governance.

Attempting to provide meaning to the words 'Plains Indians', anthropologist Maurice

Greer Smith states:

> Strictly speaking, the Plains Indians were not a unit in any respect. They presented wide differences in physical makeup, language, material life, social organization and religious development. But these tribal or stock types were variants of what was a distinct culture, correlated with the distribution of the buffalo, which grew up in this region. Much of the culture was exotic, but this area of characterization, as it were, molded together heterogeneous elements into a more or less common type.

> These Indians inhabited and ranged over a territory broader that the physiographic area which serves to designate them. They were distributed in the region from close to the Rio Grande to the Saskatchewan; and from the Rocky Mountains to Lake Winnipeg, the Missouri and the Mississippi Rivers. Almost all of the limits of the buffalo range (as of 1800) were included in their habitat. Six linguistic stocks were represented in the Plains area proper: the Siouan (the largest), the Algonkian [which included both the Blackfoot and the Cree], Caddoan, Athapascan, Shoshonean and Kiowan. Some thirty [nations and/or confederacies] made up the stocks. ...

> We find a key to the description of the Plains culture area in the buffalo. This animal was the center of a culture complex whose ramifications pervaded the entire life of these people. ...[28]

Smith is describing a very diverse and dynamic 'cultural area' with a many forms of social organizations and political systems. While Smith does not attempt to account for this diversity, Garrick Bailey, Symmes Oliver and Fred Eggan all attempt to account for this diversity in social organization by dividing the plains into the High Plains and the Prairie Plains. They argue that differences in social organization can be explained by the 'fact' that these two regions required different forms of social organization corresponding to variation in the social organization of the buffalo.[29]

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[28] Maurice Greer Smith, *Political Organization of the Plains Indians, With Special Reference to the Council*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), pp. 5-6.

[29] Fred Eggan, *The American Indian: Perspectives for the Study of Social Change*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1966, pp. 51-52. Symmes C. Oliver, *Ecology and Cultural Continuity as Contributing Factors in the Social Organization of the Plains Indians*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962). Garrick Bailey, "Social Control on the Plains" in W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty (eds.) *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

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Summarizing his findings, Eggan states:

> A brief comparison of the major orientations of the two regions should
> illuminate the contrasts. Thus tribal organization in the High Plains
> centered on the band and camp circle, with a seasonal variation related to
> ecological factors, whereas in the Prairie Plains the village was central and
> the camp circle was used only for hunting excursions during the summer. ...
>
> Political organization in the High Plains varied but usually consisted of a
> council of chiefs who had achieved their status by successful war exploits
> and who maintained their position by successful leadership. The chiefs of
> the village tribes were often more hereditary, with ascribed status, though
> war leaders were chosen on the basis of ability. ... the social structures of
> the High Plains tribes, in summary, were flexible and could adapt to the
> changing ecological conditions by breaking up or recombining. The tribal
> organization was loosely integrated ...
>
> The Prairie Plains tribes, in contrast, were characterized by more highly
> specialized and interlocking social structures, well adapted to sedentary
> agricultural life but to rigid for the uncertain life of the High Plains. Both
> regions utilized enlarged families as domestic units, as well as associational
> structures, but their roles in the larger society were somewhat different.[30]

Eggan's discussion of 'social organization' focuses on 'kinship' systems and how 'kinship' as a means of social organization is adapted to ecological conditions and how the development of social formations is, in part, a process of acculturation to an ecological context. Scholars like Eggan, unlike Henderson and I, see a direct and essential correlation between the structure of governance (kinship system) on the northern plains or the High Plains and the buffalo; that is, he believes that environmental causes social organization on the northern plains. Eggan asserts it is not just agriculture, the lack of it or a society's means of subsistence which affects the development of a polity and its system of governance. Instead, he believes social organization is a means of adapting to an ecological context. Viewing the people of the northern plains as recent arrivals he argues that the camp circle was an adaptation to the northern plains; which was ecologically determined

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[30] Eggan, op. cit., pp. 63-64.

as it was based on a people's dependency relationship to the buffalo and how the buffalo organize themselves.[31]

Because of this belief in ecological determinism, Eggan does not deal the possibility that variation in social organization could be the result of an ecological context and in the sense of how a nation has chosen to relate to or adapt to the natural environment. Instead, he agrees with Oliver that anomalies or variations are the result of peoples retaining parts of their culture as they moved from elsewhere to the Plains.[32] The existence of these differences in understanding political systems is extremely important, as they speak to Henderson's idea that Indigenous people see the natural world as a context of inquiry (from which they can learn) and they also see the natural world as something to which they have to adapt. Thus, the relationship between politics and governance is not deterministic or causal. Rather, it is a matter of a peoples using their experiences within, and understanding of, a particular ecological order to ascertain 'how we all live best together', or what form of governance is feasible in a given environment. It is also about learning how to govern from that which exists around you, and developing a system based on how peoples see themselves in relation to their environment. Thus, while Eggan and Oliver support Henderson's claims that there is a relationship between Indigenous politics and ecology, the essentialist and determinist underpinnings of their analysis are different from Henderson's theory of ecological contextuality, in which the relationship is mediated by a people's collective experiences in a particular ecological order and how they have expressed their knowledge and creativity in constructing human artifacts.

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[31] Ibid. pp. 54-55.

[32] Oliver, op. cit. pp. 71-76.

## ECOLOGICAL CONTEXTS & THE STUDY OF POLITICS

While Diamond, Eggan and Oliver support Henderson's theory of ecological contexts to varying degrees, their theories and methods of analysis do not have the explanatory power of Henderson's approach. Nor do they offer an approach to studying Indigenous political traditions from within. Moreover, Diamond fails to consider human phenomena such as world view and a people's relationship to and understanding of Creation as variables in political development. Eggan and Oliver also fail to consider human phenomena as variables in political development. For these reasons, I follow Henderson's approach because it supports my contention that human phenomena including a people's world view, their understanding of the political, their interpretation of Creation, spirituality, and understanding of their relationship with other beings all play important operational and ideological roles in Indigenous political traditions. Human phenomena need to be taken into consideration in formulating an alterNative approach to the study of Indigenous politics and governance. An alterNative approach is necessary because western-eurocentric approaches have failed to deal adequately with these human phenomena in a non-universalistic, non-eurocentric, non-essentialist manner. Hence an alterNative approach must enable the researcher to consider these human phenomena in describing and analyzing governance.

Henderson's theory of ecological contexts empowers researchers to engage in non-essentialist studies of governance which respects and emphasizes human phenomena such as world view, spirituality, and a peoples' conceptualization of the political. Because Henderson's theory is non-essentialist we come to understand that just because people live within an ecological context does not mean that they do not create governance. It simply means that they have created their political system within an ecological context of inquiry which is predicated on their experiences with and relationship to Creation.

Thus, I chose Henderson's framework based on the idea of ecological contexts and predicated on the premise that societies create human artifacts such as language, law and

governance through experiencing, mediating and understanding a local ecological order. Creation does not create a political tradition, Creation is merely represented and expressed in human artifacts such as political systems, just as the sounds of nature are expressed and represented in Indigenous languages. Indigenous peoples are not 'man in a state of nature'. They are not 'savages' nor are they 'primitives' who have social systems via 'instinct' instead of human creativity. They are distinct 'civilizations' predicated on an ecological context rather than an artificial or anti-naturalistic context. It is only by understanding this ecological contextuality that one is able to escape biases of western-eurocentric thought and the illusions or artificial constructs that this tradition has produced.

While Henderson does not argue that there is a correlation between ecology and governance, in this dissertation I will demonstrate the existence of a relationship between the ecological context and the traditional Blackfoot political system. That is to say, the remainder of this dissertation will demonstrate that "the earth and its forces [were] the living context that [instructed traditional Blackfoot political] teachings and order."[33]

I will not claim, however, that the ecological context is the sole source of Blackfoot governance or other traditional Indigenous political systems. While the local ecosystem 'instructed teachings and order', it did not causally determine political development. Blackfoot political development was also influenced by internal pressures such as intermittent rivalries between clans, and external influences such as borrowing from the political traditions of other nations. Although there were other factors contributing to political development, I will argue that understanding the ecological context and its relationship to political traditions directly, or indirectly through world views, facilitates an examination of a political tradition from the interpreted perspective of a particular political and intellectual tradition. Such an approach enables both an explanation of

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[33] Henderson, , "*Ayukpachi:* Empowering Aboriginal Thought" op. cit., p. 259.

'what' (a system) and of 'why' and 'how' a system and its characteristic attributes developed. By suggesting that ecological contexts enable a consideration of 'why' and 'how' a political system developed, I am suggesting that this permits the researcher to identify and analyze possible relationships of influence and I am not claiming that this enables a positivist explanation of causality.

In short, using ecological contexts to approach the study of politics is predicated on several things: recognition of the Indigenous world as existing separate from the assumed universality of western-eurocentric thought; recognition that this world must be viewed holistically not fragmented as in the western-eurocentric tradition; and, recognition that to discover the truth of this world and explain it in a trustworthy manner one must examine it as a contextualized whole and account for its development within a separate context. In accounting for its existence as part of a separate context, one best captured in terms of an ecological context, my thesis provides a contextualized understanding of traditional Blackfoot governance and demonstrates how ecological contexts define political systems, testing the applicability of Henderson's thesis as an explanation of traditional Blackfoot governance, and potentially other political systems.

Examining the Blackfoot political system from the perspective of an ecological context allows me the opportunity to grapple with questions that could not be answered by utilizing any of the approaches discussed in the previous chapter. For example, contextuality accounts for why western-eurocentric thinkers have failed to understand Indigenous political traditions in a manner which reflects their true nature (not predicated on an understanding of politics as power) and which incorporates how Indigenous peoples experienced and understand traditional structures of governance. It also provides the opportunity to explain commensurability theoretically; to demonstrate the need to study political traditions 'from the inside out'; and, to create a foundation for an intellectual bridge of understanding based on an understanding of Indigenous systems of knowledge, reason, world views and a relationship with nature. Contextuality also lets

me create an understanding of why Indigenous political systems are so very different than western-eurocentric systems, and to theorize why and how traditional Blackfoot governance took the form and evolved in the way it did.

## CONCLUSIONS

While there are many ways I could approach my analysis of traditional Blackfoot governance, I have concluded that Henderson's theory of ecological contexts affords me the greatest opportunity to create a trustworthy understanding of this political system and to demonstrate that it is possible to 'bring the Indian back in'. This is because applying Henderson's theory allows me to create a trustworthy analysis of *Siiksikaawa* governance without colonizing this political tradition, or perpetuating the myths or illusions that prevent western-eurocentric thinkers from seeing and understanding Indigenous political systems. Moreover, this approach affords me the greatest opportunity to explain, analyze and theorize and not simply describe Blackfoot political traditions because it builds on existing theorizations and conceptualizations of Indigenous knowledge systems, paradigms and contextuality. Thus, it enables me the opportunity to build upon and develop further my detailed institutional description of traditional Blackfoot governance and examine, explain and theorize this political system from within its own context utilizing traditional Indigenist political thought as a foundation for this discussion. The next chapter revisits my case study and presents an analysis of this political system using Henderson's theory of ecological contexts.

# CHAPTER 6

## THE BUFFALO ARE OUR TEACHERS:

## BRINGING POLITICS BACK TO CREATION

The purpose of this dissertation is to 'bring Indigenous political traditions (back) in' by destabilizing the assumed universal and forging an understanding of them as separate and distinct political traditions. To achieve a trustworthy and reliable understanding, Indigenous political traditions must be studied from within; from the perspective, and using the tools, of Indigenist thought. Using the Blackfoot Confederacy as a case study, I have explicated the contours of traditional governance, as recounted to me by contemporary members of the three traditional structures. What I have presented goes far beyond that which I thought I would achieve as an outsider. But, my explanation of Blackfoot governance thus far, does not meet the requirements that I set for myself at the outset of this dissertation. I have yet to consider the relationship between traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance and the local ecological order in which it developed.

In this chapter I use Henderson's theory of ecological contexts to analyze the Blackfoot Confederacy's political system, and to theorize 'why' and 'how' the system and its characteristic attributes developed. In theorizing 'how' and 'why' the system developed, I am seeking to demonstrate that there is a relationship between governance and ecology, and to locate the contours of this relationship. I will explicate the relationship between structures of governance and ecology through a contextualized discussion of the origins of the Confederacy, its political system and the characteristic

attributes of that system. I then contrast the relationship between Blackfoot governance and its local ecological order with *Nehiyaw* (Plains Cree) political traditions to demonstrate that a relationship exists in each case. I will demonstrate that it is a different relationship in each case and explore the difference between the idea, and application, of ecological contexts and ecological determinism.

## UNDERSTANDING ECOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

Henderson's theory of ecological contexts posits that Indigenous knowledge systems, languages, world views and societal phenomena were forged within an ecological context of inquiry. In other words, a people's knowledge of their environment and their understanding of their relationship with their local ecosystem provided the foundations upon which Indigenous peoples created human artifacts. Henderson demonstrates this conceptualization of the Indigenous world with reference to how Algonkian languages, including Cree and Mikmaw, were constructed as a relationship with the natural world and as a means of expressing or vocalizing both the relationship and the ecosystem itself. This conceptualization of the Indigenous world is also consistent with Blackfoot Creation Stories as can be demonstrated by referring back to those stories of Creation recounted in a previous chapter.

According to Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, *Napi* or the Trickster was charged with the responsibility of creating the *Niitsitapi* and teaching them how to live as part of the ecosystem from which they were created. They explain:

> ... Now Old Man led these people down to where the Blood Reserve now is, and told them that this would be a fine country for them, and that they would be very rich. ... All the people living there ate and lived like wild animals; but Old Man went among and taught them all the arts of civilization.[1]

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[1] Clark Wissler and D. C. Duvall, *Mythology of the Blackfoot Indians*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 20.

George Bird Grinnell recounts a similar story as follows:

> The first people were poor and naked, and did not know how to get a
> living. Old Man showed them the roots and berries, and told them they
> could eat them ... He told them that the animals should be their food ....
> Also Old Man said to the people: "Now, if you are overcome, you may go
> to sleep, and get power. Something will come to you in your dream, that
> will help you. Whatever these animals tell you to do, you must obey
> them, as they appear to you in your sleep. Be guided by them. If anyone
> wants help, if you are alone and traveling, and cry aloud for help, your
> prayers will be answered. It may be by the eagles, perhaps by the buffalo,
> or by the bears ..."[2]

Most of the stories I have heard emphasize the relationship the Blackfoot-established

with their territory and the non-human beings with whom they shared the land from

which they emerged. Since *Napi* or the Old Man is a physical manifestation of the

power, essence or energy of Creation, the stories illustrate how the Blackfoot learned how

to survive from Creation and how they constructed a world view, spiritual beliefs and

knowledge system based on Creation's teachings (direct or indirect). It is entirely

possible that the Creation Stories recounted above are myths or tales of events similar to

those recounted in other spiritual or intellectual traditions such as Christianity. Still,

what is important is not whether they ever were but how they always are because they

explain how *Siiksikaawa* related to their environment and they exemplified fundamental

teachings about how people should relate to, understand and learn from Creation.

As Henderson, the Blackfoot oral tradition and my own experiences all suggest, it

seems entirely plausible that Indigenous peoples like the Blackfoot Confederacy

developed world views, languages, and subsistence economies by directly experiencing an

ecosystem or indirectly experiencing an ecosystem through cumulative knowledge and

spirituality. Does this hold true, however, with respect to political knowledge and

systems of governance? Was the local ecosystem a classroom and were non-human

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[2] George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfoot Lodge Tails: The Story of a Prairie People*, (Lincoln: University of Lincoln Press, 1995), pp. 39-41.

beings the teachers of the Blackfoot with respect to governance? Did the natural world instruct in the creation of political teachings and governance? Did the ecological order shape the Blackfoot political system? In a previous chapter, I provided a quasi-institutionalist account of traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance. This account does not provide a full understanding of Blackfoot governance, however, and I argue that for a trustworthy understanding of *Siiksikaawa* governance, one has to look towards ecology rather than the institutions themselves.

## CONCEPTUALIZING *SIIKSIKAAWA* GOVERNANCE: AN INTERPRETED PERSPECTIVE

To contextualize traditional Blackfoot governance or understand how Creation has "instructed [political] teachings and order", we must understand how governance is conceptualized from within. To understand contextuality, it is important to gain an understanding of governance from the interpreted perspective of the Blackfoot world view. Thus, in this section, I attempt to bridge the previous chapters pertaining to *Siiksikaawa* reality and governance by bringing *Siiksikaawa* world view into the discussion of politics and explaining traditional governance from the vantage point of that world view.

*Siiksikaawa* governance began with Creation and existed as a relationship with all of Creation. The Blackfoot believed that Creator gave the *Niitsitapi* their territory and the tools and lessons necessary to survive in that territory. They were part of, not separate from, the larger territorial community which included all beings, including those which comprise the land itself. Governance was therefore, viewed in relationship to the environment, and as an integral part of the circle of life. This is demonstrated in the way *Siiksikaawa* governance was explained to me on several occasions, as not different from, and as a parallel to, the social structures and protocols which 'govern' other 'nations' such as the buffalo and the wolves.

As I understand it, this relationship between governance and the environment, or the wider circle of life, is extremely important for a number of reasons. If one remembers the story of *Poia* or the story of the *Natoas*, the *okahn* itself and the protocols and structures which govern *okahn* (those which comprise traditional governance) had their origins in the teachings of Creator and messengers of Creator. Protocols, laws and responsibilities within *okahn* were developed over time and in relationship to the territory and all beings present within their territory. *Okahn*, protocols, laws, and responsibilities defined the Confederacy's relationship and responsibilities in the territory (the circle of life) and existed to create balance and harmony in the circle of life.

Traditional governance was a reflection of the Blackfoot paradigm or world view; a world view in which everything existed as part of the circle of life, and in relation to all beings and all forces in the natural community or environment. This is how traditional Blackfoot governance and the structures or institutions described in the previous chapter should be understood. Governance existed within the Blackfoot realm as part of Creation, as an expression or reflection of a world view and as a relationship with Creation (all beings). Understanding it in this way, enables one to see, explain and understand the primary characteristics of traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance and to begin to understand the relationship between Blackfoot governance and the local ecosystem.

As it has been explained to me, the circle of life includes all beings and all beings have responsibilities within the circle of life. Balance, inclusion and the honouring of all beings are fundamental teachings of the natural world and thus, of the Blackfoot world view. Like the world from which it emerges, Blackfoot traditional governance was also based on the inclusion and honouring of all beings, and the creation of internal balance or harmony among all beings. Structures and protocols demanded or commanded the inclusion of all beings in traditional governance.

This was reflected in the inclusion of women in structures or institutions of governance and the inclusion of all people (all human and non-human beings) in decision-

making protocols and practices through consultative and consensus-generating mechanisms. This was also reflected in how all decisions were made and all actions were taken; protocols and structures allowed for the inclusion of spiritual guidance and traditional knowledge (that which is derived through relationships with the greater circle of life). Moreover, protocols and structures demanded the inclusion of all beings, and the creation of balance and harmony between all beings. Thus, decisions were made in a way that reflected a balance between the abstract and the physical, the theory and the practice or the male and the female. All decisions had to strive to maintain balance and harmony within each nation and the Confederacy, and between the *Niitsitapi* and the wider circle of life or natural world.

As I understand the traditional Blackfoot world view, an individual's primary responsibility was to search out and live her/his own identity and relationship to Creation and to honour all responsibilities which flowed from there. Traditional Blackfoot governance was a reflection of this understanding of individuals. Structures and protocols emphasized people's gifts and responsibilities, and honoured the vast array of responsibilities. Structures and protocols also reflected this world view by emphasizing what some describe as a doctrine of non-interference.[3] That is to say, traditional governance lacked explicit mechanisms of control and coercion. Everyone had the right and responsibility to find and live their own pathway, in so far as they respected relationships and the responsibilities which flowed from these relationships and the realization of their gifts.

In a world in which the only constant was flux (the ebbs and flows of life forces), non-coercive power was everywhere, and all beings were viewed as autonomous, there was but one purpose: to honour one's place in all realms of Creation. To do so, each one

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[3] Rupert Ross, *Dancing With a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*, (Markham: Reed Books, 1992), pp. 11-28. Rupert Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 76-100.

had to 'live their life in the best way possible' in balance with the world around them, in balance with themselves, their relations, and Creator. This ecologically based philosophy was reflected in Blackfoot governance because it was based on a recognition of the sovereignty of individuals as well as the responsibilities and identity of the collective; the idea of community wellness and a collective action-orientation. Therefore, consensus and participation in decision-making practices and enforcement procedures were not only desirable but necessary.

In explaining Aboriginal world views, Henderson has captured in words my understanding of the Blackfoot realm, and of life and reality within this world view: "Aboriginal world views and languages are formulated by experiencing an ecosystem. Aboriginal world views are empirical relationships with local ecosystems ... By living in an ecological space for millennia, Aboriginal people establish a world view that sees the order of life as a state of flux."[4] Traditional Blackfoot governance recognized and incorporated this flux into the structures and protocols which comprised governance, so flux was inherent within traditional structures and protocols. Thus, there existed enormous flexibility and fluidity within traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance as demonstrated by situational leadership. This resulted in a transformative political system that enabled governance to adapt to both internal and external demands, pressures and needs. Simply put, it allowed for the survival of *Niitsitapi* (people) as *Siiksikaawa* (Blackfoot) in an ever changing world by having had a system of governance that expressed a relationship with the circle of life (Creation).

Simply put, governance was about relationships and responsibilities, and how one lived those relationships and honoured those responsibilities. It was the way 'they lived most nicely together.'[5] Governance was not simply the structures of *okahn*, nor just the

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[4] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought", in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 258-259.

[5] Patricia Monture-Angus, *Thunder In My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1995).

process of coming to 'one mind' which involved all people (the many chiefs). It was about relationships and responsibilities: it was also a reflection of Blackfoot essentialism. Governance was also about living the best way possible by operationalizing those values and recognizing one's relationship to the universe and the Creator. Finally, it was about the reflexive, spiritual and consensual process of being and becoming one mind with those around you.

The idea that traditional governance is about 'living the best way possible' is best explained and demonstrated by looking towards the people from whom I have borrowed this terminology, the *Haudenosaunee*; and exploring what it means in its rightful context. Commonly referred to as the Great Law of Peace, the constitution of the *Haudenosaunee* or the *kayaheren'tsherakowa*, is best translated as the 'great big nice' because it refers to how people can best live together. So, the idea is that law-making is about deciding 'how we are going to get along together kindly'.[6] The idea 'how we live most nicely together' is an inclusive way to conceptualize governance which is deeply embedded in most Indigenous world views. Governance, in a traditional context was the ways people live their relationships and structure those relationships so as to achieve peace and kindness, balance and harmony in all reams of the flux and the circle of life. It was about asking 'how do we fit into the natural order' and live in a way that respects, reflects and embraces relationships and flux existing in that order. It was about the way all human and non-human beings live together the best way possible.

As I understand traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance based on the teachings of the Elders, *okahn* was a system of governance which existed as part of and was an expression of Creation as manifested in Blackfoot territory. As a reflection of the ecological world, Blackfoot governance incorporated and manifested balance, inclusion, individualism, and

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[6] Ibid., p. 32. My understanding of this was facilitated by Patricia Monture-Angus and Denise S. McConney.

flux as they were understood and expressed within the Blackfoot world view. Thus, *okahn* must be understood as a framework used for creating and maintaining peace and good order based on the physical and abstract manifestations of Creator's teachings. It is how the Blackfoot constructed 'the way we live most nicely together' based on the teachings of Creation. It is how they perceived themselves fitting into the natural order, and how they saw all human and non-human beings living together the best way possible.

## OLDER BROTHER JOINS THE CIRCLE

Exploring governance from the interpreted perspective of the *Siiksikaawa* world view, makes it clear that Henderson's conception of the Indigenous world as a relationship with the natural world is correct. My Blackfoot teachers provided similar explanations to get me thinking of governance as an expression of and as a relationship to the local ecosystem. But there is more to this. By appropriating Henderson's idea of an ecological context, I am arguing is that *Siiksikaawa* constructed their system of governance based on their collective knowledge of the ecosystem within which they existed. Governance was formulated by experiencing an ecosystem; that is, Creation 'instructed political teachings and order'. In this section, I examine this hypothesis at the most general level, that of the system as a whole.

Henderson claims that the ecological context "allows those who move within it to discover everything about the world that they can discover."[7] From this perspective, knowledge can be obtained through processes of inward journeying; reflection; dreams; visions; and, through individual and collective experiences in the natural world. Thus, it is likely that governance emerged out of or was forged using these same intellectual processes and experiences.

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[7] Henderson, op. cit., p. 256.

It is commonly argued by Blackfoot orators and Elders that the *Siiksikaawa* emerged from their territory and were given the tools with which they could survive and prosper in this territory by Creator. Many also say that their people learned and forged their language, world view, ceremonies, economy, and political system through their interactions with Creation. Given that Creator is not a noun-god, there is inherent contradiction in these teachings. Creator is the essence or the power that defines all human and non-human beings; Creator is everything and is everywhere. Thus, I was constantly asked by my teachers, if I had ever watched and experienced a relationship with their older brother, the buffalo. Moreover, many of my teachers insisted that in developing such a relationship I would be better able to understand and explain Blackfoot governance.

One might justifiably ask what one could learn about Blackfoot governance by watching the buffalo. The answer is actually quite simple. Potentially, one could learn all that exists within the cumulative knowledge of the Blackfoot with respect to the buffalo and about how the buffalo 'live together in the best way possible'. That is to say, one can learn about buffalo politics and governance and understand how the Blackfoot forged political teachings and order by having a relationship with buffalo, observing, experiencing and in listening to their wisdom.

Quite by accident, during the course of my research I had the opportunity to sit and watch a small herd of buffalo grazing on a hillside overlooking a valley where I had chosen to spend a day picking saskatoon berries. I spent more time that day as an observer than I did as a berry picker. Subsequently I spent several other days watching buffalo (when I could find them) and feasting on saskatoons. As a result, I began to understand what it was that the Elders were telling me. The lives and the internal social structure of the buffalo were being interfered with by humans; they had been acquired recently from a larger herd and were confined by fences (albeit in a large pasture). Nonetheless, those buffalo people were attempting to live their lives as their ancestors had when they roamed

freely over that same land. They lived freely as individuals, without a coercive system of governance. According to my teachings, and my observations of those beings, they were a collective or a nation (in Blackfoot terms) which had an elaborate internal structure that engaged all individuals (both males and females) within that nation and enabled all individuals to seek out their own paths and realize their own power.

I will not discuss at length what I saw of the buffalo or what I have been taught about these 'older brothers'. What is important, however, is that most, if not all, Plains peoples speak of the buffalo as their teachers, and as an intricate part of the way in which their nation is ordered. According to *Anishinaabeg* scholar Winona LaDuke and Cheyenne cowboy Fred Dubray, the buffalo taught the Plains people throughout their history, and are responsible for many teachings.[8] Relying on the wisdom of Dubray, LaDuke states that: "One of the things we learn from the buffalo is that it is not about the individual buffalo. It is about the herd."[9] Dubray asserted that the Cheyenne learned from the buffalo that "... we need to go on as tribes. We can succeed as individuals, but in that process we lose our identity. We are a collective."[10] Further, Dubray argues:

> ... what buffalo means to me is life itself on this continent. And our culture itself. ... When we talk about restoring the buffalo itself, we're not just talking about restoring the animals to the land, we're talking about restoring social structure, culture, and even our political structure. ... Buffalo mean everything to us. And they teach us all kinds of things. They teach you how to respect yourself better, how to relate to each other and live with other species, and how to respect each other. Those things are real to Indian people.[11]

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[8] Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), pp. 136-162.

[9] Ibid., p. 159.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 160.

More specifically, what the buffalo taught the Blackfoot Confederacy with respect to governance is as multifaceted and as complex as life itself. As Dubray argues, the buffalo are acknowledged for teaching *Siiksikaawa*, directly or indirectly, about community. While individuals were free to live their own life way without the interference of others, individuals were also obligated to and responsible for both their relations and the nation. Like the buffalo, they were tied together, by professions of kinship, and a "sense of community and a commitment to it."[12] This, sense of community and this commitment, as Jace Weaver suggests, is a phenomena he terms communitism, for both the Buffalo nations and the Blackfoot nations were premised on a "proactive commitment to one's community".[13] It was both community and activism and thus, communitism.[14] Similarly, Robert Warrior and other Indigenous scholars have suggested that, "the success or failure of American Indian communal societies has always been predicated not upon a set of uniform, unchanging beliefs, but rather upon a commitment to the groups and the groups' futures."[15]

The buffalo were also responsible for providing a basis from which the Blackfoot could understand issues of balance. By this I mean that the buffalo constituted a living example of a community living in balance. They had a social formation that included all genders; both men and women led buffalo nations at different points in time, depending on situation and season. Buffalo social structures also emphasized both flux and balance. Although it was predicated on hierarchical relations, it emphasized inclusion and respect

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[12] Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Communities*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 43.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. xx.

and allowed those with ability to lead without ostracizing individuals or trampling on their rights or responsibilities as individuals.

How the characteristic attributes or basic tenets of *Siiksikaawa* political philosophy were forged through experiences with the natural world can be demonstrated with respect to both individualism and leadership. Blackfoot philosophies regarding individualism is predicated on an understanding of Creation in its totality. As was discussed in the chapter on the *Siiksikaawa* world view, the Blackfoot believe in 'essentialism'; the belief that all individuals (be they human or non-human) are instilled with the essence or power of Creation. This understanding of individualism was manifested in traditional governance, which was predicated on the idea that one cannot interfere with the life way of another. Thus, traditional governance was characterized by: consensual decision-making; an absence of coercive authority or dominion; and, an absence of an hierarchy.

This understanding of 'individualism' demonstrates the relationship between traditional Blackfoot politics and, so, the natural world or how *Siiksikaawa* experience and understand their ecosystem and have constructed a political system which reflects these understandings and experiences. This is because individuals were understood as autonomous beings and were perceived as the main conduits for power (essence) in the Blackfoot world view. Thus, there was no hierarchically defined political structure which claimed a legitimate monopoly over the institutionalization and operationalization of coersive power or which claimed sovereignty over citizens and territory. There is no institution which had the ability to make and enforce decisions for the Blackfoot system was predicated on a completely different conceptualization of man and nature than the western-eurocentric political tradition. Because individuals were viewed as autonomous and because Blackfoot society was devoid of hierachically defined vestiges of coersive power which legitimately exercised authority over a populace and its territory, there was no 'authority' greater than the responsible individual. As was noted in chapter two, however, there existed an alterNative understanding of power and authority within the

traditional Blackfoot political system. Authority and power were viewed collectively as

a consensually defined communitism (community activism) and *not* in terms of

hierarchical structures or institutions which legitimately exercised sovereignty and

dominion. Thus, while Blackfoot governance was devoid of western-eurocentric

conceptualizations of power and authority (as coercion), Blackfoot governance was

predicated on an individualized power (essence) and autonomy, and collective power

(meaning both the consensual process of making-decisions and the decision itself).

Within the traditional *Siiksikaawa* context, 'power' and 'authority' were collective

and non-coersive. There was no 'authority' greater than the responsible individual other

than the total sum of individuals exercising their powers through consensual decision-

making, horizontal authority or collective power; except in certain, collectively defined

situations. While this will be explained in greater detail in the proceeding chapter, it is

important to understand the difference between western-eurocentric and Indigenous

conceptualizations of power. Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred explains:

> A crucial feature of the indigenous concept of governance is its respect for
> individual autonomy. This respect precludes the notion of 'sovereignty' -
> the idea that there can be some permanent transference of power from the
> individual to an abstraction called 'government'. The indigenous tradition
> sees government as the collective power of the individual members of the
> nation; there is no separation between society and state.[16]

I would not generalize to the degree that Alfred does because there were polities such

as the Haida that were hierarchically structured, and did not recognize the autonomy of all

members of society (particularly the 'slaves'). I would suggest, however, that in *most*

cases (especially plains polities) and under *most* circumstances there was no way to

differentiate between the governors and the governed within traditional stateless

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[16] Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 25. Alfred's assertion that 'sovereignty' is an inadequate description of Indigenous governance, does not mean that Indigenous nations were not sovereigns within their own territories. It simply means that western-eurocentric conceptualizations of sovereignty and government are inadequate means of describing and analyzing Indigenist political thought and political systems.

Iindigenous polities. Certainly this is true within the Blackfoot Confederacy, because of how the *Siiksikaawa* viewed, interpreted and related to the world within which they exist. This was, also demonstrated by the traditional philosophies of 'Blackfoot essentialism' and by practices that replicated what existed in the natural world and in the teachings of Creation, so no one being could claim dominion over another.

Blackfoot conceptualizations of 'essentialism' and 'individualism' demonstrate how *Siiksikaawa* political philosophy was forged through experiences with the natural world. This relationship between governance and Creation can also be demonstrated with respect to Blackfoot philosophies, protocols and practices regarding leadership. Although the buffalo's social structure was hierarchical, it emphasized inclusion and respect. Buffalo social structure allowed those with ability to lead without ostracizing individuals or trampling on their rights and responsibilities as individuals. Furthermore, under normal circumstances there was no coercive authority, and individual buffalo could live their lives as they saw fit, even if this meant leaving the herd or attempting to forge a new herd with themselves as leader. Similarly, there was no way to differentiate between the governing and the governed within traditional Blackfoot politics. *Siiksikaawa* was without political hierarchy and power as it is exercised legitimately in the western-eurocentric tradition. Further to this, leadership was not about gaining the ability to exercise power and coercive or 'sovereign authority'. Under normal circumstances it was not about a single person or an executive committee legitimately using power over a society which had little or no say as to the application of that power.

Thus, the way I understand Blackfoot leadership, based on the teachings of Elders, is that leadership was about an individual's gifts, honouring those gifts and one's relationships, and the idea of collective responsibility. But, it was not about an individualized pursuit of power. Leadership was simply the responsibility to lead the people by means of demonstration and rationalization (getting the people to agree) and the responsibility to provide for and ensure the sustainability of the *Niitsitapi* as

*Siiksikaawa*. It was the idea of being *nina* or *nah'a*, of being a good father or mother, and not it was not about being *kinininayna* or a medal chief, those called chief by the Canadian government. Being a Blackfoot leader was not about taking orders or making decisions. It was about representing the one-mind or the collective decision of the people, and being a good person, good provider and good advisor or a knowledgeable helper.

Leaders were typically among the poorest in traditional society, for a good leader was one who provided well for all of the people, and who gave freely to those in need. A leader was one who had chosen the righteous path or the red road in that they lived a life of balance. Balance was created through one's relationships with Creation and one's ability to live in balance and harmony with flux. Recognizing that there is good and bad in everything, that everything has an internal equilibrium, and that a flux and is comprised of both good and bad. A good leader was one who was an eternal optimist and had a demonstrated ability to 'flip reality' or find balance and goodness regardless of the circumstances. Leaders were people who knew no anger, meanness, aggressiveness, jealousy and spite. Instead, they were living examples of the highest qualities; respect, responsibility, humility and (self) control. They were people who were recognized as leaders not necessarily out of their own desire to be leaders, but because the people recognized their inherent qualities and made them leaders.

This discussion of Blackfoot political traditions and philosophies pertaining to individualism and leadership, illustrates how the Blackfoot world view and the characteristic attributes of political philosophy were formulated through their experiences with their ecosystem. A similar demonstration can be made with respect to the structures which comprised the pre-colonial political system. Structures of governance were forged in the same way as the *Siiksikaawa* world view, knowledge system and political philosophy. For instance, *okahn* existed as an expression of Creation, and defined, at least in part, the Confederacy's relationship with Creation. That Creation instructed the Blackfoot political order is demonstrated in the oral tradition, in stories such as those of

*Poia* and *Natoas*. To demonstrate that such a relationship existed between the political system and Creation, however, we must examine the structures of governance themselves. So, what follows is a discussion of the relationship between particular structures of governance and the natural world.

## BUNDLES

Within the *Siiksikaawa* political system there were three Bundles which performed functions associated with governance and, in the case of the *Nataos* Bundle, established the structure of traditional Blackfoot governance. The Beaver Bundle, Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle and *Nataos* Bundle existed at the heart of the *Siiksikaawa* governance literally and metaphorically. These Bundles were an expression of an ecological context. Because the physical and abstract manifestations of these Bundles were derived from the natural world as the Bundles were 'gifted' (*giimaks'inn*) or transferred to members of the Confederacy from the thunder beings, beaver people and the Sun. The origin stories of the Bundles profess a relationship with Creation that confirms the applicability of Henderson's idea of ecological context. The fact that the Blackfoot political system was 'formulated by experiencing an ecosystem' can also be illustrated by the abstract and physical manifestations of Creation's teachings contained within the Bundles themselves.

According to oral tradition, the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle came to reside amongst the *Siiksikaawa* when it was gifted to the people by the Thunder to be used in the resolution of disputes between individuals and disputes between various groups (sub-national and national). Even if one does not accept the story, the pipe is an expression of the peoples' knowledge of thunder and lightening. Thunder is a powerful being as Thunder can strike and destroy; but out of this flux in Creation's energy or essence emerges a possibility for hope and renewal for the rains which it brings refreshes and renews the circle of life. Thunder can strike and destroy as it pleases and in so doing, it is perceived as having the power (essence) to settle conflicts on earth and in the sky. It is

this power and the *Siiksikaawa's* understanding of this power, which was manifested in the Thunder Medicine Pipe Bundle and its teachings. The carrier of this pipe, moreover, had the responsibility to settle disputes amongst the Blackfoot and between the Blackfoot and others. This responsibility was exercised based upon the cumulative knowledge of Thunder beings. This resulted in the idea that the decision-maker or adjudicator had to remain free from the control of those individuals for whom the decision was being made as no one controls Thunder. This also resulted in the idea that the decision maker had to use their power wisely and respectfully as Thunder does not always kill when it strikes.

According to oral tradition, the Beaver Bundle was presented to the Blackfoot by Beavers and it included teachings, philosophy, theory and protocols regarding tobacco, collective decision-making, the operationalization of a council and the strength of consensual decision-making. While this transfer may never have happened in the manner recorded in the *Siiksikaawa* oral tradition, the story explains how *Siiksikaawa* related to their environment and its teachings reveal how people were to relate to, understand and learn from Creation. The Beaver are social beings whose livelihood and existence are dependent on cooperative and coordinated action; action said to be achieved through consensual decision-making. Thus, the Beaver people served as a model or example of the importance of consensual decision-making and how consensual decision-making could be achieved using the council structure and tobacco.

The *Nataos* Bundle is said to have been brought down by *Poia* and *So-at-sa-ki* from the Sun and to have provided the people with the *okaan* or *okahn* (meaning, in this instance, the Sundance as well as the camp circle itself). Regardless of how these teachings arrived, it was the Sundance which brought the nation together. This provided the opportunity for all societies and Bundle carriers to meet and re-affirm the sovereignty of the nation and make decisions readily. The gathering of the entire nation eased the difficulties associated with consensual decision-making in a 'nomadic' polity where

members of the nation separated into clans that resided in different areas of the vast territory for much of the year. *Nataos* is said to have operationalized the nation as a political unit and provided it the opportunity to reaffirm its sovereignty through collective decision-making and collective-action. Still, the *okahn* (the nation's camp circle) can also be understood independently of *okahn* (the Sundance). For while the *Nataos* provided the structure of *okahn* (both the Sundance and the camp circle), it did not create the nation. Nor did it provide the nation with the totality of its political philosophies and protocols. Thus, prior to discussing clans and societies and the relationship that existed between these structures of governance and Creation, I will address the relationship between *okahn* and the natural world.

## OKAHN

> You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. ... Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round ... and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves.[17]

Black Elk suggests that everything in the Indigenous world is circular, and as an expression of this ecological context, governance is no different. The Confederacy conceived of their system of governance using the philosophy of the circle of life. Their system of governance was also operationalized using a circular formation which came to the people as a result of the physical and abstract manifestations of the *Nataos* bundle. Even if we cannot accept the story of *Poia*, we can still see that traditional *Siiksikaawa*

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[17] Black Elk (Lakota) quoted in Norbert S. Hill (ed.), *Words of Power: Voices From Indian America* (Golden Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994), p. 1.

governance was conceptualized in relationship to, and as an expression of, the larger circle of life. It existed as part of a whole; a circle that was undivided, unsegmented and undifferentiated, yet ordered, structured and function or action-oriented.

Traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance has its origins in Creation and the teachings of Creator. The framework (*okahn*) and the many of the structures and protocols which define and characterized *okahn*, originated in the physical and abstract manifestations of Creator's teachings contained in the *Natoas* Bundle. These teachings, received from the sky people, set forth the ceremonies which brought people together, and gave structure and order to the nations and the Confederacy throughout the year. Creator's teachings and the relationship between *Siiksikaawa* and the ecological order created order and established governance, for the spiritual and ecological realms maintained the structures and protocols that existed within *okahn* and were indivisible from the political realm. There is but one circle of life, and everything in that circle existed together as one; meaning that there was no differentiation between political and spiritual domains and no separation between governance and spirituality.

Once a gathering of the entire Confederacy, over time *okahn* became associated with the nations which comprised the Confederacy (*Siksika*, *Kainai*, and *Pikani*), possibly as a result of colonization. This relationship between governance (*okahn*) and the nation (people gathering together in *okahn*) is extremely important. Conceptualizing governance as the gathering of a nation or as the camp circle demonstrates the idea of oneness, and the lack of separation between governance and the people of the nation. As the utilization of the word *okahn* to describe governance infers, governance was part of the camp circle and as such, it was part of society and not separate from it.

## CLANS

*Okahn* was a system of governance or a political system that developed out of a people's experiences with and knowledge of the local ecosystem. Just as the circular

structure was a physical representation of the natural world and the beliefs, philosophies, practices and protocols contained within *okahn* were an expression of the natural world the nation internal divisions within the nations also reflected the natural world and lessons learned therein.

As with other beings, the social structure of the Buffalo was a reflection of the natural world. It was a reflection of, or possibly an adaptation to, the natural world and the flux and cycles of change which exist therein. Buffalo social structure was not a constant, but was constantly in flux as it responded to the flux inherent in nature. Many would assume the mainstay of buffalo organization was the massive herds (nations) which explorers, settlers and buffalo hunters encountered (and killed for days at a time) during their sojourns and subsequent occupation of the plains. In fact, these massive collectivities of tens of thousands of buffalo were not the buffalo's primary social unit. These summer herds which dissipated in the fall were comprised of many smaller herds, clans or bands. Each had its own internal social structure that existed independently of other bands or clans, but could be combined with other bands when the large summer herd reassembled each summer to construct a social structure for the nation.

Just as the buffalo nation gathered and dispersed with the seasons, so too did the Blackfoot nations. In fact, as I understand it, the Blackfoot seasonal cycle was a direct corollary to the seasonal cycle of the buffalo. This association, however, was more than a simple replication of buffalo practices. It was more complex, moreover, than *Siiksikaawa* order being shaped by the buffalo or Blackfoot experiences with buffalo social structure. While the structure of the Confederacy may have been a result of the knowledge and teachings of buffalo, as I understand it, the structure of the Confederacy and the existence of clans was predicated on experiences with and the teachings of the local ecology in general.

The survival of most beings is dependent on their ability to adapt to seasonal changes. For some this may mean flying south for the winter or going into hibernation. For those

beings who do not have these options, seasonal changes dictates territorial shifts to ensure protection from the elements, and population shifts to ensure viability and survival based on the resources at hand. Traditionally, the existence of clans can easily be attributed to the need to adapt to and heed the teachings of the local ecology and reflect the Confederacy's cumulative knowledge of their environment. Smaller buffalo herds could only support small groupings of human consumers. Reliance on smaller beings (everything from rabbits to moose) required the existence of clans. The need for shelter and fuel required collectivities that could huddle together in the bluffs along a river valley without depleting the resources to ensure their abundance the following winter.

Similar analyses can explain how the nation's summer camp was ecologically determined. Seasons of abundance allowed gatherings of nations, as masses of people could be sustained by flourishing food resources such as berries, wild turnips, and the vast herds of buffalo. Lush grasses and the ease of travel into forested areas provided the fuel resources needed for large gatherings of people. Moreover, the use of buffalo jumps which required huge numbers of people to run and a highly organized collaborative effort to succeed, necessitated the summer gatherings of nations.

Ecological and seasonal factors, however, are not the only reasons why clans existed. Clans also existed for reasons of territoriality. It is my understanding that the Blackfoot were born of their territory, and also bore a responsibility for that territory. As such, clans existed to protect and ensure the viability of specific areas of the vast territory of the Confederacy, as prescribed by their understanding of their relationship to Creation and their responsibilities resulting from that relationship. The internal structure of clans also reflected an understanding of Creation and on the teachings of Creation. As suggested previously, the absence of coercion and dominion in structures of government and leadership were directly related to philosophies of individualism, power or essence and the oneness of governance or the undifferentiated *okahn*. Moreover, the existence of

both a *nina* and a *nah'a* and their leadership roles were direct corollaries to the natural world.

With respect to clan leadership, the Blackfoot seem to have looked to wolf clans as well as Buffalo clans for guidance. Observation taught the Blackfoot that "it is not about the individual buffalo. It is about the herd"[18] and that it is not about the individual wolf, but the wolf clan. Strong clans required strong leadership; not coercive leadership, but wisdom and guidance. Strong leadership required balance, respect, special gifts or powers; and the knowledge and wisdom of both males and females. Among the wolves, alpha males and alpha females, the most able and wisest of the wolf clan, provide this leadership; and they do so together. Similarly, the most able and wisest men and women provided Blackfoot clans with leadership, and they did so in the respectful ways that their older brothers the buffalo and the wolves had taught through both demonstration and instruction.

## SOCIETIES

Societies were groupings of national and sometimes confederal social structures, which performed a wide variety of administrative and decision-making functions. Societies were a reflection of the circle of life which contained a wide range of pathways, responsibilities, gifts and beings (human and non-human). As a reflection of the circle of life and Creation as a whole, societies were representative of the many beings that comprise Creation, the cumulative knowledge of those beings and their teachings, and the responsibilities of those beings within the circle of life. In the discussion that follows, therefore, I will address the relationship between societies and the ecological context; emphasizing the roles and responsibilities of various societies and the relationships between specific societies and

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[18] LaDuke, op. cit., p. 159.

specific beings to the exclusion of the internal structure and protocols of specific societies.

As noted in a previous chapter, the names of societies generally correspond with the names of other beings; names such as Little Birds, Brave Dogs, Crazy Dogs, Raven Bearers, Kit-Foxes, Bulls, Prairie Chickens correspond with beings such as pigeons, mosquitoes, bees, dogs, buffaloes, and crows. It is not by chance that there existed a correlation between society names and animal names. The naming inferred a direct correlation between a society and the being for which it was named. For the duties and the responsibilities of that society existed as an expression of that other being and of the cumulative knowledge and understanding of that other being. This can be demonstrated by using particular societies as examples.

In the natural world, bumble bees are helpers. Bees help other life forms through their participation in the pollination process and enable the creation of the many fruits, berries, roots, and vegetation that the Blackfoot and other beings are dependent on for their survival. Bees also assist other life forms through the production of honey. As a collective, bees are social beings with a complex social structure and elaborate ceremony or dances with which they communicate. They are non-aggressive beings who 'attack' others only when threatened, particularly when the other being is not 'living their responsibilities' towards other life forms (i.e. they are not living with respect, responsibility, humility and control).

Within the Blackfoot realm, members of the Bumble Bee society acted in accord with their knowledge of and instructions provided by bees with respect to both teachings and order or abstract and physical manifestations of teachings received from other beings. Members of the Bumble Bee society were helpers. Collectively they were responsible for providing and administering social assistance. Collectively, they were also responsible for 'attacking' or 'stinging' individuals who were not living their responsibilities toward other life forms. These responsibilities were demonstrated in the moving of camp.

Society members assisted those who were in need, and punished, with the 'sting' or an 'attack' of a staff, those who were lazy, ill prepared and not taking responsibility for the effect their actions had on other beings.

The relationship between societies and Creation can also be demonstrated with reference to the dog societies. Dogs are typically social and loving beings. If they, their territory or their human companions are threatened, however, dogs exhibit combative behavior. When threatened, the behaviours of dogs vary considerably (from defensive barking to aggressive fighting) and the responsibilities of dogs with respect to defense seem to vary in accordance with situation. These same behaviour and responsibilities were replicated in the Dog societies of the Confederacy (known as either the All Brave Dogs or the Crazy Dogs). Charged with the responsibility for providing and assisting in the administration of defense, the All Brave Dog or Crazy Dog society, like their four-legged counterparts were not mere soldiers. Rather, they were expected to be loyal to death and to defend the Confederacy and its (territorial) responsibilities when necessary. But they were also expected to exhibit the same loving and generous capacities of their four-legged friends. Prior to the acquisition of the horse, dogs assisted humans in moving camp, gathering plants and hunting. So members of the All Brave Dog or Crazy Dog society were expected to assist those in need and to work towards the collective good of the nation. Thus, like dogs, members of the All Brave Dogs or Crazy Dog societies were gentle, kind and honourable beings who would exhibit their braveness and abilities in fighting to defend their nation, territory and honour when required.

The duties and the responsibilities of the *Motakix* and the Horn society, and the requirements of their membership, were similarly linked to the Confederacy's cumulative knowledge of the buffalo and the instructions provided by the buffalo (and other beings) with respect to both teachings and order. Among the buffalo, the oldest cows and bulls tended to be predominant in leadership roles. Not because of their age, but because of their abilities and the knowledge and wisdom which they had accumulated over their

lifetime and over the lifetimes of those past through the stories of those who had been their Elders. These older and more predominant buffalo bulls and cows had the responsibility of providing spiritual and political leadership throughout their nation and within their clans (they were often clan leaders). The Confederacy emulated this tradition. Based upon their knowledge of and the teaching of the buffalo themselves (directly or indirectly through other nations), societies such as *Motakix*, Horns and the now defunct Bulls (incorporated into the Horns society) were born. These societies and their membership were charged with the same responsibilities as their four-legged counterparts to provide both spiritual and political leadership. Collectively, or individually the Horns and *Motakix* were responsible for decisions regarding ceremony, advising other societies (directly and indirectly), making and/or advising on decisions that were of great importance to the entire Confederacy and/or a particular nation, and advising individuals on all matters of life.

While I have only discussed three societal structures, it is clear that as a reflection of the circle of life and the teachings of Creation, societies suggest the existence of a relationship between *Siiksikaawa* political teachings and order and the natural world. With the previous sections this illustrates Henderson's theory by applying it to traditional Blackfoot structures of governance and their development. The idea that political structures, ideas and practices were forged through a relationship with the ecological order, however, can also be demonstrated from within the domain of the western-eurocentric (scientific) tradition. This is the subject of the next section.

## ECOLOGICAL DETERMINISM & PLAIN(S) GOVERNANCE

Jared Diamond asserts that there is a direct relationship among political development, ecology and geography.[19] He argues that the development of complex and specialized

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[19] Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1997).

political structures is dependent on the availability of commodity surpluses, which requires a sedentary society and domesticated sources of food production. He also believes that the development of complex and differentiated political systems is related to geography and environment. Both define and confine a collectivity's ability to develop a sedentary agricultural society as per factors such as the availability of domesticatable animals, climate and the existence of geographic barriers that inhibit the exchange of knowledge, technology and commodities between peoples. Although Diamond does not address the relationship between ecological contexts of inquiry and governance, his suggestion that environmental factors influenced political development is extremely useful. This confirms the value of Henderson's thesis from a source within the western-eurocentric knowledge system.

Other scholars including Garrick Bailey, Symmes Oliver and Fred Eggan also seek to demonstrate a relationship between governance and the environment. They argue that differences and similarities in 'Plains Indian' social organization can be attributed to the social organization of the buffalo in different geographic areas and how people adapted their social organizations to the buffalo and to their environment.[20] While the idea that plains peoples such as the Blackfoot adapted their social structures to their knowledge of and experiences with the buffalo and their larger environment seems to support Henderson's thesis and my explanation of Blackfoot governance using this method of analysis, two quite different approaches are involved. Eggan and Oliver assert that the camp circle (*okahn*) existed as a relationship to the buffalo as buffalo social organization *determined* human social organization. At the same time, they assert that variation in camp circle was the result of retaining parts of a people's culture as they moved from

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[20] Fred Eggan, *The American Indian: Perspectives for the Study of Social Change*, Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1966, pp. 51-52. Symmes C. Oliver, *Ecology and Cultural Continuity as Contributing Factors in the Social Organization of the Plains Indians*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962). Garrick Bailey, "Social Control on the Plains" in W. Raymond Wood and Margot Liberty (eds.) *Anthropology on the Great Plains*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

elsewhere onto the Plains, not ecological factors.[21] Thus, they do not recognize that this variation could be the result of choices made within an ecological context of inquiry about how a polity should adapt itself or relate to the natural environment.

Eggan acknowledges some variation in social organization, but he argues that the existence of a chief and council meant that all High Plains polities had essentially the same system of governance. This is like saying that the presence of a legislature and judiciary makes democracies and state socialist regimes the same. That is, he negates the importance of differences in the 'camp circle' or how the 'chief and council' work and so denies the fact that governance is a human artifact. Nations made choices through which they operationalized their system of governance and thus, their relationship with the natural world in very different ways. This results in a determinist form of environmentalism which ignores a people's agency; that is how a people chose to create human artifacts that expressed a relationship with Creation and how they saw themselves as part of the circle of life.

Nonetheless, the mere existence of these differences or variations in political systems is crucial because they demonstrate Henderson's idea that Indigenous people see the natural world as something from which they can learn and something to which they have to adapt to, rather than something to dominate or ignore. The relationship between politics and governance is not simply a deterministic issue of what form of governance is feasible in a given environment. It is also about learning how to govern, and developing a system based on how a people see themselves in relation to Creation. The fact that Indigenous politics exists as a relationship with Creation, and that there is no 'essential' or typical political system on the Plains, is evident when we compare the political traditions of the Plains Cree and Blackfoot as I do in the next section. I will illustrate the applicability and value of Henderson's thesis in creating a trustworthy account as

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[21] Oliver, op. cit., pp. 71-76.

comparison will show that governance exists as a relationship with Creation and that it is not simply determined by an environment.

## 'CREE-ATING' PLAINS GOVERNANCE

According to most written accounts of history, the Cree are very recent arrivals on the Great Plains. While the exact date of their arrival on the Plains is unknown, most scholars claim the Crees began venturing onto the northeastern Plains to engage in trade with other nations sometime between 1668 and 1690.[22] The reason for this wide-spread assumption is quite easily explained. The Cree are said to have all been living in the forests of Northern Quebec and Ontario at the time of the European invasion, and to have moved westward in advance of the invaders to maintain and expand on their position as a 'middlemen' in trade relations between Indigenous nations and the European traders. David Mandelbaum and John Milloy recount the expansion of the Cree into the Plains and the emergence of the Plains Cree as a distinct nation, but the histories which they recount can be interpreted in a number of ways. According to these sources, the first 'Kilistinons', the term used by the Jesuits to refer to the Cree (*Nehiyaw* or *Nehiawak*), were encountered in the forests of Northern Quebec by the Jesuits sometime between 1656 and 1658. By 1672, the Cree had become a favoured trading partner of the French, had established themselves as 'middlemen' trading with nations such as the Dakota (the Sioux), and were living as far west as Sault St. Marie. As trade expanded westward, the Cree are also said to have expanded their territory and, by 1690 when Henry Kelsey ventured westward from York Factory, he encountered mainly Cree. Such encounters were repeated as European 'explorers' and traders ventured westward until Verendry finally reached the plains around 1727.

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[22] David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study*, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1979), pp. 15-46. John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade Diplomacy and War, 1790-1870*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), pp. 5-20.

Based on this explanation of Cree expansion, one may question whether or not the Cree were already in some of the areas being 'invaded' by the 'explorers', and whether the 'explorers' and traders merely mistook the people newly encountered to be the same as those people who occupied the area surrounding the James Bay. Even if they were the same people, it is possible that Cree territory (contiguous or otherwise) was already of a significant size by the time of the European invasion. It is interesting to note that scholars continue to accept the idea that the Crees were encountered on the continuous expedition westward because of their role as a 'middleman' in the fur trade. In so doing, they do not consider the possibility that there were Crees settled in localities other than the northern forests of Quebec and Ontario (the James Bay region). Nor do they take into account that the languages (dialects) spoken by the many western Cree (both Plains and Woodland) and the James Bay Cree are mutually incomprehensible. Moreover, this explanation is problematic because a Plains Cree 'chief' drew a map for Verendry circa 1730 which indicated the locations and pathways of several major waterways in the Plains (the Saskatchewan, Red and Missouri rivers).[23] Verendry's map demonstrates that at least one Cree had traveled over much of the Plains by 1730 and knew it well enough to draw a map which is still decipherable and accurate today.

The oral history of the Plains Cree and their northern relatives the Woodland Cree of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba actually tell of a long history within their territories. There are a number of competing explanations among Cree people as to how they came to occupy a territory that stretches nearly from Sea to Sea. The point in any case is that the Cree have a history on the plains which predates the invasion and the Cree were already on the Plains when the first whites arrived in the territories now encompassed by Alberta and Saskatchewan. The oral tradition of the *Nehiyaw* and other Plains people, moreover, speak to the intermittent but sustained presence of Cree

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[23] Mandelbaum, op. cit., p. 27.

on the plains long before the fur trade began. The Plains Cree, nonetheless, can be viewed as quasi-transitionary because, despite their long history on the plains, the populations were in continuous flux as Woodlands Cree joined with Plains Cree or became an intermittent or a sustained Plains peoples themselves.[24] Furthermore, until their efforts were halted by the extirpation of the buffalo and their forced confinement on reserves, the Plains Cree continued to expand the territory to which they claimed a relationship and for which they claimed a responsibility.

In becoming a Plains people, it was necessary for the Cree to establish a new relationship with Creation for the life forces and geographical features that surrounded and confronted them on the plains were much different than those which existed in the woodlands. Thus, they learned from the new ecological context, adapting and adopting traditions that respected and expressed a relationship with Creation. As Milloy argues, however, the fact that the Cree adapted to their new ecosystem is not to be confused with environmental determinism or the existence of "some classic or standard mode of plains existence."[25] The Plains does not represent a single ecosystem. Moreover, Plains Cree society developed out of a relationship with a local ecosystem which was mediated by ideas derived from previous experiences. Many Plains Cree continued to use "a multi-zone pattern of resource exploitation,"[26] meaning that they lived for sustained periods both on the plains and in the woodlands. This, and their multi-zone pattern of territoriality undercuts any idea of ecological determinism. For while the *Nehiyaw* had adapted their political system to reflect the 'camp circle', large enclaves of Plains Cree continued to exist as woodlands peoples for much of the year. Milloy also demonstrates

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[24] Milloy, op. cit., p. 69.

[25] Ibid., p. 22.

[26] Ibid.

that Plains Cree social organization developed in part in relation to the nation's military (territorial) and trade desires which also discredits a deterministic environmentalism.[27]

As with the *Siiksikaawa*, the *Nehiyaw* utilize the camp circle as a means by which to organize and describe governance. The fact that both peoples used the camp circle, however, this does not mean that both camp circles and systems of governance were the same. They were not. Unlike the Blackfoot camp circle with three inner rings representing the three predominant 'institutions' (clan leaders, societies, and Bundles), the Plains Cree circle consisted of independent bands, each of which maintained its own societies' or 'warriors' lodge, and each of which had a 'military' leader. Thus, although both peoples commonly use a camp circle as a means of organizing and explaining traditional governance, the camp circles are not the same, nor are the 'institutions' or the ways in which these structures are operationalized as institutions of governance.

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[27] Ibid. p. 70.

Okihtcitaw    Okimahkan
Mapokasiwak    Nehiyaw
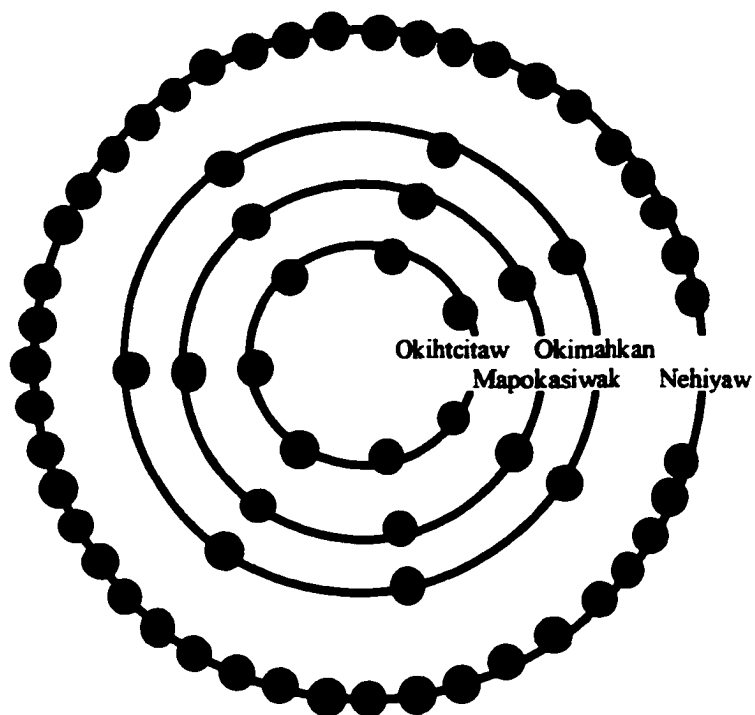
The Plains Cree consisted of some eight to fourteen bands, which were themselves

often divided into several sub-bands or camp circles. Each band had its own territory;

territories which spanned westward to the Rocky Mountains (the Beaver Hills People or

*amskwatciwiyiniwak*), eastward to the Qu'pelle Valley or the Saskatchewan/Manitoba

border (the Calling River People or the *katepwewcipi wiyiniwak*) north to the treeline and

the North Saskatchewan River (the House People or *waskahikanwiyiniwak*) and south to

the Cypress Hills (the Cree-Assiniboin or *nehiopwat*). According to Mandelbaum, "...

bands of the Plains Cree were loose, shifting units named for the territory they occupied.

Each band had its own range, but the limits were not clearly defined ... Individuals and

even whole families, might separate from their group to follow another chief" or to form their own band.[28]
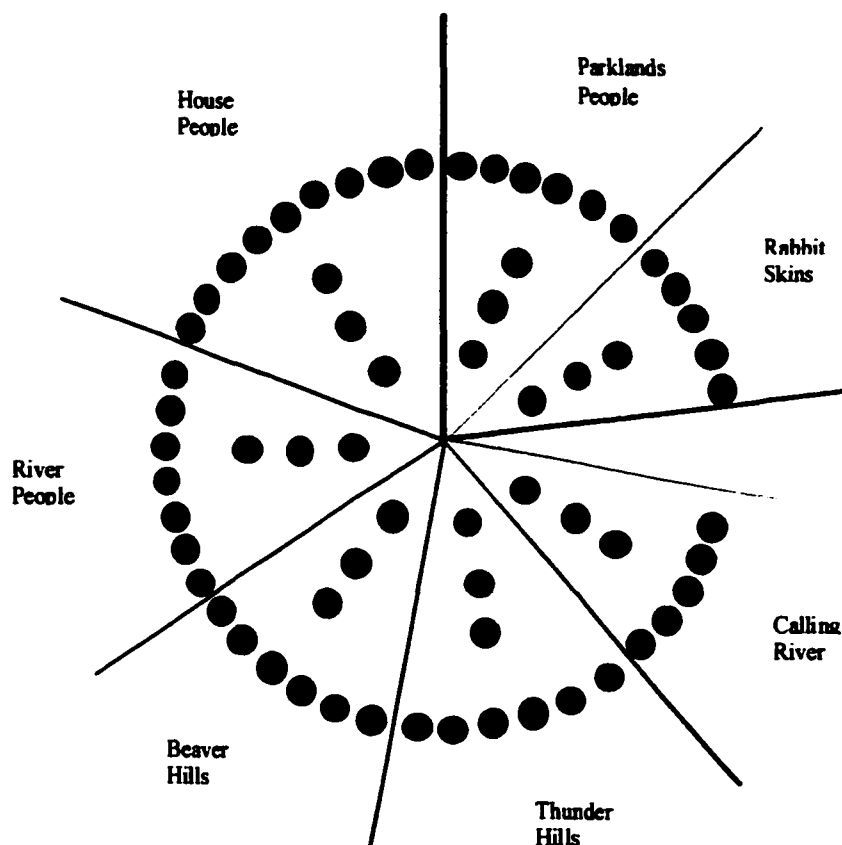


Each band or sub-band was typically comprised of an varying number of extended families (relations); groupings which played a significant political role. It should be noted that amongst the Woodlands Cree, the extended-family tended to be the primary unit of organization as the "environment mitigates against large communities" and political, social and economic gatherings were intermittent, infrequent and of a short duration.[29] . It

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[28] Mandelbaum, op. cit., p. 105.

[29] Ibid., p. 289.

should be noted that as was the case among the *Siiksikaawa*, kinship referred to all personal relations not necessarily blood relations. This reliance on and predominance of families, which emerged through a peoples' relationship to and experiences with a local ecosystem containing kinship-oriented beings such as the wolves and the beaver, remained constant throughout the forging of a new relationship with a local ecology by the Plains Cree. The extended 'family' remained predominant in *Nehiyaw* politics after relocation as each 'family' or extended group of relations who recognized mutual responsibilities and obligations, was represented in the band by a spokesman or headman. Together, these headmen constituted a council. Arguably, while the band replaced the family as the main political unit among the Plains Cree, the extended family retained is predominance in Cree politics. As such, the band council was an association of family leaders with extended families acting as constituent organizations.

Each band and each subsidiary band was led by a 'chief' (*okimahkan*) or several 'chiefs'. The existing literature explains that chiefs were selected (informally) based on their record as *okihtcitaw* (a 'warrior'). According to my teachers, however, a chief was informally chosen by the people because they perceived him as having the qualities of a true leader; qualities which had nothing to do with a 'war record'. Qualities such as strength, wisdom, bravery, being a skilled orator, having an ability to speak *as a representative of* the people, and having a capacity to understand, respect and look out for *all* people. *Okimahkan* were not decision-makers. When a decision had to be made or an issue had to be discussed, the *okimahkan* would beckon his runner (his 'crier' or *ocakitostamakew*) to summon the council and to explain to the council the nature of the subject at hand. Once these representatives had discussed the matter with their families, they would gather and forge a decision of 'one mind' which would then be proclaimed by the *okimahkan's* runner throughout the camp. Thus, as Milloy writes, "although there is no evidence of "democracy," the band member's freedom of movement enforced a code of

acceptable behaviour on leadership, and made leaders seek a consensual decision as the basis for decision making."[30]

Besides the *okimahkan* and his council, the other structure of governance that existed amongst the Crees was the *okihtcitaw* lodge (sometimes known as the societies' lodge or the soldier's lodge). Each band had its own *okihtcitaw* lodge, which was a means of governance because it structured relationships and determined responsibilities for various functions of governance. It should be noted, however, that the *okihtcitaw* lodge functioned as a structure of governance to a much more limited extent than societies within *okahn* (the Blackfoot system of governance).

The *okihtcitaw* lodge was comprised (metaphorically) of all of the so-called warriors (*okihtcitaw*) and all of the societies in which these individuals belonged. Societies were more limited in number than among the Blackfoot. They were not 'hierarchically structured' as there was no internally defined order. They were particular to each band and thus, they were not pan-band or national organizations. They performed various functions of governance, such as, education, police, military, and social services.[31] The *okihtcitaw* lodge and all of the societies were led by a single individual. This individual, commonly referred to as a warrior chief or a war chief (*mapokasiwak*), was responsible for making all strategic decisions (commonly in association with the *okimahkan*) regarding the safety of the people, the collective hunt, defense and warfare.

When several bands were gathered together, or when all of the Plains Cree bands joined together as one or gathered in one of the three primary subdivisions (these were the Downstream People or *mamihkiyiniwak*, the Upstream People or *natimiwiyininwak* and in later years, the Prairie People or *paskwa 'wiyiniwak*) the camp circles of the individual

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[30] Milloy, op. cit., p. 75.

[31] For a general discussion of the *okihtcitaw* lodge and societies see: Alanson Skinner, "Political Organization, Cults and Ceremonies of the Plains Cree" in Clark Wissler (ed.) *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, vol. XI (New York: The American Museum of Natural History, 1916), pp. 513-542.

bands joined together, as did their structures of governance. Chiefs would gather and form a council to discuss matters of significance to the entire nation or its primary subdivisions. The councils of each of the primary subdivisions were run by a 'primary chief' who was acknowledged as such by other band chiefs "because of his outstanding superiority."[32] Likewise, the council of the entire nation was run by these primary chiefs cooperatively, or by the primary chief who was recognized by the others as being superior. These councils were run in the same manner as were band councils, meaning that runners were sent out in advance of the meeting so as to provide chiefs and their headmen the opportunity to discuss an issue and come to a decision which respected all of the families involved.

Similarly, the so-called war chiefs also formed a council, albeit a far less ordered council than that of the chiefs. The responsibilities of these leaders were significant, as they are said to have discussed issues of national security and made decisions regarding the collective hunt, collaborative defensive and offensive efforts, and travel plans. Moreover, since the *okihtcitaw* lodges of the individual bands never joined, the leaders of these lodges had to coordinate the functions typically undertaken by each of the lodges independently. While these lodges did not join together or collectively engage their responsibilities, their responsibilities were coordinated. Moreover, to ensure national unity and to maintain peace and good order throughout the nation, the different *okihtcitaw* lodges took turns performing the various functions of governance. Thus, the leadership is said to have assigned to specific lodges and societies the responsibility for performing governmental functions while the nation was gathered.

This description of *Nehiyaw* structures of governance, demonstrates that Plains Cree governance was quite different from traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance. Although both systems of governance were organized around the camp circle and both used the same

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[32] Mandelbaum, op. cit., p. 108.

structures or institutions, how the camp circles, and the structures associated with the camp circles, were operationalized differed significantly in each. This demonstrates that there is no 'standard mode' of governance on the Plains and that governance is not ecologically determined as Eggan and Oliver suggest. It also demonstrates that governance, like language and world view, are forged by experiencing the natural world.

As the *Nehiyaw* experienced a new ecosystem, it became necessary for the Plains Cree to create or construct a system of governance which responded to the relationship which they were forging with their new surroundings and with the beings (human and non-human) which lived on the Great Plains. The Cree created a new political system, distinct from other Plains people. It was also different from that which existed in the woodlands where governance was: family oriented; characterized by intermittent and infrequent 'territorial' meetings; an elaborate clan ('totem') system which served to unify all 'northern Cree' peoples; and, an absence of societies and ceremonies that elsewhere unified a people and provided socially constructed responsibilities and relationships to all individuals. Although some authors have suggested that changes or the difference in Cree political systems was due to geographic considerations as the Woodlands "environment mitigates against large communities,"[33] I argue that governance was not biologically or environmentally determined. Essentialist arguments must be reconsidered and rejected. The reality of living within an ecological context is that people learn from the world around them, which influences but does not determine how humans create social phenomena such as governance. This involves choices, which is why the Northern Cree speak of the non-human peoples of the Woodlands as their teachers. Teachers do not dictate (as do noun-gods), they provide the guidance and information necessary for humans to make good choices; humans are typically viewed as the lowest form of life as they need assistance to learn how to live in a given ecological order.

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[33] Ibid., p. 289.

The fact that Plains Cree governance shifted, adapted and evolved as the Cree became 'Plains Indians' also demonstrates that Indigenous politics and governance are based on relationships with or are expressions of Creation. Moreover, this example demonstrates that political traditions and their corresponding governmental structures were "a continuous process of adjustment to the natural surroundings and not a specific [structure] valid for all times and places."[34] No tradition was static, however, for all were engaged in a dynamic and continual process of flux and evolution as expressions of the ecological context or Creation. Unlike western-eurocentric traditions, however, traditional Indigenous governance is spatially derived and limited to a specific territory. This is because traditions that exist as a relationship to a specific ecological context are not easily transplanted into another ecological context without substantial adjustment as a new relationship is forged with Creation.

The Plains Cree forged a new system of governance which expressed a new relationship with the natural world (the Plains); knowledge derived from the local ecological order; and, the other people (human and non-human) who lived within that territory. Nevertheless, they carried with them a system of knowledge, an understanding of their relationship to the natural world and an existing political tradition derived from their earlier experiences in a woodlands ecological context. Hence the more individualistic and family-oriented beings and the land to the north and northeast shaped *Nehiyaw* social structures and political culture; a political system which in turn shaped their relationship to the plains and thus, shaped the creation of a new political system within a plains ecological context. This demonstrates in how governance exists as a relationship to the natural world. Plains Cree governance was an expression of the woodlands ecosystem in which beings lived mostly in family groups and as individuals. Moreover, that ecosystem taught humans how to exist and govern themselves in families because nations seldom

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[34] Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of religion*, (Goldon: Fulcrum, 1994 ),.p. 67.

gather in that ecosystem. *Nehiyaw* governance, however, was also an expression of the Plains ecosystem where the buffalo taught people how to gather and govern themselves collectively as nations. These forest-derived teachings, observations and experiences circumscribed how Plains Cree saw themselves in relation to, and as part of, the Great Plains.[35] Millennia of experiences and observations in other ecological orders also provided the standpoint from which they observed, experienced and learned from the beings on the Great Plains. As such, their millennia of experiences both on the Plains and in other ecological orders explain the development of traditional *Nehiyaw* governance. But this also explains why Plains Cree governance is different from *Siiksikaawa* governance as both peoples experienced the natural world differently and forged different relationships with and expressions of Creation. Therefore, far from being a simple environmental determinism, the forging and reshaping of ideas about governance was a complex empirical and philosophical process.

## CONCLUSION

Henderson theorizes that the Indigenous world is characterized by an ecological context of inquiry; and that Indigenous people's "understanding of their natural context establishes the vantage point from which they construct their world view, language, knowledge and order."[36] The *Siiksikaawa* and *Nehiyaw* understand the natural world as Creation, as something that can be learned from and that should be respected (like all forms of 'essence'). They also view themselves as part of this world. Hence, one of the primary struggles of an individual's and a collectivity's journey is discovering this world,

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[35] That their millennia of observations and experiences circumscribed or mitigated their relationship to and their understanding of the plains is illustrated in comparisons of *Nehiyaw* and *Siiksikaawa* buffalo stories. For while the Blackfoot perceived the buffalo social organization as a clan based system, the Cree believe the buffalo to have an individualistic and family-oriented social structure, whereby buffalo bands are comprised of several families and families exist as strong political units.

[36] Henderson, op. cit., p. 257

their relationship to this world, how they should fit into this world as both individuals and collectives and what responsibilities they have within this world. As I understand it, this is generally the case among Aboriginal people.

Each nation's knowledge of their environment and its understanding of its relationship with its localized ecosystem (how they see themselves as part of it) resulted in a "millennia of field observations and direct experiences" which shaped and instructed "Aboriginal [political] teachings and order."[37] Thus, the knowledge systems, languages, world views and societal phenomenon of the Blackfoot, like other Indigenous peoples, were not the result of, nor were they based on, "the instructions of a noun-god or on the reductionist thoughts of great men."[38] Instead, they were the result of a people's cumulative experiences with, and knowledge of, the natural world.

The fact that traditional Blackfoot governance was contextual, with the contextuality being defined by the natural world in which the Blackfoot lived, has been demonstrated in this dissertation in a variety of ways. By examining *Siiksikaawa* governance in much the same way as traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance was explained to me by several Elders, one begins to understand that governance (the *okahn*) existed as an expression of, and as a relationship with Creation. That is to say, the structure, function and operation of Blackfoot governance embodied many of the teachings of the natural world. At the same time, governance structured the relationship between the Blackfoot and this world. The political system expressed how the Blackfoot saw themselves as part of and not separate from nature. Further, it prescribed a system of beliefs and practices which ensured the continuity of that relationship (i.e. by prescribing a camp size which was amenable to the survival of all species in all seasons).

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[37] Ibid., pp. 257-258.

[38] Ibid., p. 256.

In this chapter I have argued that the relationship between Blackfoot politics and Creation can be demonstrated with reference to oral tradition and the structures of governance themselves. The relationship can also be illustrated and verified by looking beyond the *Siiksikaawa*, their oral history and their means of conceptualizing and explaining their political traditions. Scholars such as Diamond and Eggan assert, environmental factors readily influence and constrain political development, however, Henderson's thesis (and mine) should not be confused with environmental determinism. As my comparison of Blackfoot and Plains Cree political systems demonstrates, moreover, Indigenous political systems may differ considerably within a given ecological context. Thus, as Henderson theorized, Indigenous political development was shaped by ecological considerations mediated through their experiences, knowledge, spiritual understanding or interpretation and relationship to a local ecological order.

In this chapter, I focused mainly on the structures of governance themselves. The relationship between governance and the ecological order are explored in the next chapter where I address the relationship between Creation, the act of governing or the operation of governance and the main contours of Blackfoot political philosophy.

Although my discussion of the relationship between ecology and governance is far from complete, in this chapter I have demonstrated that such a relationship exists with respect to the actual structure of both the Blackfoot political system and the Plains Cree political system. More important, I have demonstrated the value of applying the logic of ecological contexts to the study of traditional Indigenous governance. It offers the researcher the ability to study and explain a political tradition from the vantage point of the tradition itself, interpreted or otherwise. It also offers a means by which one can conceptualize and explain political development without a positivistic conceptualization of causality and without importing foreign theories which express an artificial, not an ecological context.

This leaves several important questions. Why is it that Indigenous peoples living in such different ecosystems have similar political traditions? Can the idea of ecological contexts also explain this occurrence? Is it possible to explain why americacentric and western-eurocentric political traditions are so different using Henderson's theory of contextuality? These and other questions are considered in the next chapter as I continue to address the relationship between governance and ecology by looking at primary tenets of Blackfoot political philosophy and the act of governing within the confines of an ecological context.

# CHAPTER 7

# THE ART OF GOVERNANCE IN AN ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

As I argued in the previous chapter, there is a direct correlation between ecology and

Indigenous governance such that ecological factors influenced the development and

structure of traditional Blackfoot governance and traditional Cree governance. Such an

argument, drawn from James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson's theory of ecological

contexts, can be tested by examining the oral tradition and analyzing the way governance

is conceptualized by the Blackfoot themselves. Blackfoot and Plains Cree political

systems were both expressions of the natural world. Each people's experiences with, and

relationship to, their local ecosystem shaped the context within which a system of

governance was forged. Given this reality, how can Henderson generalize about

'Aboriginal knowledge'?[1] Moreover, how can Russel Barsh talk about 'North American

political systems',[2] and Menno Boldt talk about 'tradition Indian leadership'?[3] Does not

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[1] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 248-278. Henderson, James (sákéj) Youngblood, "Post Colonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism" in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 57-76. Henderson, James (sákéj) Youngblood, "The Context of the State of Nature", in Marie Battiste (ed.), Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), pp. 11-38.

[2] Russel Lawrence Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems", in *American Indian Quarterly*, (Summer, 1986), pp. 181-198.

[3] Menno Boldt, *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 117-166.

Henderson's theory mean that claims to universality are part of the western-eurocentric tradition? If so why do Indigenous scholars make universal, or at least continental, claims about Indigenous peoples having the type of relationship with Creation such as Henderson describes above? If it is possible to speak of North American Indians, their knowledge systems and their traditional systems of governance in generalized terms (as a 'universal' in 'Indian Country')? Am I incorrect in claiming that a local ecology 'instructs political knowledge and order'? Does this mean that governance is not contextual? Or does this mean that Indigenous knowledge systems, political systems, world views, languages and spiritual traditions exist as part of an artificial context and not a natural or an ecological context? These are some of the questions that will be dealt with in this chapter.

In answering these questions, I will examine both how governance was operationalized within the Blackfoot world, and the art of governance in an ecological context. In this chapter, I identify some of the primary tenets that characterize Indigenist political thought and explore the relationship between these primary characteristics and Creation. I then discuss how these primary characteristics (and thus, a peoples' relationship to and experiences with Creation) influenced the art of governance within an ecological context and confined and defined the operationalization of governance. In so doing, I seek to illustrate that even if I were to abandon my discussion of the relationship between Blackfoot structures of governance and Creation to argue instead that Blackfoot governance was shaped by the primary tenets of a generalized Indigenist thought, I would still have to deal with contextuality. This is so because the primary characteristics of traditional Indigenist political thought result from people's understandings of the relationship between politics and ecology or 'the way we live together the best way possible'. In demonstrating why this is so, and in explaining why it is possible to generalize about Indigenous knowledge and the art of governance within an ecological context, I begin by exploring the idea of universality or context-wide generalizations. I

then proceed with a discussion of primary tenets of Indigenist political thought. I conclude by addressing how these tenets, and thus the ecological context define and confine the operationalization of governance in non-state Indigenous nations in North America.

## THE UNIVERSAL IN 'INDIAN COUNTRY' IS CREATION

Patricia Monture-Angus writes, "as Aboriginal Peoples ... are not homogeneous, there is no single "perspective" on anything, let alone governance."[4] Although this was written in relation to the contemporary issues of self-government, self-determination and independence, the ideas contained in Monture-Angus' statement are profound. Moreover, the underlying ideas are as profound when dealing with traditional governance as with contemporary governance. What I interpret Monture-Angus to be saying is that there is no single or universal entity or populace called 'Indigenous peoples'. Nor is there a single or universal view of traditional or contemporary governance. Hence, there is no single, universal traditional Aboriginal system of governance and there is no single, universal, interpretation or perspective.

I cannot speak from any place other than my own perspective, my own understanding, my own interpretation, and my own experiences. This is why my presentation of traditional *Siiksikaawa* governance continuously reiterates and emphasizes the fact that what is written is the way in which I understand governance and the teachings of Elders. Moreover, operating within an Indigenous paradigm, one is aware that each nation has its own culture, history, language, and traditions; and so one can not construct universalisms or continent-wide perspective that ignores differences among them. Each nation understands and experiences their relationship to Creation somewhat differently. So there is no conceptualization of there being a universal, other than to say

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[4] Patricia Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations Independence*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1999), p. 21.

that Creation is universal in 'Indian Country' as is the desire to understand one's experiences with and relationship to Creation. This does not mean, however, that there are no commonalties or that a broadly-based Indigenous tradition did not exist. It simply means that any attempt to construct a non-essentialist paradigm of Indigenous traditions must recognize and emphasize points of internal differentiation and the ever present flux.

Citing Deloria, Henderson states that:

> ... there are two great truths about Aboriginal people. First, there is a great unanimity among Aboriginal nations when they express their views on the natural world and the behavior of humans in that world. Second, because of the different places where they live and learn, Aboriginal nations are distinct from each other. Their diverse ecologies or living lodges have created their diverse world views and languages.
>
> Aboriginal understandings, languages, teaching, and practices developed through direct interaction with the forces of the natural order or ecology. This experience intimately connects their world views and knowledge with a certain space. This is more than mere ecological awareness, it is a living relationship with a specific environment that is not conceived of as either universal or conventional.[5]

I understand this to mean that it is possible to speak broadly of an Indigenous tradition which reflects how *most* Indigenous peoples view the natural world or Creation and the place of and actions of human beings and non-human beings in that world. But in so far as it is possible to speak of an Indigenous world view or tradition, one must also recognize that the tradition is internally differentiated as different nations experienced the natural context quite differently.

Although it is not the concern of this thesis, this internal differentiation in Indigenous thought or Indigenous understandings of and experiences with the ecological order, can be demonstrated by comparing the hierarchically structured state-based Indigenous polities such as the Haida with the non-hierarchical, non-state based Indigenous polities such as the Blackfoot and the Cree. As I understand it, the Blackfoot and Cree perceive hierarchy

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[5] Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" op. cit., p. 260.

as a violation of the teachings of Creation, whereas the Haida see hierarchy as consistent with the teachings of Creation. This diversity may reflect the different teachings of specific local ecological orders or it might simply reflect how different peoples have chosen to relate to and live within a local ecology. Potentially, therefore, both types of political structure *may* be explained using Henderson's theory of ecological contexts and Indigenist political thought. Nevertheless, here I am not concerned with understanding hierarchically structured state-based Indigenous polities, nor am I concerned with explaining the differences between non-state and state-based Indigenous political systems.

Experiences with, understandings of, and relationships to Creation vary throughout Indigenous North America. The physical manifestations of Creation are not constant or universal in either a physical sense (space) or in an abstract sense (the experiences and knowledge of particular peoples). That Creation is not a constant physical reality, but a constantly changing physical reality is very significant because of the relationship between the physical (space) and the abstract (knowledge) within Indigenous world views. In knowledge systems created within an ecological context of inquiry, knowledge is grounded in the physical manifestations of Creation. Since Indigenous knowledge systems are derived from a millennia of experiences with, and observations of, a local ecological order, knowledge is spatially or territorially oriented.

According to Vine Deloria Jr., Indigenous thought is really 'thinking in space' not in time. Thinking in space has a significant impact on how social realities and societal structures are created (really experienced) and maintained. Deloria states that:

> the structure of [Indigenous political] traditions is taken directly from the world around them, from their relationships with other forms of life. Context, is therefore all-important for both practice and understanding reality. ... Thousands of years of occupancy on their lands taught tribal peoples the sacred landscapes for which they were responsible and gradually the structure of [political reality or governance] became clear. It was not important what people believed to be true, that was important, but more important is what they experienced as true. Hence [political and governmental traditions were] seen as a continuous process of adjustment

to the natural surroundings and not a specific [structure] valid for all times and places.[6]

Given the spatial orientation of North American Indigenous thought and Indigenous traditions, and given the vast range of spaces or ecosystems, how can Indigenous political traditions be viewed as so similar by scholars such as James Youngblood Henderson, Russel Barsh and Taiaiake (Gerald) Alfred?

Aboriginal thought is contextual, and that contextuality is a shared attribute among most Indigenous peoples. Yet Henderson states that, "... there is a great unanimity among Aboriginal nations when they express their views on the natural world and the behaviour of humans in that world ... because of the different places where we live and learn, Aboriginal nations are distinct from each other."[7] Henderson's theory of ecological contexts is predicated on the idea that contextuality results in different political systems, practices and ideas. Yet, I suggest that common views of Creation resulted in common attributes in the political thought of most non-state Indigenous peoples. Further, I would argue that it is the spatial orientation and the contextuality of Indigenous thought and traditions, which makes the operationalization of these shared attributes different among nations. Each nation expresses Creation, and understands their relationship to Creation differently, as was demonstrated with the case of the *Nehiyaw*.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will address some of the similarities in political thought among different Indigenous political traditions. I also attempt to explain why

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[6] Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of religion*, (Goldon: Fulcrum, 1994), pp. 66-67. Although Deloria's discussion of 'thinking in space' or the Indigenous world view(s) actually pertains to spirituality or a Native view of religion, it is my thesis that the same holds true for governance and thus I have replaced references to spirituality with references to governance. The validity of this replacement is illustrated by how I understand Blackfoot governance based on the teachings of Elders; *okahn* is a system of governance which exists as part of, is an expression of or exists in relationship to Creation or the natural/ecological realm as it is manifested in Blackfoot territory. Thus, in many respects, the idea of 'thinking in space' is simply another way of addressing and/or verifying the relationship between governance and the natural word and demonstrating the utility of utilizing ecological contexts as a means of explaining *Siiksikaawa* governance and its development.

[7] Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" op. cit., pp. 259-260.

these similarities exist in political traditions that differ ecologically both in terms of the actual space in which each developed, and the availability and/or utilization of different subsistence and agricultural practices. In so doing, I am not advancing an essentialist understanding of Indigenous political traditions. Rather, I am asserting an understanding based on some shared attributes of different Indigenous political traditions.

## CREATION: THE NATURAL WORLD

For Indigenous thinkers, governance, like all life forces and social realities, began with Creation and existed as a relationship with all of Creation. This unified Indigenous non-state political thought and the vast array or 'strange multiplicity' of structures of governance.[8] In non-state Indigenous political systems, Creation informed, either directly or indirectly, (almost) every aspect of governance from how units of governance were structured to the way in which decisions were made. For example, the Míkmaw related the existence of seven *sakamowit* (hunting districts or sub-national territories) and seven *sakamow* ('chiefs') back to Creation and the sparks which emanated from the Great Council Fire of *Kluskap*.[9] The *Siiksikaawa* explain how *Poia* and/or his mother brought forth the teachings of *Okahn* and thus, introduced both the structure and many of the protocols which define traditional governance. The relationships between governance and the natural world existed as both an abstract and a concrete reality. These relationships provided legitimacy to a system of governance and provided for the operationalization of governance as they were typically the sources of protocols, structures, political thought

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[8] Although this dissertation is not concerned with state-based structures such as the Haida, it is nevertheless possible to suggest that many Indigenous state-based traditions in North America began with Creation and existed as a relationship with Creation. Thus, the assertion that governance begins with Creation and exists as a relationship with Creation is non-essentialist. The strange multiplicity of Indigenous traditions exist because of the spacial orientation of an ecological context of inquiry and because different people understand Creation and their relationship with Creation in different ways.

[9] Marie Battiste, "Nikanikikútmaqun'" in James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, *The Míkmaw Concordat*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997), pp. 13-20.

and political culture. This is best explained using the *Haudenosaunee* Thanksgiving Address. As the first words at all *Haudenosaunee* gatherings, it is used to remind leaders of the types of decisions which are necessary and the necessity of being of one mind with all of Creation.

A very abbreviated version of the *Haudenosaunee* Thanksgiving Address is as follows:

> Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People.
>
> Now our minds are one. ...
>
> We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to be here for us as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send greetings and thanks.
>
> Now our minds are one. ...
>
> We give thanks to all the Waters of the world for quenching our thirst and providing us with strength. ...
>
> We turn our minds to all the Fish life in the water. ...
>
> Now we turn toward the vast fields of Plant life. ...
>
> With one mind, we turn to honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest from the garden. ...
>
> Now we turn to all the Medicine Herbs of the world. ...
>
> We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life in the world. They have many things to teach us as people. ...
>
> We now turn our thoughts to the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees who have their own instructions and uses. ... Many peoples of the world use a Tree as a symbol of peace and strength. With one mind, we greet and thank the Tree life.
>
> We put our minds together as one and thank all the Birds ...

We are all thankful to the powers we know as the Four Winds. ...

Now we turn to the west where our grandfathers, the Thunder Beings, live. ...

We now send greetings and thanks to our eldest Brother, the Sun. ...

We put our minds together and give thanks to our oldest Grandmother, the Moon ... With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon. ...

We give thanks to the Stars who are spread across the sky like jewelry. ...

We gather our minds to greet and thank the enlightened Teachers who have come to help throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the way we were instructed to live as people. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to these caring Teachers. ...

Now we turn our thoughts to the Creator, or Great Spirit, and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on this Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator.

And now our minds are one.

We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and these in their own way.

And now our minds are one.[10]

It is in bringing together clear minds and in reminding leaders of their relationship to the circle of life, their responsibilities to Creation, to their people, and in the purpose of coming together to speak honestly and clearly to build 'one mind' or a consensus, that Creation informs the decision-making process in *Haudenosaunee* traditions. Similarly, in Blackfoot traditions, prayer and ceremony inform decision-making processes in much the

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[10] John Stokes and Kanawahienton (David Benedict), *Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World/Ohén:ton Karihwatehkwén: Words Before All Else*, (Albany: Six Nations Indian Museum, nd).

same way; prayers and ceremonies bring leaders together in the physical realm and connect them in emotional, spiritual and mental realms, reminding them of their responsibilities. I would argue, therefore, that while structures and protocols among systems of governance differ, they were bound together through their relationship with Creation. Especially, insofar as the natural world was understood as informing decision-making processes and as involved in those processes.

As noted in previous chapters, Creation was not only 'called in' in the practices which brought together leaders. Governance also existed as a relationship to, and an expression of, Creation (as does language, world view and knowledge). Governance was about how a people saw themselves and their responsibilities within the circle of life. It was about making decisions that respected that relationship and all beings (human and non-human). Simply stated, it was about enabling 'the way that we live most nicely together' in a manner which respected the past, present and future manifestations of Creation. Thus, governance was forged through a people's experiences with Creation, and it is an expression of their understanding of Creation and their responsibilities therein.

Protocols and structures of governance also expressed a relationship to and a knowledge of Creation. Structures and protocols differed among non-state nations (as is demonstrated by my discussion of *Nehiyaw* and *Siiksikaawa* political systems) because political systems were forged through peoples' experiences with different ecosystems and by how they related to and understood those ecosystems. It should be emphasized, nonetheless, that these different structures and protocols exhibit similarities as they reflect the "great unanimity among Aboriginal nations when they express their views on the natural world and the behaviour of humans in that world."[11] Stateless Indigenous political systems diverged structurally and functionally, yet, all are grounded in an understanding of Creation. Because there was a broadly defined consensus about

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[11] Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" op. cit., p. 260.

Creation, there was also great similarity in the basic tenets operationalized in these diverse structures. Thus, Creation itself, and how Creation was expressed and represented within Indigenous political systems is a tie that binds Indigenous political traditions both in terms of differences and similarities.

## POWER

As I understand it, and as I have explained it previously, from an Indigenist perspective, power is Creation. Amongst Aboriginal peoples, power is generally understood as an individualized expression of Creation's power or essence. It is an understanding that pervades Indigenous thought from coast to coast to coast to coast. It is reflective of an essentialism that permeates all nations and the manner in which they understand Creation and their relationship with the natural world. Thus, as an expression of Creation this essentialism was a foundational tenet upon which non-state governance was forged. But it also reflects how Creation was understood within the various nations. It is an understanding which created a consensus in the manner Creation is expressed and experienced in various ecological contexts and an understanding which mediated the formation of languages, world views, knowledge systems, spirituality and political traditions.

In addressing the relationship between the Creation and 'tribal religions', Deloria suggests that,

> the Indian is confronted with a bountiful earth in which all things and experiences have a role to play. ... The world that he experiences is dominated by the presence of power, the manifestation of life energies, the whole life-flow of a creation. Recognition that the human beings holds an important place in such a creation is tempered by the thought that they are dependent on everything in creation for their existence.[12]

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[12] Deloria, op. cit., p. 88.

Power (essence) exists as an expression of Creation, and is found within all life-forces. It is limited or tempered by the existence of other life forces and the teachings of Creator (i.e. an individual's essence can be circumscribed and/or enhanced by the powers and actions of others and through the teachings of Creation).

As an expression of Creation, power exists as the gifts bestowed upon all beings. It is the life force that exists within all beings (their essence). Power is manifested in the gifts/potential that each being has a responsibility to honour. For every being has gifts or powers which they have a responsibility to understand and honour in accordance with Creation's teachings and their responsibilities in the circle of life. This way of understanding power as essence is grounded in my understanding of both the Blackfoot and the Plains Cree world views. It is also consistent with the explanations provided by Monture-Angus;[13] Taiaiake Alfred;[14] Russel Barsh[15] and Henderson, based on the teachings of a diversity of First Nations.[16]

This way of understanding essence or power was further grounded in the Blackfoot language since *itapissko* embodied the idea that power had a spiritual origin and was something possessed by an individual (typically for the benefit of the whole).[17] This understanding is also grounded in Walter Miller's discussion of power and authority in several Central Algonkian nations (Potowatami, Sac, Menomini, Fox, Mascoutin,

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[13] Patricia Monture-Angus, *Thunder In My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1995), p. 87.

[14] Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace Power and Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, (Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 49.

[15] Russel Lawrence Barsh, "Indigenous Peoples and the Idea of Individual Human Rights", in *Native Studies Review*, 10:2 (1995), p. 44.

[16] Henderson, "*Ayukpach*: Empowering Aboriginal Thought" op. cit., pp. 264-268.

[17] According to Frantz and Russell, power is best translated as *itapissko* or "to be inhabited with power". Donald G. Frantz and Norma Jean Russell, *Blackfoot Dictionary of Stems, Roots and Affixes*, second edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 382.

Kickapoo, Miami and Illinois).[18] Miller, an anthropologist firmly established in the western-eurocentric tradition, argues that there are few intra-national differences amongst central Algonkian world views. Nonetheless, he suggests that power can best be understood in relation to Fox spiritual beliefs or the Fox world view, as he understands them:

> The basic concept of Fox religion is *manitu*. Manitu is a kind of generalized essence of supernatural power ... Manitu is actualized or manifested only when it is acquired by some particular being ... A significant characteristic of manitu power is that it is never possessed permanently by any being or group of beings; it is always held conditionally. ... Thus neither the composition of the Fox pantheon nor the relationships between its members can be stable, as [is the case] where a designated group of supernatural [and human] beings, arranged in an orderly hierarchy possesses permanent and assured power prerogatives.[19]

This understanding of power also seems to be compatible with Alfred's representation of the Tlingit's conceptualization.

> The Tlingit people of the Northwest coast speak of power as *shagóon*: 'ancestors, origins, heritage and destiny/supreme being'. Unlike the English version, *this is not an inherently oppositional concept*. By understanding and embodying these ideas, a person contributes to the achievement and maintenance of the crucial balance.[20]

While this understanding of power may appear different from that described above, my understanding of power includes those powers or gifts that come by way of ancestors and ones' heritage. Furthermore, while the source of power differs slightly, the idea that power is achieved through understanding and embodying teachings of the natural world remains constant as does the idea that individuals have a responsibility to understand and honour their unique powers.

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[18] Walter B. Miller, "Two Concepts of Authority", in *American Anthropologist*, vol. 57 (1955).

[19] Ibid., p. 279.

[20] Alfred, op. cit., p. 49. emphasis added.

With these qualifications, Alfred suggests that power (essence) can be viewed as an expression of Creation and understood within Aboriginal thought or Indigenous political traditions as characterized by the following general attributes:

> *Power is universally available and unlimited*; it does not have a unitary locus; it is everywhere, and ... *available to all.* The possession of power is temporary and contingent; *it is not a quality permanently possessed by any being*; but can be gained and lost, possession being demonstrated by successful performance in specific situations. *Demonstrated power does not grant to its processor the subsequent right to direct the actions of any other being. Power is not hierarchical; since its possession is temporary and contingent*, fixed and varying amounts of power are not distributed among a group of beings arranged in a stable hierarchy.[21]

Traditionally, while power was universally available, power was not equally distributed because individuals possessed different gifts, potentials or powers and individuals had differing abilities and opportunities to realize their powers or potentials. It should be noted that inequality in distribution did not result in a hierarchy of possessors, as possession was temporary and there was recognition of deep diversity in both people and gifts. Similarly power was not gendered, or at least not as gendering is understood within the dominant western-eurocentric mindset. Understood in relation to the *Siiksikaawa*, this was because the Blackfoot language and world view:

> ... [subordinate] "gender roles" to the basic prerogative of living beings, the exercise of autonomy. Rather than static categories, Blackfoot understanding posits a world of manifestations rooted in an Almighty, animating Power. Any being might be imbued to a surprising degree with power. That females are gifted with more power than males is seen with their innately greater reproductive capacity [for both the physical and the commodity], but anyone can aspire to be more powerful.[22]

It should also be noted that power was not simply an individual quality and/or phenomenon for it also existed as physical and abstract manifestations of Creation. That

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[21] Miller, op. cit., pp. 282-283. emphasis added.

[22] Alice Kehoe, "Blackfoot Persons", in Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman (eds.), *Women and Power in Native North America*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), p. 124.

is to say, power existed in spiritual entities (physical objects) such as Bundles, and power existed in the knowledge (the abstract manifestation of Creation) obtained through relationships with Creation. As I understand knowledge or abstract manifestations of Creation based on the teachings of Elders, power in the *Siiksikaawa* tradition, existed as song, ceremony (action) and story (words). This is consistent with my understanding of *Nehiyaw* (Plains Cree) world view and with the stories that I have heard over the years told by peoples of different nations. It also accords with Alfred's portrayal of the *Diné* (Navajo) world view in which he tells of "a Diné battle song from the 1930s [which] invokes the force of nature/power to inspire fear in the enemy."[23]

Among nations, then there is a diversity in understandings "of the various forms power can take, and the spiritual elements of the natural order that regulate and structure the expression of power in the temporal world."[24] Nonetheless, two things seem constant: power is an expression of Creation or is a manifestation of Creator's essence and power was a responsibility. That is to say, power is as much about ones' responsibility for the particular gift as it is about Creator's gift of power itself. Power is Creation; that is both the abstract and the physical manifestations of Creation bestowed upon individuals and nations. Power is also about individuals' ability to live with, honour and utilize the powers that 'inhabit' them and about those powers individuals are responsible for maintaining (i.e. abstract and physical manifestations such as Bundles).

## RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES & AUTONOMY

The idea that power is Creation permeates Indigenous thought, regardless of one's nation or the ecosystem within which one's nation lives and learns. But it is not just how power is understood that unites non-state Indigenous political thought. Indigenous

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[23] Alfred, op. cit, p. 51.

[24] Ibid, p. 49.

thought and political traditions are also united by how this instruction was

operationalized within a given polity. That is, Creation taught all peoples about power,

and that essentialism creates some commonalty in how the natural world instructs

political teachings and order throughout the non-state political traditions in North

America. This commonalty in teachings and their operationalization is evidenced in the

following discussion of the predominant conceptualizations of rights, responsibilities and

autonomy that pervade 'Indian country'.

As Menno Boldt argues in *Surviving as Indians*:

> Traditional *Indian* societies had a fundamentally different theory of the
> individual in relation to the community from that implied in Western-
> liberal ideology. Whereas Western-liberal ideology defines the individual in
> this relationship primarily in terms of legal rights, *Indian* cultures define
> the individual primarily in terms of duties and obligations to the
> collectivity. The collective wellbeing of the band/tribe was placed above
> individual self-interest. Individuals had their purpose and interest in the
> community. Members of the community were expected to subordinate
> individualism, to respect the customs and traditions of the community.
> Everyone was expected to work for the welfare of the community. In
> turn, members could expect the tribe/band to provide for their needs.
> These customs engendered mutual loyalty and held the community
> together.[25]

According to Boldt, therefore, there is no such thing as an individual in Indigenous

societies. The individual is simply theorized as part of, or defined only in relationship to,

the collective. To him, Indians are part of a community, and defined only in terms of the

community, not in terms of their existence as autonomous beings or as having inalienable

rights. This is not just Boldt's analysis of the character of individualism in traditional

Indigenous polities, however, for such sentiments are widespread. So this is widely

accepted as a valid explanation of Indigenous realities. This conceptualization does not,

however, reflect fully my understanding of the individual. It is problematic as a definition

or way of conceptualizing individuals or individualism from my understanding of a non-

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[25] Boldt, op. cit. p. 150. Boldt discusses Indians as an undifferentiated mass with no reference to national differentiation.

state Indigenist perspective; one which is based on *Siiksikaawa* and *Nehiyaw* knowledge systems.

Let us consider why Boldt and many others see individuals only in relationship to the collective and rights only in terms of collectively oriented rights and responsibilities of individuals. One could argue that scholars such as Boldt simply 'misunderstood' because they are attempting to conceptualize Indigenous realities from within the western-eurocentric paradigm. But these paradigms are so dissimilar that they cannot be understood or explained from the perspective of another's contextualized reality. Moreover, several different explanations of this misunderstanding emerge to explain the widespread idea that 'individualism' is lacking in Indigenous world views.

It is possible that Boldt's analysis may reflect how 'individualism' was understood within some Indigenous traditions. My research and personal contacts, however, suggest this was not the case in most polities. The fact that most of Boldt's research has been with the Blackfoot Confederacy in which 'traditional individualism' continues to exist as a contemporary phenomenon, suggests that he has simply misunderstood this aspect of Blackfoot reality. Undeniably there was a collectivist orientation in Indigenous world views and traditionalist mindsets. As I suggested in a previous chapter, this collectivist orientation can be explained in relation to the natural world and, in the case of the Blackfoot, social species such as the buffalo. Many nations speak of the fact that the teachings of Creation taught them that it was the group and its survival that was of utmost importance, as was an individual's realization of their responsibilities to their relations (human and non-human).

Arguably, this collectivist orientation could also be a product of the economic and social realities of pre-colonial life and Indigenous world views. Several scholars have argued, however, that the collectivist orientation of modern Indigenist political thought has as much to do with Indigenous people's interaction with the modern state, democratic theory and colonization as with cultural realities or Indigenous world views. Frances

Svensson, for example, suggests that, the very survival of Indigenous people as collectivities or nations depended on assertion of claims against the state. Since these claims are not individualistic in nature and are counter to liberal individualism and western-eurocentric rights discourse, Svensson concludes that the emergence of a discourse of collective or group rights was inevitable.[26]

The tension between liberal individualism and the values of Indigenous people, however, is neither simply a matter of the collective nature of Indigenous claims against the state nor the continuing battle for the survival of Indigenous nations as *nations*. As Ovide Mercredi and Mary Ellen Turpel argue in *In The Rapids*, the problem with western-eurocentric rights discourse, or liberal individualism is not simply a matter of a collective rights orientation of First Nations or Indigenous collectivities. Rather, Indigenous people have their own traditions of individualism and rights that are also in many ways incompatible, or at least very different from, western-eurocentric conceptions of rights and the individual. They argue:

> Many First Nations people question why we should allow government to impose [the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms] as a way of solving the problems they generated in the first place.[27] ...

> The primary objective of the Charter is to protect individual freedoms, but Aboriginal people have individual freedoms through our own forms of government. Who is to say that freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of thought and belief, and freedom of association do not exist in our societies? Of course they exist. We believe in maximizing individual autonomy without sacrificing a sense of community responsibility.[28]

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[26] Frances Svensson, "Liberal Democracy and Group Rights: The Legacy of Individualism and Its Impact on American Indian Tribes", in *Political Studies*, XXVII:3 (1980), pp. 421-439.

[27] Ovide Mercredi and Mary Ellen Turpel, *In The Rapids: Navigating the Future of First Nations*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1993), p. 97.

[28] Ibid., pp. 101-102.

The contention that Indigenous peoples have their own traditions of rights and responsibilities and their own conceptualizations of the individual which may be incompatible with western-eurocentric traditions is also assessed by James Zion:

> The individualistic thrust of domestic human and civil rights law, as well as international human rights laws, is often inappropriate in the Indian context. Indians are highly individualistic, yet that degree of individualism exists in the context of relationships and groups.[29]

Because of the incommensurability of western-eurocentric and Indigenous traditions of rights, the collective nature of Indigenous societies has been emphasized in Indigenist political discourse against the state. Svensson's also supports this view. He contends that the emergence of collective rights is an assertion of Indigenous rights against the state and is an attempt to ensure the integrity of Indigenous peoples as nations and not simply as individuals in a nation-state.[30] In other words, collective rights emerged, in part, as a reaction to colonization and they have become dominant in Indigenist rights discourse against the state. This may explain why non-Indigenous scholars such as Boldt see Indigenous traditions as collectivist, with no conception of the individual independent of the collective.

This might also be explained with reference to the incommensurability of these two traditions. Indigenist thinkers view individual rights as existing along a continuum and as a response to flux, whereas many western-eurocentric thinkers (excluding communitarians) see individual rights and collective rights as opposites, which are mutually exclusive. Thus, the idea that Indigenous world views lack rights or an understanding of individuals as separate from the collective is not totally incorrect in the context of *contemporary* rights discourse or Indigenist political thought. It is not

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[29] James Zion, "North American Indian Perspectives on Human Rights" in Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (ed.), *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 199.

[30] Svensson, op. cit.

consistent with the traditions that existed prior to colonization, however, as Aboriginal peoples had their own distinct and independent traditions of rights and individualism.

Individual rights were typically seen as responsibilities resulting from individual manifestations of Creator's essence and Creation's teachings (more generally). The way in which these teachings were operationalized varies among nations, as does how these teachings were experienced and understood within a given ecological context. There is no one single rights tradition nor a single conceptualization of the individual common to all nations. Regardless, the idea that individuals were autonomous represents a primary tenet in Indigenous political philosophies[31] affected how governance operated. Since it defined and confined governance, let us then construct a conceptualization of the individual and rights within Indigenist thought; general enough to allow for some internal differentiation.

Any discussion of individuals, rights and responsibilities within a non-state Indigenous context must begin with a discussion of Creation and the relationship between individuals and Creation. Power is viewed as an individualized phenomenon. Power involves the gifts or potentials of Creation which are given to and/or obtained by individuals and for which individuals are responsible. It is this conceptualization of power and the responsibilities pertaining to or resulting from power which underline or provide the foundation for Indigenous conceptualizations of the autonomous individual and her/his rights and responsibilities.

Attempting to create an understanding of Indigenist rights discourse in the international arena (the United Nations) or Indigenous perspectives on human rights, Barsh argues that: "Indigenous peoples generally think in terms of the freedom of individuals *to be what they were created to be, rather than being free from* certain kinds of

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[31] Barsh, "Indigenous Peoples and the Idea of Individual Human Rights", op. cit.

state encroachments."[32] 'The freedom of individuals to be what they were created to be' speaks directly to the idea that individuals are free to live out their responsibilities resulting from their gifts from Creation without interference.

As I understand it, within the traditional Indigenous realm, freedom or individualism was viewed in terms of Creation and an individual's responsibilities emanating from power. Individuals are free to be what they were created to be. So individuals were free to discover their path in life and then to follow their pathway in the manner they saw fit. That is to say, an individual was free to discover, 'understand and realize their unknown potentials' and to live the responsibilities emanating from these gifts. To reflect an individual's responsibility to honour their powers, Indigenous world views were individualistic in orientation as each individual was seen as an autonomous being with separate and distinct gifts or potentials. Furthermore, since power was conceptualized as an individualized phenomenon, inherent in this individualistic orientation was the principle of non-interference or the idea that no one had the right to interfere with another's discovery and subsequent realization, of their potential.

This prohibition on interfering with another's pursuit of power has been termed the doctrine of non-interference by Rupert Ross,[33] which, as I understand it, means no one has a right to interfere in another's life. While my understanding is based specifically on Blackfoot and Cree teachings, this doctrine of non-interference seems consistent across other non-state Indigenous teachings. The doctrine of non-interference is simply the idea or protocol which disallows interference (by anyone and against anyone) and allows all people to be what they were created to be. As recognized by Ross in his discussion of

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[32] Ibid., p. 44. emphasis added. It should be noted that this could be viewed as being consistent with the positive rights tradition in some European political traditions. However, its philosophical foundation is fundamentally different.

[33] Rupert Ross, *Dancing With a Ghost: Exploring Indian Reality*, (Markham: Reed Books, 1992), pp. 11-28. Rupert Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 76-100.

this doctrine in *Returning to the Teachings*, the doctrine of non-interference is not just disallowance of interference. Rather, it is a state of mind, a underlying conceptualization of 'individualism' (human and non-human) and a strategy for instilling in individuals the skills necessary for survival or living life.

As Ross explains, the doctrine of non-interference, or the conceptualization of individual autonomy, forms part of the traditional child-rearing process. It was not about "teaching each person exactly what to say, think, do - a product based teaching if you will. Instead, it focused on two other elements of life. It taught first that life was a matter of responsibilities..."[34] Second, it focused on developing the qualities and attributes necessary for living those responsibilities: "[w]hat people actually did in fulfillment of their duties, however, was largely a matter of free choice."[35] Non-interference was the dominant child-rearing strategy in Indigenous North America. More important, perhaps, is that it was also an action-oriented strategy which focused on lifelong skills development or the continual development of the person as an individual. As such, it also focused on the autonomy of individuals by enabling complete intellectual/mental, spiritual, emotional and physical freedom. The doctrine of non-interference was central to Indigenous conceptualizations of the individual, since it acknowledged the individual as an autonomous being was free to act as s/he chose within a realm of responsibilities. Indigenous world views, then, conceptualized the individual as an autonomous being whose autonomy could not be interfered with; as long as they acted responsibly,[36] every

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[34] Ross, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice op. cit.*, p. 84.

[35] Ibid.

[36] What is meant by acting responsibly differs amongst nations. It usually means respecting the autonomy of others (i.e. not committing murder, not acting corrosively, and not stealing). In some cases, such as among the *Siiksikaawa* and *Nehiyaw* this also means not interfering with the communal hunt. Failure to respect the autonomy of others is dealt with in a variety of ways; all of which limit the autonomy of the individual to some degree or another. Failure to 'live ones relationships' or acting irresponsibly is often dealt with through ridicule and through non-coercive instruction.

individual was understood as having complete mental, physical, spiritual and emotional freedom.

Indigenous world views conceptualized individuals as autonomous beings, but they, and the means by which they were actualized, were also constructed to sustain this conceptualization of the individual or the autonomy of all beings. This is exemplified in many ways. For example, traditional teachings focused on personal development or how one lived their life responsibly and they did not dictate how to lead a responsible life, as that was up to the individual. Instruction occurred in a variety of non-coercive ways; through individual experience, observation, and oral tradition. Stories were didactic in nature, yet typically had no externalized lesson or exact ending since lessons are usually indirect and knowledge is obtained through a process of reflection and internalization. So it was inappropriate to tell someone what to think about a story, because of a disdain for interference. Moreover, it was also perceived as an insult to the listener's intelligence. Thus, even when a person failed to 'live their responsibilities' her/his autonomy was respected. An Elder (typically a grandmother or auntie in most societies including Mohawk, Cree and Blackfoot) may be perceived as 'interfering' by attempting to correct the individual's actions. Yet, this was done in an indirect fashion using stories, song and 'gossip' and allowing individuals the choice of correcting or continuing their behaviour.

Conceptualizations of individuals as autonomous beings unifies *most* non-state, North American Aboriginal thought because of the relationship between this conceptualization of individuals and Creation. The idea that individuals are autonomous exists because of Creator's instructions. This can be demonstrated in many ways and in many ecological contexts. Conceiving of power as individualized manifestations of Creators' essence, and by justifying autonomy using power, necessarily connected ideas of individual autonomy to the instructions of Creation. Variations in conceptualizations of individual autonomy can also be attributed to the manner in which a people experienced and related to an ecosystem. As my discussion of the Plains Cree illustrated, the greater emphasis on

individualism in the *Nehiyaw* tradition can be attributed to a millennia of experiences in the forest where beings such as the Moose are more solitary and less community oriented. Indigenous thought among woodland nations such as the Cree and the Dene also reflects a greater capacity for individualism and family; than for the nation as is the case amongst plains peoples such as the Blackfoot and the Plains Cree who follow the teachings of the buffalo. Despite variations in Indigenous conceptualizations of individuals, however, Indigenous thought and traditions are unified by the teachings of Creations and by the ontological and epistemological orientations of Indigenous reality (see chapter one). While differences exist, Indigenous political thought is unified in that it always depends on Creation and a ecologically-derived conceptualization of the individual and individual rights or responsibilities. As I will demonstrate shortly, contextuality not only unified traditional Indigenist political philosophy but it also defined and confined governance within different polities.

## AUTONOMY, RESPONSIBILITY & RELATIONSHIPS

Within Indigenist thought and Indigenous traditions, the individual is generally conceptualized as an autonomous being with inalienable rights viewed, not as positive and/or negative rights, but as each individuals' responsibility to 'be what they were created to be'. Contrary to some western-eurocentric thinking, this individualist orientation is compatible with a collectivist orientation. As RCAP states:

> In most Aboriginal societies, an individual is imbued with a strong sense of personal autonomy and an equally strong responsibility to the community. Since the community is dependent on the ingenuity, initiative and self-reliance of its individual members, individual rights and responsibilities are viewed as serving rather than opposing collective interests.[37]

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[37] Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol. 1, (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1996), p. 119.

I provide a more spiritual and philosophical (ecological) explanation compared to RCAP's rationalization for the existence of a collectivist orientation and the balancing of individual rights and responsibilities with collective rights and responsibilities. More important than such nuanced difference, however, is the existence of these two orientations in Indigenist thought and their mutual interdependence. My discussion of Diamond and Eggan demonstrated that there is a relationship between economic (subsistence) considerations and social phenomena. Moreover, I perceive a relationship among the ecology, spirituality, philosophy, and economics, in the creation of a balance between individual rights and collective rights, as all exist as an expression of and as a contextualized relationship to Creation.

In explaining the interdependence between the individualist and collectivist orientations or foundations of Indigenous world views, Barsh states, "rights are no more important than duties."[38] This speaks to the traditional balance between these two orientations. Individuals are autonomous with inalienable responsibilities that allow them to live their lives in accordance with their own free will. Indigenous polities are grounded in a reality of relationships and webs of responsibilities emanating from these relationships. Max Gluckman, Elman Service, and Pierre Clastres view these relationships merely as 'kinship' and so see Indigenous societies as 'primitive' 'kinship states' or 'kinship societies'.[39] I would argue, however, that traditionally, these relationships and the subsequent responsibilities were far more complex than western notions of 'kinship', that is of being related by blood. While kinship usually denotes blood relationships or lineage within the western-eurocentric accounts, in most Indigenous world views, kinship is an expression of multiple intersecting relationships among all

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[38] Barsh, "Indigenous Peoples and the Idea of Individual Human Rights", op. cit., p. 44.

[39] Elman R. Service, *Primitive Social Organization: An Evolutionary Perspective*, (New York: Random House, 1968). Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society*, (Chicago: Aldine, 1965). Pierre Clastres, *Society Against the State: The Leader as Servant and the Humane Uses of Power Among the Indians of the Americas*, Robert Hurley (trans.), (New York: Urizen Books, 1974).

beings (human and non-human) from which flow mutual responsibilities and a social order. By contrast, the western-eurocentric traditions tends to conceptualize kinship in a limited manner which excludes rather than includes non-blood-relations and non-human beings.

By suggesting that traditionally, kinship was an expression of relationships from which flow mutual responsibilities and a 'social order', I am not claiming that Indigenous polities were based on blood (kinship). Kinship is not to be equated with blood relationships. The relationships that a people forged with other beings within a territory were the basis of that political order as Indigenous political traditions were created within an ecological context. Thus, this interpretation of kinship and its relationship to politics differs drastically from primitivists and evolutionists who argued that Indigenous political systems were based on blood (kinship) not territory. In actuality, non-state Indigenous political traditions were based on both kinship and territory (understood as 'sacred places' and ecology).

Within the Indigenous world, kinship was an expression of multiple intersecting relationships and responsibilities. According to Barsh, kinship was collective, universal and transcendent. Nevertheless, he also asserts that, while kinship was viewed as unifying all beings within a single circle of life, it was also perceived as being divisive for relationships are organized ecologically into nations and functionally into clans and societies.[40] Kinship also involved recognizing that, at a practical level 'kinship responsibilities' or 'kinship relations' only included those relations for which one recognized mutual responsibilities. This idea of multiple intersecting relationships is further demonstrated within the *Siiksikaawa* social order. Relationships were determined both by familial ties (including adoption) and by relationships to social constructions

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[40] Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems" op. cit, pp. 187-191.

such as clans, societies and Bundles for all interpersonal relationships were explained in terms of 'kinship'.

Simply put, relationships defined the collectivist orientation in Indigenous thought and traditions, since they created a social order which defined 'how we best live together' or the collective in which individuals lived and operationalized their powers and responsibilities. For while individuals were autonomous they were not islands unto themselves. Rather they were to be social beings and to live as part of a collective to which they had a responsibility. The Indigenous world was highly individualistic, yet it recognizes that all beings existed as part of a circle of life and had a responsibility for that circle of life. More particularly, each person was responsible for their fragment of universal kinship, or those beings for which they had recognized 'kinship responsibilities' for, as defined by relationships within the local ecological order. In other words, rights and responsibilities were conceptualized as individual; but individuals existed as part of collectivities. Thus, the individual domain was one of mutual interdependence whereby one's rights were limited by relationships and responsibilities emanating from those relationships. That is, individualism was mitigated by a collectivist understanding of 'how we live together in the best way possible'.


## AUTONOMY & COLLECTIVE POWER

In this section I examine how this conceptualization of the individual as the keeper of power and as an autonomous being in a web of relationships was part of Indigenist political philosophy and was translated into corresponding systems of non-state governance.

The work of Deloria and Alfred (among others) reveals a process of conceptualizing the Indigenous context as something separate and distinct from western-eurocentric tradition. Alfred frames his discussion in terms of the difference between Indigenous conceptualizations of nationhood and western-eurocentric conceptualizations of

sovereignty and nation-statehood. He suggests that the concept and framework of sovereignty is inappropriate in the context of Indigenist thought because of its different conceptualization of power. He argues that unless sovereignty is detached:

> from its current legal meaning and use in the context of the Western understanding of power and relationships ... [and replaced with] a meaning for 'sovereignty' that respects the understanding of power in indigenous cultures, one that reflects more of the sense embodied in such Western notions as 'personal sovereignty' and 'popular sovereignty'. Until then, 'sovereignty' can never be part of the language [used to liberate and explain Indigenous traditions].[41]

Instead, Alfred urges the use of the term nation as a means of understanding non-state Indigenous polities and their corresponding political traditions premised on the foregoing explanation of Creation, power, and individual autonomy (sovereignty). Alfred summarizes the characteristic attributes of this context of nationhood and the political traditions predominant within the Indigenous context:

> A crucial feature of the indigenous concept of governance is its respect for individual autonomy. This respect precludes the notion of 'sovereignty' - the idea that there can be some permanent transference of power from the individual to an abstraction called 'government'. The indigenous tradition sees government as the collective power of the individual members of the nation; there is no separation between society and state. ... In the indigenous tradition, the idea of self-determination truly starts with the self; political identity - is not surrendered to any external entity. Individuals alone determine their interests and destinies. There is no coercion: only the compelling force of conscience based on those inherited and collectively refined principles that structure the society.[42]

Alfred conceptualizes individuals as the keepers of power and as autonomous beings in a web of relationships and he asserts that the Indigenous tradition of nationhood precludes sovereignty and ensures individual autonomy. But his analysis does not answer all of my questions concerning the relationship between the individual and governance within Indigenist thought and traditions. How are authority and political or

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[41] Alfred, op. cit., p. 54.

[42] Ibid., p. 25.

collective power understood and operationalized within Indigenist thought and traditional systems of governance? Given the fundamentals of Indigenous traditions of governance which are predicated on Creator's instructions and have been forged through peoples' differentiated experiences with and relationship to the natural world, what do authority and political power mean in a non-coercive environment?

Traditionally, *most* non-state Indigenous world views explicitly condemned the use of force, coercion and hierarchical structures of authority as a basis of political power. Non-state traditions of governance were not based on power as it is typically conceived of in the western-eurocentric tradition as relations of ruling based on the legitimate use of coercion. Authority and coercion are viewed as legitimate expressions of power in western-eurocentric governance. But, as Alfred explains:

> The native concept of governance is based on what a great student of
> indigenous societies, Russell [sic] Barsh, has called the 'primacy of
> conscience'. There is no central or coercive authority, and decision making
> is collective. Leaders rely on their persuasive abilities to achieve a
> consensus that respects the authority of individuals, each of whom is free
> to dissent from and remain unaffected by the collective decision ...[43]

From this one could conclude that Indigenous governance simply lacked political power. But is such a conclusion accurate? As I have argued previously, Indigenous political systems were devoid of hierarchical structures of authority and coersive power or power and authority as they are conceived in the dominant western-eurocentric tradition. But, this does not mean that these political systems did not have their own internally generated alterNative understandings of power and authority. In fact, as I have explained several times earlier, within the Blackfoot context power is understood in two complementary and interdependent ways as essence or a relationship to Creation and as collective power or as the process of consensual decision-making and collectively defined communitism (community activism).

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[43] Ibid., p. 25.

However, within the literature on Indigenous politics within political science and anthropology, most scholars accept the idea that Aboriginal polities were devoid of power and also promulgate this conclusion in their theories and analyses of Indigenous politics. Several scholars, however, challenge the assertion that traditional Indigenous societies lacked power.[44] Pierre Clastres asserts that traditional Indigenous governance was characterized by a non-coercive form of power expressed through the spoken word, independently of violence, coercion and hierarchy. As was mentioned in chapters two and six, Alfred, on the other hand, attempts to conceptualize Indigenous governance premised on an alterNative understanding of power, and Indigenous traditions of governance and of individuals as autonomous beings and holders of power. For Alfred, governance "centres on the achievement of consensus and the creation of *collective power*, bounded by six principles: it depends on the active participation of individuals; it balances many layers of equal power; it is dispersed; it is situational; it is non-coercive; and it respects diversity."[45]

Focusing on the idea of collective power, while recognizing the autonomy of individuals, enables Alfred to theorize power as a process of decision-making and a result of decision-making. As a process of decision-making, power is equated with the coming together of minds and the aggregating of individualized powers, or the collective process of being of one mind, in a manner which prioritizes the values of respect, balance and harmony, considers the appropriateness of a decision vis-à-vis these values. Simply put, power is the manifestation of collective power and action, as collective power and action are the only 'legitimate' forms of power in most Indigenous polities. That is to say, power is the coming together of minds or the collective expression of a people's relationship to and understanding of the natural world. As the Thanksgiving Address

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[44] Clastres, op. cit., p. 6.

[45] Alfred, op. cit., p. 27. emphasis added

demonstrates, all decisions must respect all beings (past, present and futures) and a decision is but a continual affirmation of a people's understanding of 'how we live together in the best way possible'.

Alfred's believes:

> Unlike the statist version, [the Indigenous] conception of power ... does not involve coercing or inducing other beings to fulfill imperatives external to their own nature; thus it is not inherently conflictual. *Nor does it require a contractual surrender of power, leading to continuous tension between the individual and the state.* ... On the meaning of power, indigenous thought was traditionally focused on questions regarding the *legitimacy of the nature of the use of power*, rather than its distribution. ... In other words, the traditional indigenous view of power and justice has nothing to do with competition, or status vis-á-vis others: *it focuses on whether or not power is used in a way that contributes to the creation and maintenance of balance and peaceful co-existence in a web of relationships.*[46]

I want to locate this discussion of power in an ecological context and examine traditional understandings of power and the relationship between power and Indigenous traditions of governance. Power (essence) is Creation. Power is the abstract and physical manifestations of Creation bestowed both on individuals and nations. Traditionally, power was understood through a people's individual and collective experience with, and knowledge of, an ecosystem. But power also involved an individual's ability to live with, honour and utilize her/his gifts or essence. Essentially, this is what Alfred was suggesting: "on the meaning of power, indigenous thought has focused on questions regarding the legitimacy of the use of power ... [or] whether or not power is used in a way that it contributes to the creation and maintenance of balance and peaceful co-existence in a web of relationships."[47]

Power was legitimate when it was expressed in the same manner as in the natural world (i.e collectively). Many social beings live without coercive and hierarchical forms

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[46] Ibid., p. 48-49. emphasis added

[47] Ibid., p. 49.

of governance and they were perceived by Indigenous thinkers as living according of Creator's original teachings or 'living together in the best way possible'. Relationships among beings were perceived as based on a recognition of, and a respect for, the autonomy of individuals (human or otherwise). To the extent that the natural world instructed Indigenous political teachings and order, power in the human world was judged as legitimate when it is non-coercive and reflects the teachings and experiences which define Indigenous world views. That is, legitimate power rests on the values, philosophies and practices of the natural world as they were understood and experienced by a nation living in a particular ecosystem.

In Indigenist thought, power was legitimate when it prioritized respect, responsibility, humility and control. It was legitimate when it embraced Indigenous ideas about relationships and responsibilities and how one lives those relationships and honours those responsibilities. Further, it was legitimate when it attempted to create and/or maintain peace, harmony and balance in the circle of life; it respected the collective good and the necessity of being of one mind; and, it admonished negative forces which may have brought harm to the collective. Power was understood as a spiritual phenomenon or a gift of Creation to be used with respect, responsibility, humility and control for the benefit of the collective. Power (essence) was to be used in a way that creates and maintains peace, harmony and balance within a human community and between humans and the wider circle of life.

This way of conceptualizing power is really about individual and collective responsibility for maintaining peace, harmony and balance in the circle of life for that is the 'way we live best together'. Power was an individual phenomena in the sense that individuals had a responsibility to use their power for the collective good of the circle of life. Power was also a collective phenomena in the sense that each collective had the power to establish parameters of legitimacy to ensure that individual powers were used in the best way possible. Further, power was collective in the sense that power was

consensual since all people affected by a decision had to come to one mind before power was utilized within the collective, especially when decisions affected the autonomy of individuals. The collective nature of power is further evident if one looks at how the teachings of Creation were operationalized within traditional structures of governance.

## STRUCTURES OF GOVERNANCE

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine governance in relation to this concept of power within the confines of an ecological context. Russel Barsh maintains:

> Historians and ethnologists have recorded a great deal about indigenous North American societies, but while the manifestations of this continent's aboriginal intellect have been catalogued, the philosophies and sciences from which they arose remain relatively unexplored. If aboriginal Americans were conscious of the design and purpose of their sociopolitical institutions and had models of their own to explain them, there is little contemporary recognition of this fact. It is nonetheless possible to infer a continental theory of human nature from shared elements, just as we recognize that all European institutions since classical times have shared common themes...[48]

Barsh then explored what he perceives as characteristics of a shared Indigenous philosophy; universal conscience (his term for individual autonomy and power), kinship (relationships, responsibility and Creation) and the 'endless creative power of the world' (Creation). While he discusses them in terms of their philosophical expressions, he also recognizes that they are indicative of a people's experiences with, and their understanding of, their relationship to Creation or 'the creative power of the world' and the beings which occupy the life worlds therein.

While there was virtual unanimity in non-state North American Aboriginal thought with respect to a peoples' understanding of the natural world and the place of humans within that world (the shared political philosophies), the operationalization of these primary tenets was achieved through a relationship with specific ecosystems. I will now

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[48] Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems", op. cit., p. 181.

explore further common themes in how Indigenous peoples incorporated the philosophies, practices and teachings of Creation into the design, function and purpose of their sociopolitical institutions. What follows, then is a brief exploration of how Indigenist thought has been operationalized within structures of governance or how Indigenist political philosophy and, thus, the ecological context define and confine the operationalization of governance throughout non-state Indigenous North America.

## UNDERSTANDING COLLECTIVE POWER OR HORIZONTAL AUTHORITY

The fact that most Indigenous traditions are so different from western-eurocentric traditions does not mean authority did not exist. It simply means that authority existed as part of a separate and distinct parallel political tradition. To put it another way, it simply means that there exists an alterNative conceptualization of authority within non-state Indigenous political traditions. It is an understanding that is fundamentally different from the assumed universal of western-eurocentric thought. Authority, as defined within the dominant western-eurocentric tradition, does not exist in non-state Indigenous political systems as these political traditions are predicated on an understanding of governance as an undifferentiated part of society, the autonomy of the individual and the idea that only collective power is legitimate. Therefore, I will now explore how authority was operationalized within Indigenous structures of governance and what authority meant within each of the different Indigenous political system I have explored.

Understanding power as a collective phenomenon, how was power operationalized within Indigenous systems of governance? In other words, how did individualized power (essence) become collective power or horizontal authority? Alfred touches on this in his discussion of legitimacy when he argues that power was legitimate only when used consensually. By contrast, Miller understands power as an individualized phenomenon that was transformed into legitimate authority when it was made collective or consensual. He suggests that there are two different conceptualizations of authority: vertical

authority, perceived as legitimate within the western-eurocentric tradition; and, horizontal authority which characterizes traditional Indigenous structures of governance.[49] Marie Smallface Marule also describes horizontal authority or a leader's coordinating authority: "In traditional Indian societies ... authority was a collective right that could be temporarily delegated to a leader under restrictive conditions, to carry out essential activities. But the responsibility and authority always remained with the people."[50] Recognizing the non-coercive nature and the flux inherent in Indian leadership and traditional structures of governance, Miller describes horizontal authority in terms of leaders having only coordinating authority. Similar to Clastre's conceptualization of a leader's power as the ability to influence others using oratorical skills, Miller argues that leaders could facilitate collective action by coordinating the consent of the community through his influence as a good leader and orator and the "ongoing interaction between individuals"[51] or the continual process of affirming consent through the vast array of consensual decision-making mechanisms.

Like Alfred's analysis, Miller's conceptualization of authority is premised on the idea that power resided in individuals and was operationalized in structures of governance as authority through the interaction among individuals when individuals collectively consent to the use of power.[52] This analysis is grounded in non-state Indigenous world views in so far as it embraces the predominant understanding of power, autonomy, Creation and

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[49] Miller, op. cit.

[50] Marie Smallface Marule, "Traditional Indian Government: Of the People, By the People, For the People", in Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long (eds.), *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 36.

[51] Miller, op. cit., p. 277.

[52] Miller's conceptualization of authority (based on his understanding of Fox society) is also consistent with Morton Fried's pan-Indian theorization of authority that emerges out of his discussion of Indigenous societies and existing western-eurocentric theory (especially the work of M. Weber). Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology*, (New York: Random House, 1967), pp. 11-13, 70-93.

responsibility addressed earlier. It is also consistent with my understanding of how horizontal authority was operationalized within the traditional *Siiksikaawa* system of governance (as discussed in a previous chapter). For example, in the case of clan leaders and Bundle carriers, nah'a and nina may be perceived as having facilitated horizontal authority or collective power. Although they may have guided the decision-making process (substantively and ceremonially), the decision itself and their ability to forge and implement the decision depended on their ability to achieve 'one mind' through the continuous involvement of individuals.

Thus, collective power or horizontal authority is both the decision-making process itself and the resulting decision, for there was no authority greater than the autonomous individual and leaders had no ability to forge or implement decisions other than coordinating the process of 'becoming one mind'. This is because authority was not defined as a 'power over' but the power which emanated from the camp circle in its entirety. Simply put, it was a collectively defined communitism (community activism) as it was both the process of deciding to act and acting as an entire community. That is, it was the continual process of a community horizontally and collectively governing itself.

While Miller's theory of horizontal authority accurately describes authority as it is understood within non-state Indigenist thought and operationalized within a variety of contexts, it should be noted that there were situations or extenuating circumstances that diminished horizontal authority and collective power. As Robert Lowie points out, there were instances when structures of Indigenous governance exercised and displayed 'sovereign authority' (coercive authority); "achieving intermittently ... what a modern State professes to do continuously."[53] In suggesting that there were instances of 'sovereign authority', Lowie was referring to examples of 'military' or 'police' societies amongst Plains Indians and their ability to transcend normal boundaries of authority and

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[53] Robert H. Lowie, "Property Rights and Coercive Power of Plains Indians", in *Journal of Legal and Political Sociology*, Vol. 1 (1943), p. 65.

individual autonomy. Lowie suggests that instances of intermittent 'sovereign authority' were limited to the plains and existed only in a nascent form during normal circumstances.

I agree with Lowie in so far as these instances represent a deviation from the norm. 'Sovereign authority' is not, however, predicated on the idea that there is no authority greater than the autonomous individual. Further, it does not address the idea that the act of governance was only legitimate when based on the realization off collective power or horizontal authority. Thus, I disagree with Lowie on several accounts. I would argue that instances whereby societies transcended normal boundaries of collective power did not represent an intermittent operationalization of 'sovereign authority'. Rather, horizontal authority and individual autonomy did not evaporate but were instead maintained, albeit in a diminished form. This is demonstrated by the fact that while societies had the ability to 'enforce the law', they did not have the ability to punish 'offenders' as the legitimacy of such action required horizontal authority. This is also demonstrated with respect to the powers of war chiefs or society leaders. These individuals were recognized as possessing 'gifts' which enabled them to lead societies in times of 'crisis' without a consensual decision-making process. Nevertheless, individuals retained their autonomy in so far as they had the ability to opt out (disagree and not comply) of a decision. It should also be noted that horizontal authority and autonomy was maintained despite the fact that a society leaders may have had the ability to make decisions in times of war. This is because, members decided to join a society and *chose to accept the responsibilities* that joining entailed. Thus, 'sovereign authority' or authority as it is conceived in western-eurocentric thought did not exist. There was no authority greater than the *responsible*, autonomous individual and horizontal authority and collective power were maintained as there was no hierarchically defined or centralized vehicle through which coercive power and authority could be legitimately operationalized.

Further to this, I would also suggest that Lowie was incorrect in asserting that the intermittent circumstances whereby structures of governance transcended the normal

boundaries of horizontal authority were limited to the plains. Horizontal authority was also intermittently diminished in nations, such as the Mohawk, whose political structures included a 'war chief' who, in situations of conflict, were provided extraordinary powers. One should also note a need to qualify the idea that all societies and all 'war chiefs' had the ability to transcend normal boundaries of power. There were many societies and many different nations and a wide range of variation. For example, not all Blackfoot societies had the ability to transcend normal boundaries of authority (be it over their membership or the nation at large). Finally, to reiterate, no matter what the circumstance, any discussion of authority or its operationalization in non-state Indigenous polities does not preclude consideration of 'responsibility' and 'legitimacy' and thus, individual autonomy, collective power and horizontal authority. Indigenous political systems were not vestiges of popular sovereignty, they excluded sovereignty, as there has never been a "permanent transference of power from the individual to an abstraction called 'government'"[54] and individuals are autonomous and self-governing.

## LEADERSHIP

According to Tom Porter:

> The word "chief" kind of makes you think of a fire chief or a kind of big man, but it is not at all what an Iroquois leader is. Perhaps that might be one of the first things attempted by the intellectual people of the world - that is to translate properly from one culture to another culture exactly what is meant and then there would be more ground and an easier means by which peace could be achieved.[55]

For the most part, Indigenous leaders were powerless. Quoting Clastres, Barsh notes:

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[54] Alfred, op. cit., p. 25.

[55] Tom Porter, "Traditions of the Constitution of the Six Nations", in Leroy Little Bear, Menno Boldt and J. Anthony Long Eds.), *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 13.

The powerlessness of Native American governments was considered and deliberate, reflecting a sophisticated awareness that "an external authority which creates its own legality is a challenge to culture itself." For many North American peoples, then, 'civilization' banished them from the light of individualism back to the dark ages of authoritarianism.[56]

I maintain that the powerlessness of Indigenous leaders and Indigenous structures of governance was a deliberate attempt to maintain and emphasize the teachings of Creation (beings such as the Buffalo people do not permit coercive and authoritative leaders), or the continuance of Indigenous conceptualizations of individual as autonomous beings and Indigenous conceptualizations of power and authority.

Non-state Indigenous systems appear quite similar because these systems were deliberately designed by nations acting in relation to Creation or expressing a knowledge of, and a relationship to, different ecological realities. Nonetheless, how specific Indigenous conceptualizations of the individual and of power were manifested in structures of governance differed substantially. Furthermore, because leadership was situational, how Indigenous conceptualizations of individual and power manifested themselves within a particular system of governance often coincided with the abilities of different leaders and different structures.

How I understand Blackfoot leadership, based on the teachings of Elders, is that leadership was about an individual's gifts, honouring those gifts and her/his relationships. So leadership in the Blackfoot nations was the same as it is in the buffalo nation; it was about collective responsibility not an individualized pursuit of power. For the most part, leadership was simply the responsibility to provide direction or guidance to the people by means of demonstration and rationalization, by getting the people to agree, and the responsibility to provide for and ensure the sustainability of the *Niitsitapi* as *Siiksikaawa*. It was the idea of being *nina* or *nah 'a*, of being a good father or mother, and not *kinininayna* or a 'captured chief' or a 'medal chief'. Being a leader was not about taking

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[56] Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems", op. cit., pp. 186-187.

orders from another level of government or making decisions and acting as though you are a sovereign.[57] It was about representing the one-mind or the collective decision of the people, and being a good person, good provider, good advisor and a knowledgeable helper. As Barsh points out, leadership was an *obligation* in 'the indigenous American view'.

While I agree that leadership was viewed by most (possibly all) Indigenous peoples as an obligation which provided certain individuals with a responsibility to *serve* their people because of the powers or gifts which they had received from the Creator (their individual qualities and potentials), the qualities expected of leaders varied among nations. This is demonstrated by contrasting *Siiksikaawa* and *Nehiyaw* leadership. The qualities expected of *Nehiyaw* leaders were consistent with the qualities expected of Blackfoot leaders; a leader must be a good person, good provider, good advisor and knowledgeable helper. Plains Cree leadership was, however, grounded in a different ecosystem and a different understanding of the natural world. Like the world from which it emerged (the woodlands of the northern plains), and like the beings which occupy the northlands (such as the moose), Cree leaders continued to be more individualistic and family oriented than the *Siiksikaawa* who modeled their leadership on the collectivist and clan and nation oriented buffalo.

In her study of 'major' Indigenous political leaders, Jessie Bernard argued that in over one hundred scholarly sources, the personal qualities of leaders were fairly consistent, but not identical. She argues that personality traits predominant in political leadership included: "open minded, adaptable, eager desire for knowledge, logical, wisdom, sagacity, strong intellect, mild, kind, good, generous, peaceful, humane, dignity, noble, moral, courage, truthfulness, integrity, sincere, orator, brave, fierce, strategist, great warrior ..."[58]

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[57] Acting like a sovereign refers to the manner is which sovereignty is translated in Cree to mean *kihcitipeyicikew*.

[58] Jessie Bernard, "Political Leadership Among North American Indians" in *American Journal of Sociology*, 33, (1927), p. 304.

Personal qualities were of vital importance as leaders relied on their abilities to capture

horizontal authority. As such, I would argue that, leaders' abilities to raise issues,

facilitate discussion and consensus, and implement collective power depended on their

individual attributes and their ability to engage in the form of discursive action which

Clastres considers to be power.[59]

These personal qualities were necessary, as is demonstrated by the case of the

*Siiksikaawa*. As was noted in my discussion of authority, under certain circumstances,

leaders could exercise powers without the immediate limitations created by horizontal

authority. Thus, these leaders needed to be of a certain character and have certain

qualities to ensure that they exercised their powers responsibly and respectfully with

humility and control. Given the potential for leaders to abuse power in situations such as

war when horizontal authority, consensus or collective action could not exist in the same

fashion, Indigenous traditions demanded that leaders be of the highest quality and

character. As Barsh notes:

> ... the industrial world views politics as an institution for usefully
> channeling the energies of ambitious men and women. Politics is
> selfishness harnessed. In the indigenous American view, however,
> leadership is a burden upon the selfless, an obligation for the most capable,
> but never a reward for the greedy.[60]

These sentiments were echoed by Anishnabwe Elder Wilfred Pelletier, who joked:

> My people were very mixed up about Government. They thought that
> decisions affecting all people should be made by the wisest and most
> experienced and bravest people in the community. We just didn't know
> that a proper democratic system should attract the most ambitious men in
> the community - the most egotistical - those who are the most convinced

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[59] Clastres conceived of power in terms of words, and the oratorical abilities that provided leaders with the power of respect, knowledge and persuasion.

[60] Barsh, "The Nature and Spirit of North American Political Systems", op. cit., p. 191.

that they know what is best for everyone and who want to run other
people's lives. And we are still learning about politics even today[61]

## DECISION-MAKING

Given the fact that the power of Creation was manifested in individuals and
structures, the predominant conceptualization of individuals as autonomous entities, and
the fact that authority was typically vested in the collective as a whole, the people
themselves were part of the political system. There was no way to differentiate between
society and the state in such a context. As in traditional Blackfoot governance,
governance and structures of governance existed as part of society and were a non-
differentiated part of the whole. The fact that people were a continuous part of the
system of governance in *most* Indigenous polities is demonstrated by their involvement in
decision-making processes. For the most part, decision-making involved a consensual
process in which the voices of all were to be heard and respected and discussions were
held until a consensus was reached. Failing consensus, either no decision was made or the
decision did not apply to those who did not consent. Consensual decision-making has
been explained to me as the coming together of one mind and is as much a spiritual
process as it is a dialogical process. Moreover, it was a process which involved all beings
(including non-humans) directly or indirectly. This is because, as Alfred suggests, the
legitimacy of this process depended on the ability of those present to consider the
meaning of the decision for all peoples; human and non-human, past and present. While
the structural arrangements and means of participation differ substantially among nations,
*most* provide for the continuous participation of the entire nation (including children) in
decision-making processes.[62]

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[61] Wilfred S. Pelletier, "Dumb Indian", in R. Osborne (ed.), *Who is the Chairman of this Meeting?*,
(Toronto: Neewin, 1972), p. 8.

[62] RCAP, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 134

The diversity in how the ideas of horizontal authority and individual autonomy were operationalized in decision-making processes is demonstrated in the following examples. Explaining Mohawk governance, Tom Porter suggests that it be thought of in terms of a circle, is divided into nine slices to represent the clans. In the inner portion of each slice sits the clan mother and the clan leader who constitute the leadership and thus the governing structure internal to the clan. Each clan is represented in the governing structure of the nation (the Longhouse) by its clan leader. Although this appears to be a system of representative government with the clans represented at the national level solely by male chiefs, it is not. While clans are represented by chiefs in the consensual decision-making processes, they receive continuous guidance and direction from the clan. Runners act as conduits of communication between decision-makers and the clan mothers who have the responsibility of conveying the clan's position and keeping chiefs in line. Chiefs are appointed by them and clan mothers can 'dehorn' or impeach the chiefs they appointed if they do not act in a manner which respects the clan and reflects their responsibilities and position.[63]

'Representation' in Mohawk decision-making processes, then, is indirect and participation and horizontal authority are channeled through clan mothers to clan leaders. *Siiksikaawa* traditions, by contrast place more emphasis on flux and thus consultation protocols are less structured. It is the runners' job to link the inner circle of decision making (a clan leaders' 'council', a society, or a Bundle 'council') back to the people and not simply to clan leadership.

Meanwhile, according to RCAP, the Lheit-Lit'en nation had a system which involved all people directly in the decision-making process.

> The potlatch was a gathering of people. ... the potlatch was usually a culmination of smaller meetings where individual issues were dealt with [by leaders]. At this final meeting, all people were included so that

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[63] Porter, op. cit., pp. 16-21.

everyone could participate in the final discussion and be aware of the decisions and agreement reached. The gathering dealt with territorial and justice issues and was generally the main instrument of community control, community watch, defense of the territory and any issues relating to the community.[64]

While each system has a different means of operationalizing autonomy and horizontal authority through direct and indirect participation in decision-making processes, the decision-making processes or consensus-building processes also differ substantially. While the idea of 'one-mindedness' seems to be common across Indigenous systems of governance based on the underlying philosophies of individual autonomy and the legitimacy of collective power, consensus-building mechanisms differed concerning how the people participated and how decisions were realized.

## CONCLUSION

Too many social scientists, as well as the general public, use [the term "tribe"] to maintain a false distinction between us and them, those people who used to be called primitive because they did not originate within the European tradition. Tribe, then signals something about political domination but says nothing about social complexity or political organization, now or formerly ...[65]

Elizabeth Colson, explains that there are many grounds on which to compare 'tribal political organizations', but she asserts that one should do so with an awareness and an appreciation for both similarities and differences.[66] The 'political organizations of tribal societies' exhibit social complexity as they are extremely different and the structures internal to individual polities range in complexity of structure and function.

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[64] RCAP, op. cit. Vol 2, pp. 134-135.

[65] Elizabeth Colson, "Political Organization in Tribal Societies: A Cross-Cultural Comparison", in *American Indian Quarterly*, 11 (Winter, 1986), p. 6.

[66] Ibid., p. 9.

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a culturally relevant, interpretive analysis of traditional Indigenous governance. I suggested that the values and philosophies that are manifested in *most* traditional, non-state North American Indian world views and political traditions express a unified understanding of Creation and Creation's teachings. I do not intend this analysis to be interpreted as meaning that all 'tribal' traditions or traditional Indigenous political systems were the same. Instead I intend this chapter to be interpreted as demonstrating that both the structures of governance themselves were forged through a people's experiences with Creation. The primary tenets of Indigenous political philosophy, themselves expressions of an ecological order, also shaped the act of governance within *most* non-state Indigenous polities.

The commonality in many North American Indigenous people's understanding of the natural world and their relationship to Creation produced commonality in Indigenous political thought. The fact that Indigenous people share a common view of the natural world and the relationship between all beings does not mean that Indigenous political traditions were 'universal'. The fact that Indigenous non-state governance existed as a relationship to, and as an expression of, Creation resulted in a trend that simultaneously unified and created diversity among nations and their respective political systems.

Governance existed as a relationship to Creation and developed through direct interaction with a natural context, and as Barsh argued, political systems were the deliberate creations of collectivities. So, I conclude that, while there were shared values and philosophies, how these attributes were operationalized within political systems differed considerably. This was demonstrated in my discussion of Plains Cree and Blackfoot political systems in the previous chapter, and in my discussion of authority, leadership and decision-making in this chapter. While I have demonstrated the existence of diversity, however, further work is necessary to explicate the extent of this diversity. More detailed interpretive studies grounded in Indigenist methodology of all Indigenous political traditions are required. Further work is necessary, since each collectivity has its

own distinct political system and its own means of philosophizing, explaining or rationalizing that tradition. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the underlying shared attributes, values and philosophies that have been forged through each nations experiences with and relationship to Creation. It is my conclusion that these commonalties and this unified understanding of the relationship between governance and Creation define an internally differentiated Indigenous political tradition.

# CHAPTER 8

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

### THE CIRCLE CLOSES AS INDIANS ARE BROUGHT BACK IN

The stated purpose of this dissertation has been to decolonize political science and destabilize its presumed universals by 'bringing the Indian back in' while creating a post-Indian and post-colonial understanding of traditional Indigenous governance. I argue that there is no universal and that non-state Indigenous governments did exist in North America prior to colonization. I then hypothesized that a trustworthy, post-colonial understanding of traditional, non-state Indigenous political system in North America can only be achieved from the inside. Further, I contended that the best way to create an alterNative understanding of traditional Indigenous non-state political systems was by applying Henderson's theory of ecological contexts which enables the researcher to examine, explain and theorize these political traditions from the inside out.

Using traditional Blackfoot governance as my case study and traditional Plains Cree governance as a means of grounding my findings in a second case, I demonstrated that it is both possible and necessary to 'bring Indigenous political traditions into political science'. I also demonstrated that it is not enough to simply 'bring Indigenous political traditions in' for this alone would *not* destabilize the universal, ensure a trustworthy post-colonial understanding, and enable one to understand, explain, theorize and analyze the 'Indigenous'. Moreover, it would not prevent the continued intellectual colonization of Indigenous people, their knowledge and their structures of governance. It was not

sufficient to simply describe Blackfoot governance, nor was it sufficient to study Blackfoot governance using the approaches that have been used previously. I concluded, finally, that Henderson's theory of ecological contexts offers the best approach with which to study traditional Indigenous political systems such as *Siiksikaawa* and *Nehiyaw* governance. This is because it enables a researcher whom the Elders are willing to teach to understand and theorize governance from the inside out. More specifically it permits an empowered researcher to understand how and why a particular political system developed and how it was operationalized as it was.

By engaging a historical study of *Siiksikaawa* governance from the inside out, I make several significant contributions to political science and its understanding of traditional Indigenous political traditions in this dissertation. Normatively, I destabilize the presumed universal which underlies disciplinary understandings of pre-colonial North America by introducing the reader to the idea that it is both possible and necessary to stop ignoring, accept the existence of, and study traditional Indigenous political systems. That is to say, this dissertation deconstructs the myth of the 'savage' or 'Imaginary Indian' by creating a trustworthy understanding of Blackfoot political traditions which recognizes and emphasizes that Indigenous political systems existed (and continue to exist) despite the absence of the state prior to colonization.

Normatively, this dissertation also tells a story that has never been told in any body of (written) literature. While I have explained governance in much the same way as generations of Blackfoot have, governance has never been explained from the interpreted perspective of the people previously in political science. Further, this is not the same story as told by generations of anthropologists, as their stories of Blackfoot governance fail to 'see the whole picture' or political system, present a misunderstanding of governance, and conceptualize governance from a western-eurocentric perspective predicated on primitivist and evolutionist ideologies. Further, the *okahn* and the relationship between governance and Creation has ever been recounted in an academic

forum. Thus this dissertation which uses an internally generated framework of analysis contributes a trustworthy, non-anthropological, non-primitivist understanding of Blackfoot governance that is new to both political science and the academy at large.

Theoretically, this thesis contributes a new approach to the study of governance and a contextualized theorization of governance which challenges the discipline's presumed universal and its unacknowledged primitivism. Recognizing stateless North American Indigenous political traditions as a separate and distinct from western-eurocentric political traditions, I argued that it was necessary to study americacentric political traditions contextually, from the inside out. Whether or not we accept Unger and Henderson's approach to conceptualizing and theorizing contextuality, the fact remains stateless Indigenous political systems are not part of the discipline's presumed universal. Nor are they exotic deviants of or the pre-historical ancestors of the western-eurocentric tradition. Each tradition is internally generated, and each is a human artifact that has been created within a different context of inquiry. This can only be grasped by a methodology which accepts contextual analysis of some form.

Recognizing the contextuality of Indigenous political traditions has enormous theoretical and normative significance within a discipline predicated on an assumed universalism and on a positivist epistemology. No longer is it possible to study the world as a unified whole if scholarship such as this dissertation demonstrates the existence of a multiplicity of separate and distinct, parallel political traditions, each of which has to be examined and understood within its own context. Acknowledging this means that a positivist science of society is impossible to attain since even if the presumed universal were augmented through the application of studies of multiple political cultures this would only ignore the existence of contextuality and perpetuate paradigm paralysis and the presumed universal.

Theoretically, this dissertation not only 'brought the Indian in', but it also offered a new approach with which Indigenous political traditions could be studied within political

'science'. Grounded in a recognition of contextuality, Henderson's theory of ecological contexts enables a researcher to explicate the contours of stateless, traditional political thought and governance in Indigenous North America. The importance of Henderson's theory, and my application of it in this thesis, is that it enables the creation of a trustworthy understanding of stateless Indigenous political traditions such as *Siiksikaawa* and *Nehiya*w governance. This also supports the creation of a post-colonial understanding and analysis which is not limited by the confines of western-eurocentric thought, and which does perpetuate misunderstanding and the continued intellectual colonization of Indigenous people and their traditions. By recognizing contextuality researchers are able to study this tradition from the inside out, or from the interpreted perspective of the communities themselves. It should be noted, however, that while I have illustrated the viability of Henderson's theory and demonstrated its explanatory capacity, the application of this theory is suitable only for understanding social phenomena in ecological contexts of inquiry. That is, while this theory supports my analysis of traditional Blackfoot governance, it may not hold true for all Indigenous political systems, especially those which developed states. Thus, studies of increasingly different Indigenous political systems will be required to determine fully the value and viability of Henderson's theory of ecological contexts for other Indigenous political traditions. Further to this, studies of traditional political systems as they exist in the present are also required to determine fully the value and viability of Henderson's theory for alterNative political systems, past and present.

By bringing Indigenous political traditions and ecological explanations into political science, I have, despite the limitations as noted above nevertheless, achieved my goal of de stabilizing the presumed universal and so decolonizing political science. I acknowledge that this job is incomplete, however, as a single case study cannot destabilize and decolonize a discipline and its knowledge or truth claims. I also acknowledge that political science cannot be destabilized and decolonized by introducing a new theory or

raising the proposition that one can study a political system by watching buffalo and understanding the relationship between a political system and the local ecological order in which it developed. Destabilizing and decolonizing political science, therefore, will take much more than a single dissertation or a single voice.

Still, it is a journey that is worthy of pursuit for just as there is no one universal, there is no single 'other' political tradition and no single way of studying governance from the inside out. To fully destabilize and decolonize political science, all marginalized political traditions have to be 'brought in' and treated as equals; as parallel political traditions. To reach this goal, all political traditions must be studied from within, and researchers must continue to search out internally generated theories and methods to ensure trustworthy understandings are developed of all political traditions. This will be a long and uncharted course with an unknown ending since no one knows what a post-colonial political science would look like. One can assume that destabilizing western-eurocentric thought and creating a 'one world' approach whereby all political traditions would be recognized as parallel political traditions, however, would have enormous repercussions. Intellectually, it would enable political science to overcome the paradigm paralysis Roberto Unger has asserted we experience because we are stuck within the confines of a context made, and maintained, by intellectuals who fail to see beyond their own paradigm paralysis. Like all intellectual and political traditions, the western-eurocentric tradition is a human artifact and it is not the product of a pre-determined, teleological historical evolution. Beyond the confines of the artificial context of inquiry, there are other traditions and other answers to the questions political science seeks to ask and other responses to the problems the artificial context seeks to overcome.

This is not suggest that the answers found elsewhere will be any better than those contained within the western-eurocentric tradition as it stands now. Surely, many answers will be different, however this does not mean that they are any better, they are simply different solutions for different people and different experiences. To put it

another way, by asking 'how do we fit into the world around us' and 'how do we live together the best way possible', the Blackfoot created a system of governance that was very different from those societies created by 'noun gods' and 'great men' trying to create a new utopia by escaping 'a state of nature'. Each represents a different contexts of inquiry and a different process of creating human artifacts to solve societal problems within those contexts of inquiry. Still, the fact remains, that if Unger is correct in proclaiming that the contextuality of the western-eurocentric tradition must be overcome because it failed to solve the social, political, economic and environmental problems of humanity. Perhaps, maybe it is time for people *on* Turtle Island to move beyond colonization (intellectual and otherwise) and continue the journey that the 'great men' of the enlightenment began. Only this time, let us move beyond the limits of the artificial or anti-naturalistic context without colonizing or (mis)appropriating Indigenous thought, and learn the lessons that these 'great men' failed to learn. This means beginning to learn how all people (human and non-human) can live together in the best way possible. Maybe this will mean the creation of separate and parallel paths, or the implementation of the *Gus-Wen-Qah* (the Two Row Wampum) and treaty federalism. Certainly how the colonizer and the colonized live together today with one dominating the others is definitely not the best way possible. Only when we engage and reconcile the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized does a post-colonial existence becomes possible.

Destabilizing and decolonizing the presumed universal is an important step toward the attainment of a post-colonial reality within Canada. If political scientists and government officials are forced to deal with the fact that there is no universal and no single right way of governing and if they recognize that Indigenous people have their own traditions. Maybe then, it will be possible to create a post-colonial reality, to decolonize the relationships between the colonizer and the colonized and to recognize and affirm the existence of (contemporary) traditional political systems. But intellectuals, bureaucrats

and politicians must begin to think beyond their own paradigm paralysis and acknowledge that there are several parallel political traditions. They must also deal respectfully with other visions of the future of Aboriginal communities and of relationships between the colonizer and the colonized.

The most important contribution of this dissertation is its point that eurocentric thinkers are not the only ones who have to escape paradigm paralysis and the presumed universals of the western-eurocentric political tradition which defines political science. Eurocentric thinkers are not the only ones who should be concerned with decolonization, and finding 'the way we live together in the best way possible'. Indigenous people too must begin the process of 'thinking against themselves' and thinking outside the confines of the anti-naturalistic or artificial context which defines and confines western-eurocentric thought. Encouraging this process, is the true reason for which this dissertation was written.

Decolonization necessitates creation of a new dialogue and a new relationship with the colonizer, but more importantly, it requires the decolonization of the colonized. While many traditional structures of governance continue to exist in the present (albeit in an alterNative manner), many Indigenous peoples have been co-opted by the western-eurocentric political tradition, so they know nothing of their own political traditions. This is extremely problematic, for as we venture increasingly towards self-government, it takes the form of self-administration or Indigenous peoples administering programs of the state just as the state would, in ways that are neither 'Indigenous' nor involving 'governance'. This is problematic because it fails to address the basic problem self-government was meant to address; the imposition of the state and a colonial model of governance designed and operated by and for the benefit of the state.

When I began this research I was hoping that somehow I would engage communities to start thinking beyond the borders of the state-imposed discourse of self-government. It was not that I was thinking that I could create a dialogue or start a community thinking

on a new path towards decolonization. I simply wanted to engage existing dialogues and create a foundation for people within their own communities to continue this research programme. I also wanted to facilitate a sharing of knowledge within communities and among generations so as to ensure that the youth of today are not forced to think primarily within the western-eurocentric political tradition.

I am not sure that this research project will ever facilitate or encourage the attainment of these lofty goals, but I am hopeful that these goals will be attained nonetheless. I am hopeful because the traditional structures of governance have survived colonization, albeit in an altered form in which governmental responsibilities are remembered, recounted and constantly revisited but not practiced. I am hopeful because traditionalism is in a state of revitalization. But, I am most hopeful because many of my teachers taught me that the attainment of self-determination and Blackfoot governance (not self-administration) was dependent upon having 'green grass and fenced, landscaped yards' on the reserves.

While such a statement may lead one to think that these teachers have been completely co-opted by the state-building project and western-eurocentric values and traditions, this is not the case. Traditional governance is predicated on the autonomy of individuals and thus, the idea of 'self' governance. Individuals must emerge out of their own individualized state of colonization and oppression and begin to live their responsibilities as autonomous beings within their webs of relationships. Individuals have to begin taking pride in themselves as beings in Creation, and have to begin taking care of themselves and their relations; thus the idea that they have to begin taking care of, and showing pride in, their homes and yards. Individuals cannot be forced to do so. However, until they do so individuals can never come together as 'one mind' and decide for themselves how it is that they, as a modern Blackfoot nation, will live together in the best way possible. Thus, decolonization is not about the revitalization of traditional structures, or the renaming of *Indian Act* band council governments with increased responsibilities of administration. Decolonization is about a community members coming

together and deciding how they see themselves fitting within the modern 'environment'. It is deciding how they see themselves living the best way possible and how they choose to learn from the past to live in the present or how they choose to modernize tradition to meet the needs of today.

Then again, maybe I have been spent too much time watching the grass grow and 'speaking' with buffalo. Maybe the Elders have been colonized and have a belief in modernity. Maybe 'real' traditional Blackfoot governance has been forgotten. Maybe this is the reason my stories about governance differ from those told by anthropologists. I do not believe that this is the case. I know where I have walked, and I have walked amongst the circles of stones marking the *okahn* of times past when traditional Blackfoot governance was strong. I have walked among the circles of stone marking the *okahn* of today. I know that in the massive gatherings of today, people are increasingly engaged in discussions regarding 'the way we live best together'. These are the post-colonial thinkers. These are the contemporary participants in structures of traditional governance. They are the ones who are journeying forward to restore traditional consciousness and traditional governance. They are the ones that are encouraging others to live a good life and become 'self' governing individuals that contribute to the creation and maintenance of peace and good order. They are the ones who are waiting since they can not force others to join them. They are the ones who engage in 'post-colonial ghost dancing'. For while they are gathered for the Sundance, it is the ghost dance that tells:

> ... how to release all the spirits contained in the old ceremonies and rites ...
> the dance would allow the spiritual teachings to renew the ecology, and
> eventually the forces of the ecology would forge a traditional
> consciousness of the following generations. In time, through postcolonial
> ghost dancing, these forces would foster a new vision of Aboriginal
> renewal, thus restoring traditional consciousness and order.[1]

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[1] James (sákéj) Youngblood Henderson, "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism", in Marie Battiste (ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), p. 58.

Then again, maybe it is as *Sákéj* Henderson has suggested, and again it is I who am 'post-colonial ghost dancing'.[2]

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[2] Ibid., pp. 57-76.

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