
The Anathema of Aggregation: Toward 21st-Century Self-Government in the Coast Salish World

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Abstract: There are significant tensions in state-sponsored attempts to formulate aggregated First Nations self-government bodies. In spite of decades of pressure from the Indian Act and Canada's Inherent Self-Government Rights Policy, and a dramatic privatization and alienation of lands and resources, First Nations' visions of future self-governments continue to be distinctively local, with a few notable exceptions. This article looks at how the kin-based principles that underwrite Coast Salish leadership, property, political networking and the distribution of political power bases profoundly influence choices in self-determination. These issues challenge both state and First Nations negotiators to reconcile cultural difference in these agreements.

Keywords: self-government, Coast Salish, Canadian Aboriginal policy, kinship, political organization

Résumé: Les tentatives parrainées par l'État de concevoir des organismes de gouvernement autonome en délégation de pouvoir chez les Premières Nations engendrent des tensions significatives. En dépit de décennies de pression associée à la Loi canadienne sur les Indiens et la politique sur le droit inhérent à l'autonomie gouvernementale, de même qu'à la privatisation et à l'aliénation de territoires et de ressources naturelles, les Autochtones continuent de voir les futurs organismes de gouvernement autonome comme distinctement locaux, à quelques exceptions près. Cet article étudie comment, chez les Salish de la Côte, les principes fondés sur la parenté qui sous-tendent les bases du leadership, de la propriété, des réseaux politiques et la distribution du pouvoir politique ont une influence profonde sur les choix relatifs à l'auto-détermination. Ces enjeux posent aux négociateurs de l'État et des Premières Nations le défi de faire concorder les différences culturelles lors de l'élaboration de ces ententes.

Mots-clés : gouvernement autonome, Salish de la Côte, politique autochtone canadienne, parenté, organisation politique

Introduction

In the summer of 2007, in a minor local media tempest,¹ the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, an umbrella organization representing six Coast Salish Indian bands where I had been employed full-time as a researcher, advisor and negotiator for seven years, nearly fissured. The circumstances of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group are not different from those other Coast Salish communities who have attempted aggregation. The former 24-member Stó:lō Nation, which had coalesced when I was a tribal employee in 1994, had, barely 10 years later, split into two tribal councils and a half a dozen independent bands.² The Mid-Island Tribal Council, which provided services and leadership for many of the smaller First Nations on the east coast of Vancouver Island split in the late 1990s. The South Island Tribal Council suffered a similar fate following the collapse of their justice program. Indeed, in spite of repeated calls for political aggregation—from Hawthorne, Belshaw and Jamieson's report, *Indians of British Columbia* (1958:465-466), to the recommendations on aggregation by the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Government of Canada 1996), to the high-level dialogue in 2009 between provincial and First Nations leadership in British Columbia concerning the so-called reconstitution of Indigenous Nations (British Columbia 2009)—there has been little traction in Coast Salish communities for strongly centralized self-government. Indeed, in the discourse around unity in self-government I have experienced in my day-to-day participation in Coast Salish political life, aggregation seems to be something of an anathema.

This scenario presents a significant conundrum for those who are seeking both to re-imagine and to re-establish self-determination within the overall framework of the state. For indigenous actors, it represents a moment of the possible re-imagining and re-moulding of identities that have been deeply shaped by colonial processes (Anderson 1991) into ones where cultural creativity and

strategic compromises may, depending on one's view, result in significant benefit or persistently and catastrophically bureaucratized lives. For state actors, aggregation of indigenous governments creates the possibility of bringing self-sufficient, accountable and democratic indigenous governance institutions into the fold of the nation state. Indigenous communities otherwise continue to be too small, too disparate, too poor, to have the capacity to meet their own self-government aspirations. Indeed, for state actors who articulate policies of accommodating indigenous difference while encouraging self-sufficiency, the political gains and economies of scale that result from collaboration in aggregated indigenous self-government institutions are seen as a crucial long-term goal.

Though there are examples of functional aggregated self-governments, from the Inuit legislature in Nunavut, to the Saami Parliament in the Nordic countries, such institutions are the exception, not the rule. Drawing on an ethnographic account of historic and contemporary Coast Salish political life in British Columbia, this article examines some key reasons why the discourse of indigenous self-government has come to see aggregation as something of an anathema.

Though there are many nuanced and local reasons for the continued reluctance of members of closely related Coast Salish Indian bands to aggregate into a central government, two underlying issues pervade self-government discussions and decision making. The first is the assimilative dynamic of state power, which acts as a significant political disincentive for present day Indian bands to dissolve and coalesce into larger political units. This power transforms local, culturally shared social and political relationships into ones familiar to, and indeed often mirroring, the state itself. Such transformative power is warily regarded by Aboriginal people who have in many ways been failed by the states' institutions and bureaucracies in the wake of colonization. The ethnographic evidence from my experience in Coast Salish communities reveals many disincentives: self-preserving Indian Act governments; the legal and economic uncertainty regarding the place of aggregated self-governments within the overall constitutional and fiscal relationship of First Nations governments to the state; and, given a lack of politically integrating tools such as a common media (in spite of intense regional interaction), a divided, underfunded power-base presently focused on difficult local crisis issues like lack of housing and youth violence. The apparent incentives that are there—important structural changes in fiscal financing, clarified law-making roles vis-à-vis federal and provincial government—are bewilderingly complex and expensive to implement and they are generally bundled

in self-government negotiations with community non-starters such as the requirement to give up tax exemptions currently guaranteed by the Indian Act.

The second underlying issue is the dynamic of power in kin-ordered politics among closely related First Nations people. Though kin groups' power has diminished since the fabric of everyday life has been woven in with the norms of modern, individual-centred, mainstream society, the kin-based principles that underwrite indigenous communities' leadership, territories and property, political networking and the distribution of political power bases continue to profoundly influence choices in the ongoing formulation of indigenous self-determination. Though identifications with long-standing networks of extended kin continue to resonate for Coast Salish social and cultural lives, people also strongly identify with their Indian band. The strength of this village-based identity is underscored by Indian Act driven membership codes, through which eligibility to receive benefits and services—from housing and land to social programs—is derived. These issues challenge both state and indigenous actors endeavouring to reconcile cultural difference through negotiated self-government arrangements.

Describing Coast Salish Polities

There has been considerable ethnographic work done in describing the prevailing elements of political organization of Coast Salish people, looking at both "traditional" polities and those which are more clearly derived from Coast Salish peoples' experience with the bureaucratic mechanisms of the state (Allen 1976; Angelbeck 2009; Barnett 1938, 1955; Boxberger and Miller 1997; Collins 1979; Drucker 1983; Kennedy 2007; Kew and Miller 1999; Lewis 1980; Miller 1989; Miller and Boxberger 1994; Miller 1997; Mitchell 1983; Suttles 1963; Verma 1956; among others). This ethnographic material paints a remarkably consistent picture of historic political authority in Coast Salish communities from the early 1880s to just prior to 1940. Coast Salish political authority largely rested at the level of the local residence group (Drucker 1983:88), which is typically made up of a large household group or villages of closely related households (Barnett 1938:119). Larger aggregations of villages did occur at certain locales, normally to take advantage of abundant resources (Mitchell 1983:99-100), but the aggregations were not "tribes" in the usual sense of the term (Kennedy 1995; Miller and Boxberger 1992; Suttles 1963:513), rather they were peaceful neighbours with no supra-village order (Barnett 1955:18). Even in these residence groups, consolidated political authority did not rest with a "chief" or "council" of individuals, but was distributed between respected indi-

viduals, often high-born or wealthy, and those who had the capacity to coordinate the specialized labour of the group.

Until they were appointed by Canadian officials, villages had no superior chiefs (Barnett 1938:129-130; Suttles 1989; Collins 1979:251), with political power vested in respected, property and title-holding family heads or other specialists who could organize people for specific tasks, but whose power was largely at the discretion of their followers (Suttles 1963:513). Nor was the village group self-contained or self-sufficient (Suttles 1960, 1963:502, 514) inasmuch as social relations between closely related but geographically distant kin were frequently more important than those between neighbours within a village (Leacock 1949; Lewis 1980; Suttles 1963:517). Indeed, these now famously named residence groups—such as the Musqueam, the Cowichan, the Squamish—that affiliated on the basis of household, village or watershed residence, are deeply cross-cut by groups of exogamous, bilaterally descended, property-owning kin-groups, which form large networks throughout the Coast Salish world (Suttles 1963:513; Kennedy 2007). Contact within this broad kin-based “community” has been continually reinforced through extensive informal social networks, including labour (working together on subsistence and other ventures); trade (pervasive small-scale economy of redistribution or reciprocity); ritual (bighouse, shakers, ritual healing); potlatch (family feasts, formal events like namings); and sport (basketball, soccer, canoe races) (Suttles 1963:517). So, while village or tribal aggregations did not historically serve stable, long-term political functions, regional inter-village networks of kin have been a critical component of Coast Salish social and political life. The importance of these regional kin networks persists today, in spite of the significant social and cultural transformations that have been experienced over the last four to five generations.

Contemporary Political Organization and Aggregation

Though the key centre of power today is the local Indian band, there is some political unity beyond village groups. Regional and provincial level political lobby groups and a bewildering array of regional service-provision groups have all formed to take advantage of economies of scale. Below I detail the local and regional political configuration of Canadian Coast Salish communities.

Local Level

In British Columbia, much of the political authority held by Coast Salish residence groups was nearly universally

transferred to Indian bands that are supported by the Canadian government (Suttles 1963:516). Band councils have been appointed or elected since the 1880s in some Coast Salish communities, but as late as the 1940s in others, and handle—to the degree that the Indian Act permits them—the political affairs of these communities. Verma observed that with these Indian bands a “new economic and political unit owning land and moneys in common [was] imposed on existing units [traditional villages and extended families]” (1956:66).

As Table 1 demonstrates, the Coast Salish Indian bands do not incorporate old village groups on a simple 1:1 basis. During the late 19th and early 20th century processes of reserve creation and Indian Affairs administration, many bands were formed from aggregations of several closely

TABLE 1
Coast Salish Indian Bands in Canada (with spring 2008 populations)

Mainland	Mainland	Islands
(Sunshine Coast/northern Strait of Georgia Area)	(Fraser Valley Area)	(Parksville-Nanaimo Area)
Homalco (456)[> 1]	Kwantlen (197)[> 1]	<i>Penlatch Tribe</i> [> 1]
Klahoose (79 ^a)[> 1]	Matsqui (233)[> 1]	Qualicum (106)[1:1]
Sliammon (959)[> 1]	Sumas (182 ^a)[> 1]	Nanoose (217)[1:1]
Sechelt (1218)[> 1]	Lakahahmen (Leq'amel) 341)[> 1]	Snuneymuxw (1513)[> 1]
(Howe Sound Area)	Scowltz (107 ^a)[> 1]	(Ladysmith/Duncan-Gulf Islands)
Squamish (3600)[> 10]	Chehalis (965)[> 1]	Chemainus (1145)[> 1]
(Vancouver Area)	<i>Chilliwack Tribe</i> [> 10]	Halalt (208)[> 1]
Musqueam (1196)[> 1]	Aitchelitz (40)[1:1]	Lyackson (189)[> 1]
Katzie (494)[> 1]	Kwaw-kwaw-a-pilt (40)[1:1]	Penelakut (840)[> 1]
Semiahmoo (80)[> 1]	Skowkale (227)[1:1]	Cowichan (4196)[> 10]
Tsawwassen (275)[1:1]	Skwah (464)[1:1]	Malahat (258)[1:1]
Tseil-Waututh (Burrard) (442)[1:1]	Shxw'há:y (319)[1:1]	Lake Cowichan (15 ^a)[1:1]
Kwikwetlem (Coquitlam) (61)[1:1]	Soowahlie (351)[1:1]	(Victoria-Saanich Area)
Qayqayt (9)[1:1]	Squiala (129)[1:1]	Songhees (489)[> 1]
	Tzeachten (387)[1:1]	Esquimalt (256)[> 1]
	Yakweakwoose (63)[1:1]	T'Sou-ke (Sooke) (216)[1:1]
	<i>Pilalt Tribe</i> [> 5]	Scia'new (Beecher Bay) (230)[1:1]
	Cheam (470)[1:1]	<i>Saanich Tribe</i> [> 10]
	Popkum (8)[1:1]	Tsartlip (571 ^a)[1:1]
	Peters (118)[1:1]	Pauquachin (363)[1:1]
	<i>Tait Tribe</i> [> 10]	Tseycum (153)[1:1]
	Shxw'ow'hamel (164)[1:1]	Tsawout (749)[1:1]
	Skawahlook (72)[1:1]	
	Chawathil (521)[1:1]	
	Yale (145)[1:1]	
	Union Bar (118)[1:1]	
	Seabird Island (801)[> 1]	
	<i>Hatzic Tribe</i> [> 1]	
	<i>Whonnock Tribe</i> [> 1]	
	<i>Skayuks Tribe</i> [> 1]	
	<i>Sna'kwemelh Tribe</i> [> 1]	

Note: Square brackets show number of 18-19th C. “village groups” incorporated into present-day Indian bands. “Tribes” in italics are historic named group aggregations not recognized as formal political bodies today.

^a In population number indicates only on-reserve population numbers represented.

connected local groups or village groups. The aggregations were consistent with the government's policies for the effective and efficient administering of residence-based communities but also were responses of First Nations working to negotiate a new position in a landscape that was rapidly transformed by intense settlement.

Cowichan Tribes and Squamish Nation distinguish themselves as very large Indian bands, both representing aggregations of more than 10 historical local village groups and having memberships today of around 4,000 people. This aggregation of the Cowichan-area villages was done by Indian Affairs in about 1954, "because the separate bands [villages] were related groups on a common reserve, were using common trust funds, and more and more of their property was being held by members who had moved out [from the historic village areas] to live elsewhere [in newly established suburban areas] on the reserve" (Lewis 1980:56). The Squamish Band amalgamated in 1923, with 16 of the 17 closely related Indian bands established to administer Squamish Indian Reserves amalgamating into one unit with Chief George of the Burrard Band not agreeing to join (Verma 1956:68,73). At Squamish, the amalgamation occurred to alleviate the strained relations between kin caused when certain parcels of or assets from Indian Reserve lands were sold. The proceeds of these sales were distributed only to members of the Indian bands who resided on these Reserves, while others, who had held legitimate extended family claims to these lands under the customary law system but had ended up belonging to neighbouring Indian bands, got nothing (Verma 1956:68-73). Amalgamation allowed for each member to have an equal share of the cash distributions from these land and assets sales.

Sliammon, Chehalis, Chemainus, Musqueam, Sechelt and Snuneymuxw are all large Indian bands that have between 1,000-1,500 members, and each of them is also a large aggregation of historic village groups. Tsawout, Seabird Island, and Penelakut are mid-sized Indian bands with between 750-850 members, which are also state-created, multi-village aggregations from the late 19th to the early 20th century (Duff 1952:42; Rozen 1985:95, 97, 101, 126-127; Suttles 1951:24). Most of the small Indian bands (n=27) have between 50 and 500 members and about half represent single historic village groups, though 13 of them (Klahoose, Semiahmoo, Qualicum, Scowlitz, Sumas, Lyackson, Kwantlen, Halalt, Matsqui, Esquimalt, Leq'á:mél, Homalco, Songhees and Katzie), are also aggregations of several historic villages now represented by single Indian bands. Several very small Indian bands may represent the descendants of local groups that may have only been a single family kin-group, like the Lake Cowichan (Rozen

1985:217-218) or villages that experienced devastating historic depopulation, such as Popkum and Qeqayt (Duff 1952:34, 24).

Indian bands derive much of their formal power through the mechanisms of the state, including having the power to make by-laws as set out in the Indian Act, and to provide core services funded primarily by annual fiscal transfers from the Federal Government, with "top ups" being provided for additional delegated services such as health care, child and family services, or fisheries management (see Table 2). Indian bands have the option of incorporating for the purposes of generation of revenues, supported now by federal legislative options which provide additional governance and taxation for bands who opt in. Economic development corporations which run "band businesses" frequently have governance boards made up of elected band chiefs and councils or persons appointed by them.

TABLE 2
Coast Salish Local (Indian Band) Program
and Service Delivery

Elementary / secondary / post-secondary education schools, curriculum and funding
Band Governance Support
Indian Registry
Elections
Lands and Trust services
Infrastructure, water, other municipal services
Social assistance
Social support services
Health services
Housing programs (CMHC social housing)
DFO funded fisheries programs
Employment programs
Economic development / Band-run businesses

Regional Level

To say that aggregation is a complete anathema would be an overstatement of the situation on the ground. In addition to the state's 19th- and 20th-century administrative aggregations of village units into Indian bands discussed above, there have been a number of First Nation led efforts at regional-level political organization and consolidation (see Table 3). These regional bodies have been formed largely for taking advantage of economies of scale when performing important functions: negotiating self-government, land claims and other inter-governmental agreements; providing technical services and community planning; administering, providing and delivering health and other services; creating economic opportunities and facilitating economic development; promoting education,

TABLE 3
Regional Political Organizations of the Coast Salish in Canada

Treaty Negotiation Offices	Tribal Councils	Political Affiliates
Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group (Cowichan, Lake Cowichan, Halalt, Penelakut, Lyakson, Chemainus)	Stó:lō Nation (Aitchelitz, Leq'a:mel, Matsqui, Popkum, Shxwhá:y Village, Skawahlook, Skowkale, Squiala, Sumas, Tzeachten, and Yakweawkwoose)	Sencot'en Alliance (Tsartlip, Tsawout, Pauquachin, Semiahmoo)
Temexw Treaty Association (Beecher Bay, Malahat, Nanoose, Songhees, and Sooke)	Stó:lō Tribal Council (Chawathil, Cheam, Kwantlen, Kwaw'kwaw'apilt, Scowlitz, Seabird Island, Shxw'ow'hamel and Soowahlie)	Coast Salish Gathering Organization
Stó:lō Xwexwilmexw Treaty Association (Aitchelitz, Leq'a:mel, Popkum, Skawahlook, Skowkale, Tzeachten, and Yakweawkwoose)	Naut'samawt Tribal Council (Chemainus, Halalt, Homalco, Klahoose, Malahat, Nanoose, Sliammon, Snuneymuxw, Tsawwassen and Tseilil-Waututh)	
	Defunct:	
	- South Island Tribal Council	
	- Mid Island Tribal Council	
	- Southern Vancouver Island Tribal Federation (15 bands)	

cultural practices and community leadership; and, administering, providing and delivering programs and services.

Under or parallel to these regional bodies, there is a myriad of programs and organizations which provide services that most Canadians receive from their provincial or federal governments. Examples of these organizations are shown in Table 4. The provision of these services is often complicated by lack of harmonization between federal and provincial governments in terms of standards, funding and arrangements for services provided to on- and off-reserve Indians. Even for something as basic for most Canadians as medical services, First Nations health authorities are often seen as an efficient means for administering the complex interplay between federal and provincial programs and services for status Indians. These regional bodies are generally incorporated as "societies" under the provincial Societies Act, with boards of directors who are often appointed by Indian band chiefs and councils.

The recent annual Coast Salish Gathering is a different kind of political aggregation. The Coast Salish leadership from both Canada and U.S. communities assem-

TABLE 4
Coast Salish Regional Program and Service Delivery Organizations (not exhaustive)

<i>Health Services</i>
Inter-Tribal Health Authority (28 Vancouver Island Coast Salish members)
Tsewultun Health Centre (Cowichan)
H'ulh-etun Health Society (5 members)
<i>Child and Family Services</i>
Lalum'utul' Smun'eem Child and Family Services (Cowichan)
Kwumut Lelum Child and Family Services (9 members)
Coast Salish Employment and Training Society (22)
First Nations Marine Society (26 members)
Friendship Centres (urban areas)
Tribal Councils (South Island, Mid-Island, Nutsa'maat)
M'akola Group of Societies (Victoria, Duncan, Nanaimo)

bles on an annual basis to discuss environmental issues, co-ordinating strategies toward actions of mutual benefit. They have seized on funding opportunities provided by several government environmental agencies to assist in the planning, logistics and expenses of the gathering. An oversized, hand-made, skin drum, made sometime in the 1990s, lists the names of all the Coast Salish Indian bands, with the signatures of each of the originally participating chiefs beside their band. The drum is passed from host-community to host community to serve as a symbol of the unity and common interest the Coast Salish have and of their strategy of coming together to seize opportunities. A prominent organizer of a recent Coast Salish Gathering told me that it was very significant that these leaders were putting differences aside to work together. He said that the gathering has two strengths. One is that people cannot be on top of each other—no one is over the others in the way the gathering is structured. This is now it needs to work when the families are all related at the grand-parental or more distant level. The second is the ability for leaders of communities to opt in or out. If people do not like it, they can move, without having to tear down the work of the others. This has made the Coast Salish Gathering a flexible, viable institution for the limited but important mandate it deals with.

Provincial Level

There are also three major provincial level political bodies in which Coast Salish First Nations participate (see Table 5). These bodies, again accountable to Indian band chiefs and councils, are the current generation of broad-based First Nations political lobby groups which press federal and provincial governments for policy change (antecedent organizations have been described by Drucker

TABLE 5
Province-Wide Political Organizations

First Nations Summit (Coast Salish members)	Union of BC Indian Chiefs	Assembly of First Nations (BC Region)
Katzie, Musqueam, Squamish, Tsawwassen, Tseil-Waututh, Yale, Stó:lō (Aitchelitz, Leq'ámél, Matsqui, Popkum, Skawahlook, Skowkale, Tzeachten, and Yakweakwoose), Homalco HTG (Cowichan, Chemainus, Lyackson, Penelakut, Halalt, Lake Cowichan), Klahoose, Sechelt, Sliammon, Snuneymuxw, Te'mexw (Beecher Bay, Malahat, Nanoose, Songhees, and Sooke)	About 70 bands in British Columbia, few of which are involved in the British Columbia Treaty Process.	All 192 bands in British Columbia

1958:97, 121-122; Hawthorne et al. 1958; Tennant 1982, 1983, 1990; Thornton 2002). The major achievements of these organizations in recent years have been the 2005 Transformative Change Accord with the Government of Canada, the 2006 New Relationships with the British Columbia Government and the Federal Government's Statement of Apology to the former students of Indian Residential Schools in 2008. These bodies continue to be the touchstone for dialogue with First Nations for provincial and federal legislative and policy reform. They also coordinate or help administer several provincial-level service organizations (see Table 6). Though important for lobbying and providing limited services in the form of policy expertise, the political authority of these provincial-level bodies should not be overstated. Many Aboriginal people feel that these are largely spokesperson positions whose work is not mandated by the general First Nation population. These bodies are nothing like the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' proposals (Government of Canada 1996) for formal representation in parliament through a House of First Peoples.

TABLE 6
Provincial Program and Service Organizations

First Nation Summit
Fiscal Relations Committee
First Nations Chiefs' Health Committee
First Nations Technology Council
First Nations Education Steering Committee
Assembly of First Nations, BC Region
British Columbia First Nations Fisheries Council
British Columbia First Nations Energy Summit
British Columbia Aboriginal Fisheries Commission

Examples of Failed Aggregation

Given these examples, a certain degree of political aggregation has occurred among Coast Salish communities. However, from my own experiences, there have been many other attempts at unity beyond the local group that have been strained, rocky and tumultuous, and some of which have ultimately failed. Indeed, I would argue that there remains continual tension favouring the fissioning of political organizations that try to represent multiple Coast Salish people beyond the family level. From the constant tension of fission in the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group; the very public 2004 split of the Stó:lō Nation; the 2004 and 2009 calls from members of two different village groups (Somana and Quamichan) in Cowichan to re-establish their own governance outside the Cowichan Tribes; the lack of support of Indian band chiefs and councils for the federally unrecognized Hwiltsum First Nation's joining any tribal council or treaty negotiations; the outright litigation between multiple First Nations (Musqueam-Squamish-Tseilil-Waututh; Cowichan-Sencot'en-Tsawwassen) around "overlapping" land claims; the yearly inter-band divisions over the economies of the Fraser River sockeye fishery; the folding of the Mid Island and South Island Tribal councils; the problems of South Island Justice Project's attempt to institutionalize socio-ceremonial aggregations (Miller 2001); to the splitting and dissolving of numerous intertribal program and service delivery agencies (from justice and policing programs to health and child and family services agencies), all experiences show that many Coast Salish people have significant difficulty with political aggregation. So, again I turn to my question, why?

Why Is Aggregation an Anathema

Earlier I proposed that the assimilative dynamic of state power and the continuing importance of kin-centred identity and politics are underlying factors behind the reluctance of Coast Salish people to fully engage in political aggregation. Below, I point to examples that underscore the working of these two forces, showing how in realms of Indian band decision making and leadership, and in the engagement of federal and provincial government land and self-government policies, Coast Salish people are reluctant, hesitant and even dismissive, electing largely to stay out of political aggregations.

To formulate these examples, I have drawn on my extensive participation as an active observer of Coast Salish political life and from extensive dialogues with Coast Salish political leadership, elders and community members in a variety of public and private forums. I have been

intensively involved in these discussions and dialogues on an ongoing basis since 1994. I have almost always worked as a tribal employee for First Nations institutions that represent multiple Indian bands. My work as a tribal employee has been near the centre of the governance-building effort: negotiating land claims provisions, facilitating dialogue about the reconstitution of self-government, developing inter-governmental relationships with federal, provincial and local governments, preparing for litigation on rights issues that affect individuals from multiple Indian bands, co-chairing a multi-First Nation park co-management board, and so on. From my perspective as a tribal employee, aggregation has largely been seen as an important but elusive goal. My account attempts to balance maintaining a respectful anonymity, by not elaborating detailed examples and dialogues, with providing a candid ethnographic account of the situation on the ground over the past 15 years.

Indian Bands in Inter-Indian Band Contexts

Talking to a prominent, retired First Nations leader over lunch recently, I was struck by his candid observation that it only became possible for the Indian bands of the Nass River valley to move decision making forward on the Nisga'a treaty once there was a clear separation between the bands and the Nisga'a Nation. Under Indian band chiefs and councils, he said, it was impossible to get decision making on a treaty, as collective interests were subordinated by locally pressing issues. When the Nisga'a Tribal Council was formed, it was mandated directly by the general membership of Nisga'a citizens to handle making decisions on treaty issues, without needing to go back to individual chiefs and councils for approval. This cleared a critical hurdle for building the aggregated governance of the Nisga'a Nation.

In Coast Salish territories, there is similarly a significant lack of decision making by aggregated Indian Act governments. In instances where this has occurred, such as in the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group where the chief of a large band like Cowichan Tribes with 4,000 members sits on a board of directors with an equal vote to fellow directors of much smaller bands (for instance, Lake Cowichan Band with under 20 members), decision making at the aggregated level becomes a serious political liability at the band level. Consensus decisions on "safe issues" such as administration, personnel or general mandating are made through a board of directors, but when more politically complex issues are brought to the table, the board of directors are reluctant to tackle them without thoroughly grounding any decision with their chiefs and councils at home. Where this process has worked,

such as the establishment of a collective committee to engage Parks Canada in cooperative management of the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, or in establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Archaeology Branch, reaching a consensus decision was very time consuming. In other examples, such as the ratification of a draft political accord around land use planning with the Islands Trust or the possible admission of a new member to the Treaty Group, dissent of any one of the member First Nations prevented a consensus decision from being reached.

In an analysis of political decision making at the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group, David Pope, a lawyer, mediator and advisor to First Nations on governance issues, has suggested that there may be other ways to structure the Board to achieve more effective decision making (2009:3):

- Unanimity (complete consensus), all must agree
- Simple Majority (50% plus one of the members). The Canadian House of Commons is an example.
- Special Majority based on a certain majority of number of members representing a certain proportion of the population involved. The proposals for a formula to change the Canadian Constitution usually are based on this type of majority.
- Special Majority based on a certain majority of number of members representing a certain proportion of the financial contribution to the organization, where financial contribution and population are not necessarily the same, as in the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.
- Weighted votes based in part on the population and in part on whether a member is participating by paying for a particular service, such as is used in British Columbia Regional Districts.
- Determining what a "sufficient consensus" is to carry the matter, as was used in the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland or the planning for future government in South Africa in the transition from apartheid. This usually amounts to a majority of representatives, but always requires enough participants to ensure that the decision "sticks" and is not avoided or reversed at the next meeting if some participants are different. This method is very uncertain and is used in situations where changing alliances and goals often arise.

However, there has been little appetite to date for restructuring around any of Pope's suggestions, nor are there other Coast Salish aggregated political bodies which have, to my knowledge, adopted any of the more complex of these decision-making mechanisms. Accountability for

political decision making is clearly a key factor, as it is the chiefs and councils that are directly elected (or selected in the case of hereditary chiefs with life-terms), and the aggregated bodies with appointed boards like the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group are accountable only to the chiefs and councils not directly to the whole membership. Significant political concerns at the band level arise when aggregated governments compete for the same limited funds available to Indian bands or when the implementation of some benefit from aggregated governance (for instance securing land) is perceived to be advantageous to one community to the exclusion of others. Such scenarios have led either to a lack of willingness to make a decision or to the fissioning of the aggregated body when decisions were taken that had an objectionable element.

Information sharing on political issues among band councils, between bands and an aggregated political body, and between these bodies and the general membership is also crucial in this context. I have observed, however, that there is often a significant lack of information flow, despite the close proximity of these communities. The lack of an integrating Coast Salish media, such as a newspaper or radio station, contributes to this. Most local news stories concerning Coast Salish bands are run in small-circulation papers of the Black Press newspaper chain, with little media attention paid to pan-Coast Salish issues. Some locally published newsletters are photocopied or commercially printed, but these seldom carry on the kind of intensive dialogue needed for inter-community political issues to be fully raised. Such media are often viewed as irreparably biased or as self-serving and leave little room for independent, local voices.

Where Indian bands continue to be the sole bodies accountable for political decision-making in aggregated political structures (such as the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group) whose board of directors are appointed by the bands (as opposed to elected or selected by the general membership), there are also real potential problems in efficiency and effectiveness of decision-path information flow. Already burgeoning band council agendas are strained in dealing with issues or decisions that are needed to move forward aggregated governance issues. However, when the staff or Board of Directors move forward on issues without bringing them to individual Indian bands for decision making, councillors may feel like they are being left behind on political issues being led by a central office. The efficiencies and economies of scale of a central political body become lost in this scenario.

While the need for local accountability in political decision making may be a significant practical barrier to aggregation, another significant conceptual barrier exists

in the view that aggregation is tantamount to “overthrowing” the Indian bands which have come to stand for the more ancient village settlements established in *syuth*, a class of oral traditions that belong to the Coast Salish canon of charter myths (Thom 2005:83). Coast Salish communities, like other communities on the Northwest Coast (Adams 1974:172), have oral traditions that recall the very First Ancestors on the land who established the original communities, many of which have continued to the present day. In the Coast Salish forms of these stories, powerful people drop from the sky or otherwise appear in the world and found the original villages (see for example, Barnett 1955:18, 20-21). The stories frequently refer to fundamental teachings about the importance of exogamous kin relations and extended family networks. They also commemorate prominent landmarks and villages in the Coast Salish world through the places that the ancestors landed, or exercised and experienced their powers and settled communities. The figures whose deeds are recounted in these stories provide a “charter” for the named local groups today, outlining rights and privileges of their resident members. In discussions with Coast Salish leaders and Elders about these *syuth* (Thom 2005:88-93), I have been struck by how strongly they provide an index of identity, anchoring connections to village places—now largely articulated as one’s home Indian Reserve—through these ancient ancestors. Though the interconnection between communities through the kinship and travel of these ancestors within the Coast Salish world is sometimes rhetorically commented on as an integrating force, the greater sense of political identity is in the connections to the ancestral village area for which the Indian band most often stands today. Such strong band identities continue to be articulated today, even among young leaders, like one individual who, in a recent important community discussion of aggregation, said

We don't want to lose our identity as distinct First Nations. We can all come together but we don't do that at the expense of who we are as Chemainus people, as Cowichan people. We don't want to come together and have as a result our identity melt into one. You bring who you are together at the table. In decolonizing, we need to not dilute who we really are.

While advocates of aggregation may find the Nisga'a experience compelling in reducing or constraining the political authority of Indian bands, it is clear in the Coast Salish case that Indian bands are going to be a continuing fixture in the political landscape.

Leadership

Leadership has continued to follow the axiom that there be “no superior chief,” with few Indian band chiefs having more broad-based support than immediate kin and some co-residents. Though in recent years, a few Coast Salish leaders, like British Columbia’s Lieutenant Governor Steven Point, have been given the honorific title Grand Chief, it is a position of moral not formal political or institutional authority. Leaders who command broader popular support within the Coast Salish community activate and maintain extended kin ties in venues like winter dancing, canoe racing or Indian doctoring, which are largely outside the formal political process. This support has rarely manifested in broad political support in the context of formal aggregated governance.

Indeed, among the extended network of kin, there has always been a tension amongst in-laws, something Snyder (1964:75, 389-391) observed in her analysis of the canon of Coast Salish myth, and navigating the practical or political limits of relationships in these vast kin networks is one of the central challenges of personhood in Coast Salish life. While reliance on in-laws for access to important resource sites, sharing of locally abundant resources and hospitality while travelling, is a prominent theme, there is a potential for gluttony in sharing or over-extending one’s welcome that adds an edge to the relationship. Reliance on in-laws from other communities in roles of political leadership has the potential to erode the support of local kin, who, in the contemporary era, exchange their support for jobs, social housing, discretionary education funding and other band-run opportunities. The fear is that in an aggregated governance scenario, where economies of scale may eliminate duplication of services offered by individual bands, such discretion may be eliminated. This can even be seen in instances of Indian band-level leadership, where an individual married into a politically influential family from another Coast Salish community can hold political influence for a time, but loses local support when the connecting kin dies or breaks off the relationship. Such change is frequent at the band level, where political leadership is often in flux. Chief and council elections are typified by having very large slates of candidates, including many from a single family, with the result of vote-splitting. Compelling leaders may hold office for a time, but frequent chief and council elections, mandated by standard Indian Act election codes which require elections every two years, make continuity a challenge.

Rhetoric involved in the maintenance of political support invokes the scorn of johnnies-come-lately and the trust of people of proven, established lineages. This is

very frequently articulated today in the context of individuals who regained their status through the change to membership rules imposed by Bill C-31. That bill allowed status Indian women who had lost their membership when they married non-status individuals, to regain Indian status for themselves and their children. I have heard such people derisively described as having “floated in on a log.” There is suspicion of their spurious claims as compared to those of old, established families whose members have chosen to continue to live on-reserve in recent generations. Such gossip can intensify between communities, where suspicions about the veracity of linking genealogies may be highlighted as distrust for a neighbouring community’s leaders is augmented.

Land Claims Policies

The aggregation of bodies with rights over land presents another significant conundrum for Coast Salish communities. The fate of customary land tenure, Indian Act forms of title (location tickets, certificates of possession), fee-simple titles, and the potential for some future form of land tenure created by land claims agreements, is debated in considerations of aggregated governance. Political aggregation creates new problems for determining who (collective and individual) title holders will be, and what jurisdictions local or aggregated authorities will have over these lands.

Local, ancestral property systems which recognize properties being held by both family and residence groups (Kennedy 2000; Thom 2005) have never been codified to the extent that they may be effectively administered by a central government. Even the Cowichan Land Committee, which has operated for over 30 years with a mandate to reconcile ancestral property claims with Indian Act forms of title on Reserve lands, is still embroiled in significant debates over outstanding issues of location, boundaries and descent of ancestral titles.

Under the current options available to First Nation governments through land claims agreements in British Columbia, all forms of Aboriginal title within a First Nation’s territory are converted to fee-simple title held collectively by the group settling the land claim (such as in the Nisga’a, Maa-nulth and Tsawwassen Final Agreements). An aggregated group may hold the title collectively as a Nation (such as clause 3 of the Nisga’a Final Agreement land chapter) or choose to have the new fee-simple title held collectively by each of the local groups benefitting from the agreement (such as clause 2.3.1 of the Maa-nulth Final Agreement land chapter). The title holding group—either the umbrella or local group—is required to set out in its constitution what the terms would

be for dispossessing itself of collective title (in the case of transferring a fee-simple title to individual members for instance) to any of its lands (for example clause 13.3.1(m) of the Maa-nulth Final Agreement).

The problem is compounded if post-land claim agreement titles rest with individual Coast Salish village communities, as intercommunity territorial boundaries are not neatly understood (Thom 2009), resulting in the infamous “overlapping claims” that bedevil contemporary land claims and treaty negotiations. Divisive debates, which in 2007 were punctuated by litigation at the British Columbia Supreme Court over the Tsawaassen Final Agreement (*Cowichan Tribes v. R.*; *Cook v. The Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation*), continue as Indian band councils consider the complexities of overlapping territorial boundaries between their village communities. Similar issues encumber the closing negotiations for the Yale Final Agreement, which are disputed by the Stó:lō Nation and the In-SHUCK-ch Final Agreement, which is hotly contested by the Chehalis Band. Though aggregation under an umbrella government or collective title holding group appears to be an elegant solution, it is also plagued with problems.

Under a fully aggregated governance model, individual family heads with ancestral properties (who were fortunate enough to have their homes and important resource locales located on lands received under the benefits of the agreement, as many likely will not be), individual holders of Indian Act titles, and Indian band councils, who control common band properties, would all have their titles converted to a collective fee-simple title held by the aggregated group. The aggregated government’s jurisdiction would then be relied on to create, register and administer lesser titles. The uncertain outcomes of such a feudalization and redistribution of the existing customary and Indian Act tenure systems—in spite of all the problems, peculiarities and uncertainties of those customary and Indian Act titles (cf. Alacantara and Flanagan 2006)—is a risk that many Coast Salish people are extremely cautious about, as the process is obviously fraught with potential for the powerful to benefit at the expense of those whose relationship to the lands are contested. These issues are all exacerbated by the extremely small land offers made by the government in the largely urban Coast Salish area, perpetuating an overall scarcity of land for which these titles could be worked out.

Self-Government Policies

Canada’s Inherent Right of Self-Government Policy (Government of Canada 1995) articulates how the federal government is willing to recognize self-defined Aboriginal

groups, their constitutions and a range of legislative powers, and will work to facilitate program and service delivery capacities. In British Columbia, self-government under Canada’s Inherent Right Policy has been, for all but the Sechelt and Westbank First Nations (which derive delegated authorities from provincial or federal legislation), been negotiated within the framework of settling land claims in the British Columbia Treaty Process. It has, to date, failed to produce any lasting agreements with aggregated Coast Salish First Nations.

Canada’s approach to governance in the treaty process has produced examples of both aggregated (Nisga’a) and village-level (Tsawwassen, Maa-nulth) governance based on the core principles of this policy. The preambles to these agreements contain an acknowledgment by Canada and the First Nation in question that, prior to the treaty, Aboriginal jurisdictions flowed from the First Nation’s inherent right of self-government. The treaty then goes on to set out constitutionally binding general provisions which modify all pre-existing governance (and other) rights into those which are articulated between the covers of the treaty. In these general provisions, Canada and British Columbia are released from and indemnified against all obligations or duties, past, present and future, around any right or jurisdiction not explicitly set out in the treaty. The general provisions also make it explicit that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms apply to the government of the First Nation and that federal and provincial laws now apply concurrently with the laws of the First Nation, with the priority of laws on occasions of conflict being established on a case-by-case basis for each political authority that has made it into the text of the treaty. These general provisions clarify that any of the governance powers mentioned in the text of the treaty do not include authority over criminal law, criminal procedure, intellectual property, official languages of Canada, aeronautics, navigation and shipping, or labour relations and working conditions, which are exclusive areas of federal jurisdiction under Canada’s Inherent Rights Policy.³

The governance chapters of these treaty agreements then establish that the collective rights and jurisdictions of the First Nation will be democratically represented by the First Nation government established under a constitution that a majority of the eligible members ratify at the same time as the treaty. The Canadian authorities expect that the structure of such governments will ensure that the majority of responsible decision makers are democratically accountable to the membership through elections, irrespective of any hereditary or other means of selecting government representatives. Canada insists on treaty text that establishes these governments and their

institutions as legal entities, with the legal rights and duties of a natural person (closing a legal ambiguity in the status of Indian bands). The governance chapters then set out provisions to allow the First Nation government to delegate any of its law-making authorities to another First Nation or to a public institution established by one or more First Nations in British Columbia. Finally, these governance chapters and various references in other chapters, exhaustively (through about 20 pages of text) set out the scope and limits of the heads of power of that First Nation (summarized in Table 7).

TABLE 7
General First Nations Heads of Power Negotiated through BC Treaty Process (drawn from Maa-nulth Final Agreement 2006 and Tsawwassen Final Agreement 2008)

<p>General Governance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - election, administration, management and operation of the First Nation government - use, possession and management of a First nation's assets - citizenship in the First nation - adoption of its citizen's children residing in British Columbia - solemnization of marriages - powers of enforcement of the First Nation's laws - direct taxation of the First Nations citizens - preservation, promotion and development of language and culture 	<p>Management of Lands and Activities on First Nations Lands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use, management, planning, zoning and development - regulation of nuisances, buildings and structures, businesses and land use planning in designated foreshore areas - ownership, disposition of estates or interests - expropriation for public purposes by First Nation government - public order, peace and safety - regulation of businesses - traffic, transportation, parking and highways - buildings and structures - forest resources and forestry practices - protection, preservation and conservation of the environment - conservation and management of, and public access to heritage sites, artifacts and ancient human remains
<p>Government Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - child protection services for First Nation's citizens - childcare services on First Nation's lands - K-12, post-secondary and language and culture education provided by the First Nation - health services provided by the First Nation - social development services provided by the First Nation - emergency preparedness services provided by the First Nation - public works services on First Nation lands 	<p>Natural Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - use of water from the First Nation's water licence - distribution of fish, wildlife plants harvested under the agreement - licencing of members exercising harvesting rights under the agreement - methods, timing and location of harvest of wildlife under the agreement - trade and barter of wildlife harvested under the agreement

Many Coast Salish communities negotiating governance in the British Columbia Treaty Process are cautious about accepting such provisions for self-government within the permanently binding agreements of a Final

Agreement. One issue which has attracted widespread criticism by First Nations leadership and their legal advisors is the extent to which the so-called "certainty" clauses of the general provisions chapter limits the entire future scope and extent of their authority to the text of the treaty. They are concerned that the ingenuity and pragmatism of the currently uncodified systems of customary law—for instance with respect to intangible property systems, or the management of family or village properties that fall outside the treaty settlement lands provided with the agreement—will be much diminished by such an approach, eliminating important constitutional protections for the future exercise of any rights that are not adequately articulated in the treaties (Thom 2008).

Another concern is the relatively permanent decision that must be made within the text of a Final Agreement with respect to who the governing authority will be as well as the extent of the the jurisdiction(s) that the treaty recognizes for the First Nation. Though there are jurisdictional delegation clauses allowing the First Nation to pass its authority to other First Nations, aggregations or their public institutions, once they have also entered into final agreements (for instance the Tsawwassen Final Agreement governance chapter clauses 39 and 40), such provisions do not provide assurances that a community's future decision to associate or disassociate with other levels of Aboriginal government will be accommodated without significant complexity. Even under the terms of such treaties, there has been some ambiguity concerning the differential allocation of jurisdiction by disparate First Nations governments to the aggregate First Nations body. In the case of education, for instance, if an aggregated First Nation body passed laws under the authority delegated by a First Nation that had carved out its jurisdiction in detail under the treaty, could those laws apply to a member First Nation whose authority may not have been as exhaustively established (and such differences in drafting conventions do exist between these agreements) or may indeed have merely been delegated from the Province in an out-of-treaty arrangement? The inter-jurisdictional complexities of this system reinforce the political economics of the lowest common denominator in such efforts. The fluidity of association and decision making present in Coast Salish communities is effectively subsumed under the state-like First Nation governments established under these agreements.

Many community members have little hope that aggregated governments produced by self-government agreements will be able to solve the social crisis produced by poverty and the disenfranchisement experienced by many Aboriginal people living in a settler society. Though

these problems have been too complex to be solved by Indian bands, there is a significant reluctance to put political capital into another possible failure. The examples of chronically inadequate funding of the services provided by aggregated Aboriginal governments, both those like the Nisga'a who have established agreements, or the former Stó:lō Nation who established their own constitutions, reinforce this view.

Indeed, aggregation under Canada's Inherent Right to Self-Government Policy and attendant positions in self-government or land claims negotiations have come to be characterized by a number of Coast Salish First Nations leaders as a "risk" rather than an opportunity to embrace. Several have stated that aggregated, constitutionally entrenched Aboriginal self-governments need to be more fully empowered for Coast Salish people to risk the consequences of the significant and uncertain change from Indian Act governance to aggregated bodies operating outside the known bounds of the Indian Act. Others have been cautiously critical of how aggregated governance under this policy erases kin-based polities through democratization, structural permanence of institutions through binding "constitutions" and certainty provisions, membership criteria, and application of the Charter of Rights, and replaces them with something much more familiar to the state.

Indigenous Nations and the New Relationship in British Columbia

The stakes for aggregation increased significantly in the spring of 2009 with the proposal from the British Columbia Government and First Nations Leadership Council to pass provincial legislation that would recognize that Aboriginal rights and title exist through the territories of "Indigenous Nations" without the requirement of proof or strength of claim, establishing revenue sharing and shared decision making for planning, management and tenuring decisions over these lands (British Columbia 2009). The First Nations Leadership Council has circulated several documents, letters and PowerPoint presentations amongst the Aboriginal leadership in British Columbia providing context for discussion of this proposed legislation, including a draft map of Indigenous Nations territories (see Figure 1). The comprehensive involvement of First Nations in decision making and revenue sharing under this legislation would be dependent on their having aggregated into these Indigenous Nations, where the collective rights and title holders who share common threads of language, customs, traditions and history join together into a single, formal political aggregation. This vision of "Indigenous Nations" as being the proper title and rights holders comes from the Canadian

courts which, in decisions like *Marshall*, *Bernard*, *Delgamuukw* and *Tsilhqot'in*, have stated that the collective, rights-based governance, decision-making authorities that flow from Aboriginal title must be exercised by Aboriginal "peoples" or "nations," and not necessarily at the level of the Indian band. The First Nations Leadership Council is also motivated by a vision that the many divisive territorial overlaps between closely related Indian band communities will be significantly resolved by their consolidation into aggregated Indigenous Nations who engage the Province in shared decision making and revenue sharing on the basis of their collective territorial interests.

I understand from discussions with provincial officials that the British Columbia Government is in part motivated to encourage the reconstitution of Indigenous Nations because of its need for effective, efficient First Nations decision making. If the government is going to implement some manner of legislated duty toward the Aboriginal title of a First Nation through formal shared decision-making mechanisms, for example, significant economies of scale need to be realized. Vocal critics, like prominent First Nations commentator Arthur Manuel, claim that the move is also a crass political manoeuvre by the provincial government which anticipates that dissenters and Aboriginal rights activists will have a voice during the intense international spotlight of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.⁴ The government could claim that it has boldly legislated recognition of Aboriginal rights and title, while satisfying its own conservative constituency by incurring very little actual risk of significant material outcome in the short term, as recent experience has shown that there is very little present political appetite for aggregation by Indian band First Nations in British Columbia. Whatever the motivations, the very public discourse around this proposed legislation has created a high-stakes environment for First Nations leaders to consider aggregation to increase their involvement in the management of and the reaping of benefits from their territories. Not surprisingly, late in the summer of 2009, the proposal in the Reconciliation Act to aggregate Indian bands into Indigenous Nations was rejected by Aboriginal leaders in a rare all-chiefs gathering held in Vancouver.⁵

Indeed, in numerous informal discussions I have had with Coast Salish leaders on the proposed legislative initiative, many were not persuaded by the potential benefits of aggregation. These individuals would prefer not to risk entering into such formal aggregations where their identity as individual communities—in spite of their widespread kin connections—might be lost in the decision making about the approval of land use plans and the receipt of benefits from the provincial development of lands and resources in



Figure 1: Map showing sovereign Indigenous Nations territorial boundaries. UBCIC, June 1993. Redrawn by M.J. Churchill and Brian Thom, 2010.

local corners of the a so-called Indigenous Nations' territories. Navigating the internal politics of such decisions appears to be an impossible task at this time.

Kinship in aggregated political organization

The pre-eminent Northwest Coast scholar Wayne Suttles observed in 1963 that “the Coast Salish were not to be

made over to conform to the model of the Old World peasant village—ideologically homogeneous, economically self-sufficient, socially self-contained” (516). Today, the negotiation process around land claims and self-government may be more effective in promoting this assimilation goal. It may be that, as Suttles suggested over 45 years ago, an alternative to these current government mandates will emerge that will incorporate the regional kin networks

and their social, ceremonial, economic and, perhaps, political manifestations, providing “a basis for the growth of the organization and leadership that is needed” (1963:523) to establish strong and culturally relevant self-governments.

The extended Coast Salish kin group, which plays an enormously important role in areas of life as diverse as subsistence, ceremony and sport, would appear to be the natural line upon which aggregation could be built. Extended kinship may provide the common idiom of relationship, creating a pathway so that aggregated political structures in the Coast Salish world can come together temporarily, even opportunistically, around areas of common interest. The Coast Salish Gathering example discussed earlier is an interesting example of this, with the event and the institution that has emerged to sustain it serving Coast Salish communities on well-defined, common, transboundary and transnational environmental issues. Also, individual charismatic leaders who work within and beyond the bounds of this kin-centred cultural logic may make the politics of approaching aggregation less dangerous and divisive. The dynamic leadership of Steven Point who united the Stó:lō in the 1990s, or Cowichan council member Abraham C. Joe’s success drawing on extensive political, kin and Shaker church networks to gain support in pushing for housing reform and land claims processes in the late 1960s and 1970s are examples. Formulating elements of the idiom of extended kinship in aggregated political action may be the best way to operationalize Cornell and Kalt’s (1998) now famous observation that success in self-government is most often won when indigenous institutions and authorities are organized and implemented in ways that are rooted in indigenous concepts of authority and governance.

Given that these extended kin groups are not permanent or mutually exclusive (Suttles 1963:514), it is hard to imagine how the state would be able to articulate with an amorphous kin-based political structure if it were to be more formally empowered. Indeed, as Kew and Miller (1999:57-59) and Allen (1976) have suggested, there is a great deal of (at least theoretical) flexibility of residence affiliation in being a member of a bilateral kin network. If affiliating with kin from one area becomes tense (Allen 1976:169), or there are significant political disagreements with band or other aggregated governments (Kew and Miller 1999:59), people can (and do) “pull out,” re-affiliate or form new groups of like-minded kin. This element of the functioning of kin-based social organizations—what Kew and Miller call “routine political actions rather than schisms” (1999:59)—may be difficult to actualize in the language and organizational practice of bureaucratic institutions and democratic, aggregated Aboriginal self-government.

Government mandates in self-government negotiations may already allow for the delegation of law-making authorities from one First Nation government to another, foreshadowing the need for economies of scale for First Nations institutions providing services under harmonized First Nations laws. In practice, the process of delegated governance is likely to be cumbersome, politically charged and unwieldy. Re-crafting membership codes and citizenship eligibility criteria may be another mechanism for achieving a recognition of unity through bilaterally descended ancestry. In discussions around crafting just such codes and criteria in treaties, I have heard First Nations leaders express serious concerns about being unable to provide enough land or governance services to all the members “coming home.” Enabling people to hold membership in multiple First Nations (as many Coast Salish people do for tribes on either side of the Canada-U.S. border, as dual-membership within a nation is prohibited due to potential “double-dipping”) may be another strategy. These suggestions point to ways for First Nations leaders to work within the challenges of the state’s agendas and policies to bring cultural principles into contemporary governance.

Conclusions

It is clear that it is in the agency that First Nations have in navigating and controlling the processes of social change that are engendered in building First Nations governments, that fundamental indigenous ideas, indeed indigenous ontologies (Poirier 2005; Scott 2001), will be brought to shape these governments in the 21st century. It is important to see these processes as dynamic, not merely a myriad of state-run programs to aggregate local communities, but indeed a great political debate that rages in the communities. In the case of the Hul’qumi’num Treaty Group, for instance, a decade-long project has been underway to undertake a decision about political unity, with community forums, elders’ meetings and special working groups all discussing the idea of coming together, sitting as one (*nutsa’maat* in the Island dialect of the Hul’qumi’num’ language). There are strong supporters of more regional-style, aggregated representation working with symbols of identity—shared language, shared territory, shared history, shared cultural practice, shared kin—to shape new forms of Aboriginal government. And there are strong detractors from the idea of dismantling the political identities that have taken their current shape under Indian Act and subsequent federal and provincial policies, and which have become so central a feature of many First Nations lives. While the title “anathema of aggregation” may have been shown here to be hyperbole,

the political tension is very real and a considerable puzzle for 21st-century self-government.

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Notes

- 1 "Tribes breaking away to form independent parallel treaty table," *Cowichan News Leader Pictorial*, 16 May 2007, "Parallel Treaty Moves Step Closer," *Cowichan News Leader Pictorial*, 20 June 2007; "Tribes Walk on a Different Path One Worth Taking," *Cowichan News Leader Pictorial*, 27 June 2007.
- 2 "Dispute Splits Sto:lo Nation," *Chilliwack Progress*, 27 July 2004; "Treaty Fight Leads to Sto:lo Split," *Abbotsford Times*, 29 July 2004.
- 3 These legal mechanisms for describing the status of Aboriginal self-government in a Final Agreement can be seen, for example, in the Tsawwassen Final Agreement, preamble clause D, general provisions chapter clauses 9, 12 (b), 13, 16, 17, 19 and 22, and governance chapter clause 1.
- 4 For instance, Arthur Manuel's "Commentary," *Georgia Strait*, 23 July 2009, electronic document, <http://www.straight.com/node/241616>, accessed 13 September 2009.
- 5 "BC First Nations Leaders Declare Reconciliation Act Officially Dead," *Vancouver Sun*, 28 August 2009; "Legacy of Change Shattered," *Globe and Mail*, 5 September 2009.

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