The Dialectics of First Nation Governance: A Case Study of The Relationship between the Ahousaht First Nation and Industrial Fish Farming

For: R.A.V.E.N (Respecting Aboriginal Values and Environmental Needs)

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Introduction

The Nuu-chah-nulth people are comprised of 13 nations, which are members of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (NTC) and Maa-nulth Treaty Society (Castleden et al. 2009). The Ahousaht Fist Nation is located in Clayoqout Sound, and is a member of the NTC (*ibid)*. They have developed a working relationship with Mainstream Canada, an industrial aquaculture company that primarily grows Atlantic salmon (Schreiber and Newell 2006). In 2002 the Ahousaht and Mainstream signed a partnership protocol that allowed Mainstream to operate in Ahousaht territory, with the consent of the hereditary chief or *Ha'wiih* – in exchange for collaboration on environmental sustainability issues, as well as increased Ahousaht access to jobs (p. 80). This protocol was renewed in 2010 (Mainstream Canada, 2012).

This paper is about cosmologies, discourses, and lived practices. It is about the relationship between the Ahousaht First Nation of Vancouver Island, and Mainstream Canada. Thus, this paper is about the relationship between historic (Fordist) and contemporary (neoliberal) dominant economic paradigms and the lived experience of the Ahousaht. My questions are: How did the commodification of salmon affect the Ahousaht? How did this commodification enable multi-national industrial salmon farming companies to operate in unceded Ahousaht territory? Is there a cogent Ahousaht cosmological view that aids their leadership in making day-to-day decisions? Thus, in this paper I will analyze Fordist and neo-liberal globalization and each form of capitalism shaped local and government policies regarding labour and the environment in Ahousaht unceded territory. I will then articulate the Ahousaht/Nuu-chah-nulth theory of Tsawalk to demonstrate that it exists and is used by the Ahousaht in their day-to-day decisions regarding the operations of industrial aquaculture in their unceded territory. Finally, I will use dialectical analysis to articulate the fact that the Ahousaht are not "using" their culture to combat

neoliberalism; rather, that their culture is a distinct embodied reality that interacts with and shapes how industrial fish farms operate within their unceded territory.

Fordist Globalization to Neoliberal-Globalization

Menzies (2011) describes neoliberal-globalization as "a form of economic globalization linked to a late twentieth-century political agenda designed to weaken the authority of nation-states and to increase the flow of capital, goods, and services across national borders while simultaneously limiting the mobility of labour" (p. 136). This mode of production, which is closely linked to classical liberalism, was the result of the capitalist class seeking to restore rates of profitability, which had significantly decreased in the late 1960 to early 1970's (Workman, 2009). I do not think that neoliberal-globalization should be limited to the ability of multi-national corporations to weaken the state, as per Menzies` (2011) definition (p. 136). Neoliberalism is as much about weakening the state as it is about reshaping communities to fit the neoliberal mould (Young, 2008). Thus place-oriented agents, such as aboriginal groups, are encouraged to "achieve a measure of independence from corporate resource production — to act self-sufficiently and mobilize local entrepreneurialism as a means of directly participating in broader economies" (Young, 2008: 1).

Yet, I am in agreement with Menzies (2011) that the terms "neoliberalism" or "globalization" are not apt in describing the set of relationships that define industries such as fisheries. Raw resources such as fish have always been subject to the demands of global industrial capitalism. What has changed is the scope and intensity in which labour and resources have been exploited. As Healey (2009) notes, fisheries in British Columbia have shifted "from a century of centralized, command and-control management focused initially on maximizing yield

… [to] more recently, on economic efficiency" (p. 10). Thus, globalization can be seen in two forms: Fordist (Young, 2008), and neoliberal (Menzies, 2011). Fordist-globalization was defined by "large-scale industrial development of the province's natural resources … environmental and economic stability … [and] dispersion of production across the province" (Young, 2008, p. 8). Thus, throughout this paper I will be using the term neoliberal-globalization, combining the definitions of Menzies (2011) and Young (2008).

Volpe and Shaw (2008) have noted that pacific salmon were "a high-value seasonal delicacy" (p. 10). However, I would like to stress that salmon were not merely a seasonal delicacy as Volpe and Shaw (2008) suggest. Rather, the management of resources such as salmon were subject to the prevailing trends in local and global capitalism, hence salmon were also a global commodity managed under the auspices of Fordism (Young, 2008). From the late 1800's to the mid 1980's, fishing was defined by wage labourers working for large canneries (Guppy, 1986). Thus, technology existed which enabled BC salmon to be shipped nationally and internationally. Models, such as the Ricker's Curve (Parsons, 2011) and technology, such as fish hatcheries and canneries, were employed with the expressed goal of measuring and increasing the productivity and profitability of the salmon fisheries (Healey, 2009; Meffe, 1992) long before the transition from Fordist-globalization to neoliberal-globalization.

During the 1990s, the commercial fisheries of the West Coast of Vancouver Island collapsed (Parsons, 2011). Pacific salmon abundance decreased, with commercial landings going from 107,000 metric tonnes in 1985 to 17,000 metric tonnes in 1999 (Parsons, 2011, p. 397). To combat the problem of over fishing by so-called "hyper-competitive fisherman", the government reorganized the pacific salmon fisheries eliminating the competitive, yet

monopolistic, fisheries defined by wage labour, small fleets, and the power of industrial canneries (Healey, 2009; Glavin, 1996; Guppy, 1986). In its place a non-competitive monopolistic fisheries defined by individual transferrable quotas (ITQs) has taken root (Bromley, 2009; Mansfield, 2004; Marchak 1988 / 1989). These ITQS are touted by free-market capitalists as private property because they can be transferred, exchanged, and sold (Bromley, 2009) However, they are merely permits that allow people access to common pool resources. Their rise in use has coincided directly with the rise of neoliberal-globalization (Mansfield, 2004) and fit the neoliberal agenda of government divestment from management of public goods (Bromley, 2009). They are attractive to cash strapped fisheries managers precisely because they are low-cost (Menzies, 2011). As of 2008, ITQs account for 58% of all landed catches within Canada (Parsons, 2009). This has led to a situation where profit maximization and rationalization of fisheries as a whole is stressed (Bromley, 2009). This means that fishing firms are not competing with each other; rather they are competing with other regional and national fisheries (*ibid)*.

The impact of this hyper-commodification, and subsequent stock collapses, was calamitous on the AFN, as Johnny-O, a member of the Ahousaht First Nation notes:

> "Four hundred of us would leave the harbour on April 15. For six months, we'd be gone fishing. Everyone would make $20,000, $30, 000," he says. "And then, bang," a decade ago, the fisheries collapsed. Soon, the suicides started. "I was almost one of them," he says. "I'd fished for 40 years, day in, day out: that's all I knew." After selling his boat and fishing licence, he was still $30,000 in debt. "I lay down in the bath, and I thought: I'd rather be dead …" (MacDonald, 2009, para. 5).

Yet, it should be noted that both Fordist and neoliberal federal and provincial governments have gone to great lengths to pin the aboriginal fisheries down into an archaic "food fisheries", which limits their fishing rights to those associated with food, social, and ceremonial practices (FSC) (Schreiber, 2006; Glavin, 1996). The Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has used programs such as the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy (AFS), among others done this to "encourage" (assimilate?) aboriginals into the industrial capitalist commercial fisheries (Glavin, 1996). These programs are less about the government fulfilling their fiduciary obligations to aboriginals as they are about forcing aboriginals into a highly capitalized industry (Schreiber, 2006). The government of Canada has a special fiduciary relationship with aboriginals that has developed since contact, and is as Schreiber (2006) notes:

> "Reflected in the language of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This proclamation was issued by King George and reserved the interior of the continent as a vast Indian hunting ground, where Indians would not be "molested or disturbed" on land that could only be ceded to or purchased by the Crown. This means that the federal government is supposed to be protecting the interests and status of Native peoples as unique political entities" (p. 21).

With this in mind, it is very odd that DFO would fight aboriginal attempts (including the Ahousaht) to move beyond the archaic FSC fisheries, to one that includes their right to sell fish caught communally (Glavin, 1996). Even a recent court victory in *Ahousaht vs. Canada*, which recognizes the Ahousaht right to sell fish caught by their communal fisheries, has been hampered by bureaucratical intransigence on the part of DFO (Uu-a-thluk, 2011). Thus, the *Taaq-whiihak* (which means fishing with permission of the *Ha'wiih*) project, which seeks to establish

community rights-based fisheries that would be "community managed and enforced …" has been stalled dramatically by DFO (*ibid*).

Neoliberal-globalization and Salmon Aquaculture

The rise of the multi-national salmon farming industry in British Columbia coincided with neoliberal policies enacted by Brian Mulroney. Mulroney's replacement of the *Foreign Investment Review Act* of 1973 with the *Investment Canada Act* of 1985 meant that Canadian registered companies no longer had to have a Canadian majority ownership (Volpe and Shaw, 2008). This enabled large multinational corporations such as Mainstream Canada to apply for near-shore leases from the BC government to begin farming salmon in "what it regards as empty, underdeveloped territories" (Schreiber, 2006, p. 21). In 1995 the NDP government put a moratorium on the expansion of fish farms (Schreiber, 2006). Yet, by this time there were already several fish farms operating within the unceded territory of the Ahousaht (Schreiber and Newell, 2010).

The rise in production of cheap farmed salmon – 71,600 metric tons in British Columbia alone as of 2002 – has had significant consequences for the pacific salmon fisheries in British Columbia (Volpe and Shaw, 2008, p. 6). Salmon, once a high-value commodity was turned into a low-value commodity that could be bought "fresh" whenever and wherever. Thus, while the value of farmed salmon dropped dramatically – by 55% from 1988 to 2002 – production increased by 895,000 times over that of 1988 (Volpe and Shaw, 2008, p. 7). Thus, prices for farmed salmon were offset by increased production rates. Logically, the fiscal viability of small fishing firms began to be challenged. Thus, while ITQs stimulated mergers between fishing firms (Glavin, 1996), so too did the declining price of salmon in a neoliberalized global market (Volpe

and Shaw, 2008). Thus, ITQs hold a complex place in fisheries management. They are at once a product of and a response to the hyper-commodification of the salmon, in which industrial aquaculture played a large role.

Yet, there are more than economic downfalls to the hyper-commodification of salmon. Sea lice are external parasites that feed on the skin and mucus of salmon, are found also in wild salmon (Clausen and Clarke, 2005). Fish farms and surrounding waters can house sea lice, increasing sea lice densities within a specific geographical region. Juvenile Pacific salmon, which migrate past fish farms, are most likely to be infected by sea lice. However, it must be noted that I could find no studies that indicated that sea-lice transmission from fish farms to juvenile salmon was occurring in Clayoqout Sound. Hence, the transfer of sea lice from farmed fish to wild juvenile pink salmon and chum salmon leaving the rivers and streams of the mainland coast is a considerable threat to not only populations of wild salmon (Volpe and Shaw, 2008), but also First Nation access to natural resources such as clam and salmon (Schreiber, 2003). Also Salmon net pens allow fish feces and uneaten feed to flow directly into coastal waters, resulting in substantial discharge of nutrients (Clausen and Clark, 2005). The excess nutrients are toxic to the marine communities occupying the ocean floor beneath the net-pens.

Hishook-ish-tsawalk

According to Bromley (2009), industrial fishing is conducted "to gain control of future value – fish that can be eaten or sold" (p. 3). However, as Menzies and Butler (2008) note aboriginal fisherfolk fished to earn profits *and* to sustain their cultural heritage. Thus, salmon is not merely a commodity to be turned into a product; rather, fish are part of the cultural identity of the Ahousaht. Using a Marxist-materialist theory of kinship production, Menzies and Butler (2008) demonstrate that west-coast aboriginals were active participants in wage economies, such

as fisheries, which they manipulated to meet the needs social, cultural, and political structures of their communities. For the Ahousaht, this interaction is rooted in the theory of *Hishook-ish-tsawalk* loosely translated, meaning everything is one (Atleo, 2004). *Hishook-ish-tsawalk,* a Nuu-chah-nulth theoretical perspective as old as time itself, is articulated in Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview by Umeek (Dr. Richard Atleo, 2004). The Ahousaht are governed by a hereditary chieftainship, called *Ha`wiih*. It is the duty of the *Ha'wiih* to govern and manage resources in their chiefly territory, or *hahuulthi* (*ibid*). *Ha'wiih* undergo years of training to intimately understand their *hahuulthi*. The *Ha'wiih* was, and is, responsible for caring for their non-human brothers and sisters for the present and future benefit of their people. When a *Ha'wiih* reaches an age of maturation, they inherit the *hahuulthi*, and began their relationship with their non-human brothers and sisters. Besides managing the *hahuulthi,* it was also the duty of *Ha'wiih* to manage his, and care for their *Mus-chums* (tribal members, through the principles of *Hish-ook-ish-tsawalk* (*ibid*).

Important in the *Ha'wiih's* implementation of *Hishook-ish-tsawalk* is the realization that life is a gift from the creator, or *Qua-ootz*, and that there exists methods (*oosumich*, akin to vision quests) for unveiling the relationship between the physical and metaphysical (Atleo, 2004). Hence, it is recognized that a relationship exists between physical and metaphysical that results in their unification (p. 120-121). It is acknowledged that since *Qua-ootz* is the creator, the physical domain is the result of the spiritual (p. 122). Creation stories are integral to *Hishook-ish-tsawalk*, with Son of Raven (*Keesta)* as ``an archetype of the ideal relationship between heaven and earth, between a created person and the Creator, *Keesta* modelled himself after this archetype`` (*ibid*). On the polar side, ``*Aulth-ma-quus* represents another archetype: that of an evil, destructive person who possesses overwhelming power over earthly beings`` (*ibid*). The

final archetype, Wolf, is ``an archetypal heavenly personage who represents creative power. A community of these wolves forms the archetypal heavenly community in the same way that angels form the heavenly community in Christian stories`` (p. 123). Thus, the wolf rituals serve a reminder of the unity between physical and metaphysical. Thus, *Hishook-ish-tsawalk* presupposes that good, evil, and creativity have been a part of Nuu-chah-nulth existence since creation and are thus not the subject of human creation.

The Dialectics of Ahousaht Identity

I do not believe that the Ahousaht "use" their identity to resist neoliberal-globalization. Rather, I think that the Ahousaht government are caught between two distinct realities: one situated within their cosmological framework and one situated within the framework of neoliberal capitalism. Thus, the Ahousaht are negotiating these tensions on a day-to-day basis. As Miller notes (2000, p. 5), the Hegelian dialectical approach is powerful because it not only allows for the recognition of multiple discourses which produce multiple perceptions and actions on the material world, but also acknowledges the micro processes – individual agency – that shape and produce discourse and social action (*ibid*). Dialectical analysis allows us to acknowledge that a Nuu-chah-nulth perspective on the environment is a fundamental reality with its own discourses and practices. Dialectical analysis also allows us to acknowledge that there exists a capitalist perspective on the environment that is informed by its own fundamental theoretical perspective on labour and the environment. This approach does not subsume either industrial capitalism or *Hishook-ish-tsawalk* to the margins of analysis; rather, it takes both into full consideration.

These dialectical tensions are evident in the statement of one Ahousaht member on the benefits of Ahousaht ecological knowledge:

> "I guess the reason I say local knowledge plays a key role is—a good one is the Bare Bluff issue—We told them. "No, we don't want that farm there [Bare Bluff]." Despite our opposition, they went and did it anyway. Lo and behold this year what happens? The biggest mortality rate you've ever seen. We're told 20 feet of dead fish on the bottom, maybe even more, plus floating fish on top" (Schreiber and Newell 2010, p. 83).

Thus, on the one hand, AFN ecological knowledge is acknowledged as still existing and still vital. Conversely, the AFN member had to couch his language in a way that rendered it useful for Mainstream Canada. This is a dangerous balancing act, but one I think the Ahousaht don't undertake to resist neoliberalism. Rather, it is a day-to-day reality that AFN have to rationalize the existence of their culture to an outside force. It's as old a process as colonialism. Indeed, colonial settler-discourse, and actions, was and is replete with correcting the wayward, backwards, and wasteful Indians (Razack, 2002).

It seems the Ahousaht take a pride in balancing these dialectical tensions. Ahousaht member Wally Samuel notes: "We are wild salmon people … Wild fish people. We do love our wild fish. Our protocol contains very strict conditions. They (Mainstream) are told where they can put the farms" (Steel, 2010, para. 18). Again, the Ahousaht member frames his cosmological perceptions on salmon against other cosmological ones, in this case both environmentalist and neoliberal-capitalist. He does this because he recognizes that the Ahousaht live in a neoliberal capitalist country which often makes decisions, such as granting near-shore leases to multi-national industrial aquaculture companies such as Mainstream Canada without Ahousaht

input(Schreiber and Newell, 2010; Schreiber, 2006). They live in a world by their identity as salmon people – people whose knowledge of the environment is inscribed in their oral history and unceded territory. Thus, their decisions regarding industrial aquaculture are as much about establishing and maintaining jurisdiction as they are about the reality of having to earn a wage to live in a country defined by neoliberal-globalization. As with the Tsmyan, Gixtaala, and Gitga'at wage earners of the early 19th century (Menzies and Butler, 2008), the Ahousaht are using cultural mechanisms (*Hishook-ish-tsawalk*) to mediate how capitalism operates within their territory. As *Kiista* notes: "We are more than capable of making decisions that impact our people and our land … We do not need uninformed outsiders making decisions or pronouncements without our consent" (Seccia, 2010, para. 24).

While the Ahousaht want to conduct labour according to their cosmological viewpoint, neoliberal-globalization limits these desires. As Wally Samuel notes: "We eat it, but that's why we're more involved in the [fish farm] locations … We know where the fish run … Yes, we're caught between a rock and a hard place. But right now it's our livelihood (Seccia, 2010, para. 12). The Ahousaht live in a world defined by neoliberal-globalization, which requires them to enter into a wage economy. Yet the Ahousaht expectations around how the wage economy should operate within their territory are shaped by their own discourse and actions, as well as that of the neoliberal-globalization. For the Ahousaht, organizations that operate within their territory must negotiate with them in such a way that recognizes their right and title to their unceded land. It means recognizing that the Ahousaht have a cosmological perspective that enables them to interact with the landscape that is beneficial for both the environment and humans (Atleo, 2004). Yet, government, industry, academics, and environmentalists often interpret Ahousaht actions to suit their own theoretical perspectives. This is evident in a frustrated Ahousaht *Ha'wiih*

Maquinna's observation that the only organization that respected his *hahuulthi* was Mainstream Canada (Steel, 2011). The government which leased the waterways of unceded Ahousaht territory without consultation certainly didn't respect *hahuulthi* (Schreiber and Newell, 2010).

Yet, there is a paradox that lies at the heart of the relationship between the Ahousaht and Mainstream Canada: the Ahousaht signing of the protocol at once establishes and limits the sovereignty of the Ahousaht. It helps to establish sovereignty in that it forces the industry to acknowledge, and in effect the government that issued the near-shore leases, to acknowledge the Ahousaht jurisdiction over their territory. This is done through consultation over siting of farms, etc. However, the protocol limits the sovereignty of the Ahousaht in that the Ahousaht have become reliant upon Mainstream Canada for jobs. Thus, in concurrence with observations by Young (2008) about the neoliberalization of rural communities, the Ahousaht are expected to approach industrial aquaculture in their unceded territories with entrepreneurial vigour. Thus, the pressure remains – as with the fisheries (Schreiber, 2006; Glavin, 1996) – to incorporate the Ahousaht into the dominant economic paradigm. This allows the government to continue to divest itself from its fiduciary duties to the Ahousaht, while at the same time allowing industrial capitalism to operate unabated in the hinterland.

Conclusion

The Ahousaht want and need jobs to survive. They also want to live in their territory of their ancestors and manage it according to the tenets of *Hishook-ish-tsawalk.* They are not going anywhere, nor should they. Thus, negotiating with private corporations is a necessary step in a neoliberal capitalist world where government continue to divest itself from its responsibility to

aboriginal people. The Ahousaht are caught between two distinct realities with which they have to negotiate: *Hishook-ish-tsawalk* and the neoliberal capitalist reality which operates in their unceded territory. The Ahousaht have suffered innumerable hardships because of global capitals need to hyper-commodify natural resources. Thus, when the pacific salmon fisheries collapsed it seemed for a time that Ahousaht culture would collapse as well. Yet, the Ahousaht have drawn strength from their cosmological mode, which has allowed them to benefit and modify the destructive global forces which wreaked havoc on their community. Thus, their culture isn't a resistance strategy, it's a lived experience.

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