

A Spindle, an Awl, and the Construction Tools of Tla'amin Histories in the Twentieth Century

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Abstract

Western historical and ethnographic scholarship has tended to overlook Indigenous peoples' processes of making handmade items, in favour of focusing on the finished objects. This neglect obscures the social, political, labour, and gender histories of the items. For members of the Tla'amin Nation in British Columbia, Canada, histories of tools show how processes of making objects have also been processes of making histories. Histories of making objects help to show how community members retained and actively defended their agency: tools enabled community members to make their presence visible in a larger colonial climate that sought to erase them. This article responds to calls from Indigenous scholars to analyse power and gender dynamics that are inherent within histories of objects themselves, as well as within community members' own experiences. Oral histories and a Traditional Use Study (TUS) conducted in Sliammon in the late 1990s historicize the significance of tools that contemporary community members have discussed. These phenomena of economic change, politics, tradition, and have all been inherent themes in histories of making things in Sliammon. Such inherent themes become explicit with a focus on tools as construction tools of histories, and they show how tools have been central in Tla'amin responses to colonial incursions past and present.

I first visited Sliammon, a small First Nation on the west coast of British Columbia near the city of Powell River in 2012. As a Ph.D. student, I hoped to learn whether community members would be interested in working with me on an oral history project about histories of handmade items. I spoke with Tla'amin (Sliammon) community members about making and interpreting objects of historical significance.¹ In our conversations they made it clear that the tools used to create significant items occupied a background role. The tools sat in private, in contrast to the more public popularity of carvings, baskets, and other items that have seen growing community and commercial appeal over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Despite their understated presence, tools and social connections have worked together to create objects and their historical significance. They have helped to construct change, in direct opposition to colonial forces seeking to limit Indigenous people's identities. As revealed in community members' perspectives shared in oral histories, histories of tools illuminate labour and gender histories as well as histories of local resistance to colonialism.

Sliammon, B.C., home of the Tla'amin First Nation, sits on the Sunshine Coast north of Vancouver, near the town of Powell River. Historically, Sliammon was one village of several throughout Tla'amin territory, which bordered and was sometimes shared with the closely-related Klahoose and Homalco peoples, and was part of larger network among Salish communities all along the coast and into the interior of what is now British Columbia.² In the nineteenth century, the alienation of lands to corporate and individual settler interests, coupled with the creation of the reserve system in B.C., began to restrict Sliammon people's movements

and access to resources.³ Shortly after the turn of the century, the establishment of a paper mill at Powell River sparked an influx of non-Indigenous settlers and reinforced a shift – begun by the nineteenth-century presence of Hudson’s Bay Company posts along the coast and on Vancouver Island – from a predominantly Indigenous space to one where the settler colonial and provincial aims of British Columbia and Canada sought to limit Indigenous people’s political, social, spatial, and economic activities.⁴

When I introduced my research interest to community members, I was often asked, “What type of handmade items are you interested in?”⁵ My response was that we could converse about any items they wished. I have sought to ensure that community members had the space to define which histories were most significant, hoping to shape the work in ways that would resonate with community members. I have endeavored to portray methods and arguments in ways that forefront Indigenous perspectives in their own words, and to put individual remarks into the context of statements made by others past and present. This project aims to contextualize individual community members’ experiences within broader histories.

I am also obligated to contextualize my research relationships. During the research process, several people made gently corrective remarks to me (a settler person doing oral history work), pointing out family members recording stories, or planning a community museum, or who had university training in writing and research. I took these remarks as cautions for my academic methodologies. They did not necessarily mind that I was doing the work – some encouraged my efforts in the interests of fostering better understanding among non-Indigenous people – but ultimately, the work of preserving cultures and histories should be led by community members. My work should not overshadow those efforts. Through my extended consultations with community members, I have tried to be specific about the cultural influences shaping histories of

handmade items, how this knowledge was gained, how I interpreted evidence, and how I have worked to ensure that analyses remain faithful to the perspectives shared with me. My conversations with community members have provided a basis from which I have responded to calls from Indigenous scholars for settler scholars to be open and critical about their research methodologies. Calls for decolonizing scholarship have led me to discuss how histories of tools encode gender and labour histories of making traditions that could respond to colonial intrusion.

I first contextualize tools within existing ethnographic, historical, and Indigenous Studies scholarship on material histories and related methodological scholarship on Indigenous histories. I pick up on calls from Indigenous scholars to analyse power and gender dynamics that are inherent within histories of objects themselves, as well as within community members' own experiences. I then consider how a Traditional Use Study (TUS) conducted in Sliammon in the late 1990s, which forms a basis for many of the themes in this paper, also offers a means of historicizing the significance of tools that contemporary community members have discussed with me. Finally, I discuss how economic change, politics, tradition, and have all been inherent themes in histories of making things in Sliammon. Each of these themes become explicit with a focus on tools as construction tools of histories, and they show how tools have come to play central roles in responses to colonial incursions past and present.

The Spindle and the Awl

Community members in Sliammon talked about two specific tools that led me to consider Tla'amin tools as construction tools of histories: a recently hand-carved spindle and a sixty-year-old commercial awl, both in use (though not always for their original purpose) in Sliammon today. For Indigenous community members, these tools created cross-cultural exchange and

reinforced narratives of family histories. Conversely, non-Indigenous people interacted with these same tools in single transactions rather than ongoing narratives. They generally purchased finished items made with the tools: a discrete commercial interaction with a specific Indigenous person. Settler scholarship has tended to discuss tools as a means of survival in the surrounding landscape and natural world, exemplified, for instance in the concept of the “ecological Indian.”⁶ But these perspectives have overlooked how tools also sometimes became Indigenous peoples’ means of survival within settler colonialism. Using the same tools, they were able to apply their skills for financial gain in new working environments. Some new contexts for tools were created by non-Indigenous-run industries to increase public interest in Indigenous-made goods, while others grew out of Indigenous responses to settler public perceptions.

Tools do not operate solely behind the scenes in Tla’amin histories. They are historical sources that highlight *processes* of making things, not just the finished, public object itself. Western settler scholarship has tended to overlook the political and social motivations for making objects that their Indigenous makers define as traditional. Examining processes of making objects helps to show that community members retained and actively defended their agency as the implementation of colonialism in Sliammon changed over time. Tools enabled community members to make their presence visible in a larger climate that sought to erase them. Histories of the tools show how community members have defended agency in their own histories by making things in response to changing historical circumstances and the shifting impacts of colonialism.

The spindle and the awl originated in very different contexts, even though their users were discussing them with me around the same time. The spindle was conceptualized in about 2014 by Charlie Bob, an octogenarian carver who remembers his grandmother using a similar

tool but who has not seen one in use since.⁷ Charlie's motivation for recreating a seemingly archaic tool in his grandmother's style was sparked by my casual conversations with and about contemporary, non-Indigenous hobby spinners who are interested in collecting spindles from around the world. I relayed these conversations to Charlie, asking if he would be interested in making spindles for purchase. In other words, while the idea of creating the spindle was enabled and perhaps inspired by historical Tla'amin spinning practices, it also formed part of Charlie's commercial interests as someone who carves to supplement his income. The awl, by contrast, was constructed by the late Joe Mitchell approximately sixty years ago and has been in continuous use since then, first by Joe Mitchell and then by his son Melvin. As Melvin explained, both men have primarily used the tool to make items that support community activities.⁸ In this way, the uses of tools – that is, the processes of making things – has been an engagement with the uses of material histories and traditions in Sliammon. As histories of tools show, tradition is not only a philosophical or theoretical idea; it closely links to social, political, and economic realities. Community members' individual perspectives and experiences have crucially shaped their own expectations and responded to others' expectations of what tradition has looked like since the 1930s. A focus on making things makes explicit the processes of making histories. Making things responds to colonialism and reasserts belonging and agency, not only by producing symbols of identities but also by providing economic opportunities and interpreting past experiences.

[Image of Melvin Mitchell's tools and creations]

Methodologically, crafters' tools are scholarly tools. Because they are so closely connected to historical narratives, tools nuance and complicate historical relationships (particularly among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people) that have often been viewed as one-

dimensional. Ethnographic discussions about handmade items throughout the twentieth century have focused on the ways that objects protect or revive a specific, often static, concept of pre-contact Tla'amin culture. Homer Barnett, who published *The Coast Salish of British Columbia* in 1955, was one of the only scholars to comment on Sliammon as a distinct culture rather than as a subgroup of neighbouring Coast Salish peoples. Barnett's work employed methods common in the field at that time: a reliance on key informants (one of whom was Chief Tom, the last hereditary Sliammon chief) an emphasis on observable pre-contact traits depicted as static, and a quest for a cultural "core" free of "infiltration" (as Barnett described it) of traits from other cultures.⁹ Barnett's informants' descriptions and illustrations of tools, clothing, canoe and paddle styles have helped to guide community members' more recent depictions and definitions of tradition in Sliammon. As some community members have pointed out, though, processes of making things have never operated outside of social contexts, and understandings of the "cultural traits" that Barnett described varied according to gender, social position, and time period. Tools and processes of making things help to highlight these complexities beyond what early ethnographers described. Tracing the social contexts of tools throughout the twentieth century shows how Tla'amin people have not been bound by settlers' assumptions about their histories.

Making things was an economic venture for some Indigenous people as well as a symbolic reference to the past, and so histories of handmade items are also labour histories. In the latter part of the twentieth century, labour was a site where many Indigenous people negotiated non-Indigenous people's expectations. Historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum has noted, in settler society and in historiographical discussions, a tension between the ideas of "declining" and "persisting" Indigenous communities, which tend to constitute the only scholarly discussions of change over time.¹⁰ McCallum argues that such categories mask the complexity

that existed in Indigenous women's work, in particular.¹¹ As Métis artist and art historian Sherry Farrell-Racette has commented, historians have tended to view objects as a subject or artifact in and of themselves, rather than evidence of the maker's labour.¹² Considering tools and processes of making things allows the social, historical, and economic experiences of the maker to become visible alongside those of the consumer or observer.

Complex histories of making objects suggest that Indigenous peoples have long used “innovative means for traditional ends;” something that is “traditional” need not be static or unable to adapt to contemporary concerns.¹³ Nor does departure from the historically-familiar signify “inauthenticity,” as historian Paige Raibmon has noted of B.C. Indigenous peoples in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Nevertheless, colonial understandings of the “vanishing Indian,” ethnographic quests for authentic, “core” cultures, and court cases surrounding federally-defined Aboriginal rights in Canada have sought to officially restrict Indigenous identities to static, ahistorical features.¹⁵ The process of making things carries as much historical significance as the completed items, and scholarship must intentionally move beyond specific material culture to engage with labour histories, gender histories, and the history of ideas regarding tradition, authenticity, and representation. Makers of objects have drawn on broad social networks to create their works. Physical tools and social connections have worked together to create objects and their historical significance. Focusing on the tools that have helped to create objects and histories, I highlight the objects' roles as narrators and interpreters of complex community histories.

The line between tools and finished objects is at times blurry. The tools I discuss are items that community members have used to construct other items: the latter with greater public appeal and visibility, particularly as increasing settler interest in Indigenous-made items created

definitions of what was and was not worthy of attention. In community members' discussions, baskets, carvings, and other items that facilitated traditional ways of making a living were the most significant products of the tools in their lives. The tools to make those items were less visible but remained important in the creation of histories around the finished objects. Focusing on tools therefore offers a means of considering Indigenous histories beyond the ones that settlers have engaged with. Tools help to illuminate different historical questions than finished products do, in part because in many analyses of material history, the processes of creating those objects and historical questions go largely unexplored.¹⁶ In other words, using tools as historical sources offers a methodology that complements those surrounding finished items. As Lakota artist and art historian Carmen Robertson has noted, in many Indigenous handmade objects, a single object has domestic, spiritual, and cultural significance, whereas Western art tends to draw distinctions among those practices.¹⁷ Thus, it is important to focus not only on the finished item, but also on the process through which it was made: a process that tools help to illuminate.

Scholarship and Colonialism in Histories of Tools

About twenty years after Barnett's 1955 work, anthropologists Dorothy Kennedy and Randy Bouchard began fieldwork in Sliammon, eventually published as *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands* (1983). Kennedy and Bouchard included perspectives from a broader range of community members on many of the same topics that Barnett had discussed. Many of the elders involved have died since Kennedy and Bouchard's work was published, and community members have expressed regret that those people were no longer here to serve as models of traditional skills that community members identified as valuable.

Many of the elders depicted in *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands* were instrumental in developing community programs and educational initiatives during the years of Kennedy and Bouchard's research. In Traditional Use Study (TUS) interviews, community publications, and Powell River newspaper articles, elders commented on their motivations for establishing these programs. The practical skills of making traditional things were intended to counter colonialism and racism, by giving community members opportunities to reinforce their history and belonging in that place. Kennedy and Bouchard, however, did not comment on the contemporary contexts in which community members made and documented tangible things. Although their work captured aspects of the past that community members at the time and today have deemed important, it did not consider the contemporary significance of the knowledge that elders shared with them. In other words, settler anthropology has tended to overlook community members' own reasons for constructing histories.¹⁸ Processes of making things help to show how these reasons have been connected to relationships with non-Indigenous neighbours. As relationships changed from restrictive policies of reserve creation and residential schools to less official racism and segregation that has persisted despite recent efforts at reconciliation, community members found that they needed to emphasize different parts of their history through the tools they used.

Joe Mitchell, who first used the awl, was a key informant for Kennedy and Bouchard, and his parents were informants for Barnett. The Mitchell family has been closely involved with academics' understandings of Tla'amin histories. Joe Mitchell's son Melvin, who showed me the awl and described its significance for his family, noted that the awl was important not only because it helped makers to complete useful or beautiful items. Rather, the tool embodied historical relationships of kinship, community, reciprocity, caretaking, and knowledge-sharing; it

was not possible to make an object without these connections in place.¹⁹ Community members' own perspectives on tools and histories must be considered beyond their contexts in earlier anthropological works. One response to this gap in scholarship has been Sliammon elder Elsie Paul's work with historian Paige Raibmon and Elsie Paul's granddaughter Harmony Johnson to record her own life history and teachings in a work that community members fondly call "Elsie's book:" *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder*. The book has created important space for Indigenous people's stories within academic publishing, yet it also leaves room for other Sliammon perspectives beyond Elsie's lived experience.

Tla'amin people have sought out many avenues for recording and depicting their histories. In the mid 1990s, the community began negotiating a treaty via the newly-formed B.C. Treaty Commission (BCTC). One of the first phases of this process was a community-driven Traditional Use Study (TUS). Five community members were hired by the community-based Sliammon Treaty Society to conduct and transcribe interviews. Their goal was to speak with as many elders and other community members as possible, using a standardized list of questions to inquire about traditional resource harvesting, territories and land use, cultural and spiritual practices, historical skills and knowledge, and related topics. The topic of tools and of making objects came up frequently within these interviews. The recordings serve as valuable sources of knowledge for community members and others seeking insights into Sliammon's history; they also help to show how conversations about processes of making things have taken on changing social and political significance over time.

The TUS helped to define for Sliammon community members what tradition looked like. The questions of the TUS were intended to spur collective definitions of tradition, to draw a

distinction between pre-contact and post-contact lifestyles, and to be based on tangible markers. even when participants were not specifically asked to speak about handmade items — although such questions were standard in the interview process — their remarks helped to create and shape contexts in which objects would be discussed, both at the time and by community members I spoke with.

Historians of handmade items, notably American colonial historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, have tended to look at individual objects as lenses on larger relationships.²⁰ Indigenous historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum argues that examining only the finished item obscures the motivations for making it; the item risks being removed from its original context, especially when colonial institutions are involved with how it is shared.²¹ Looking at tools – the process of making objects – provides one method for providing the context that colonialism can obscure. In my conversations with community members, several people have noted that handmade items do not exist in a vacuum, but are products of vast, interconnected networks. Melvin Mitchell, a carver who works as a carpenter, cultural educator, and volunteer emergency responder, and whose father was chief in Sliammon in the 1970s and 1980s, noted that his father’s awl had enabled him to carve, weave, and create items that, when given as gifts, invoked gift-giving reciprocity to reinforce the significance of the items he created.²² Other tools, and items created by them, have been more explicitly pragmatic, intended to fulfil immediate economic interests. In any case, the objects have been created with the help of diverse connections as well as the tools themselves. Processes of making things were also processes of constructing resistance to colonialism.

How do tools illuminate change in the community over time? Eugene Louie, a community member involved in community politics and treaty negotiation for several decades,

described how the role of his grandmother's handmade baskets, what they represented, and the values attached to them changed over time. Commenting on how his grandmother preserved berries on a long journey, Eugene stated, "I really don't know how she did it. I remember she had real big Indian baskets she used to line with leaves."²³ The baskets used as tools for food collection and preservation were part of Eugene Louie's grandmother's daily activities. As subsistence activities changed and, in many cases, ceased in Sliammon, some community members began to draw on historical ways of life to inform how they addressed contemporary social or political concerns. Items such as baskets shifted from being tools in household tasks to finished products that would help to articulate their owners' narratives about Sliammon's past. As the influence of settler colonialism grew over the twentieth century in Sliammon, everyday tasks such as gathering traditional foods took on new political significance; collecting food was sometimes an act of resistance. The changing contexts for baskets as tools meant that community members' narratives about their baskets changed, meeting contemporary political and social needs as well as subsistence ones.

Alongside community members' description of historical tools, published descriptions of atemporal ethnographic findings help to ensconce a notion of tradition. A series of fishing tools were included in Kennedy and Bouchard's research: a fishing weir, a herring rake, and a scoop net. The depictions were brief and technical. Of the herring rake, they stated:

Schools of herring were raked from the water with a ten to fourteen foot red cedar pole fitted for approximately two feet on one end with sharp bone "teeth." The stout, flat herring rake. . .was swept through the water by the man in the bow of the canoe while the man in the stern paddled. A tap of the pole on the side of the canoe disengaged the herring from the teeth.²⁴

Such description suggests a static past, with the present day having broken away definitively at a decisive moment (presumably first contact). This idea of the past remains meaningful for some community members, who use ethnographic descriptions to learn skills that need to be reclaimed.²⁵ The herring rake was at one point a practical fishing tool, but as Tla'amin subsistence practices were increasingly restricted by provincial and federal governments and as settlers around Sliammon started to define spaces as private property, the tool fell out of use.²⁶ As impacts of colonialism changed so too did the meaning of the tool, becoming an opportunity to reclaim historical knowledge as an act of resistance.

The TUS process remains a meaningful source of knowledge for community members in Sliammon. Although it records a seemingly static notion of the past, it also provides a basis for community members to interpret knowledge about making things into contemporary contexts.²⁷ Alvin Wilson, an elder in Sliammon with a reputation for carvings like cedar masks, spoke with me about his history as a maker. Alvin, now in his early 70s and largely retired from work, has reflected on his memories of fishing as it occurred in his youth, around the time that Kennedy and Bouchard were interviewing elders and recording their understandings of history and tradition. Alvin's carving today is largely devoted to creating an aesthetically-pleasing finished product with either commercial or symbolic value. As Alvin walked me to the street as I was leaving his home, we stopped in his garage to look at more items that he had made, including his herring rake and several fishhooks and spears. He had designed some of the hooks himself, but the herring rake was recreated from his memories of older rakes. He explained that he had been curious to see the process of using a herring rake from start to finish, because he knew them as efficient, practical tools.²⁸ Reconstructing the rake based on memories was a way for Alvin to reflect on his own past. Yet the rake was also a product of histories of fishing, economics, and

exchange that surrounded its use and subsequent decline in popularity. Constructing a historical tool was a way to highlight historical innovations that continue to have practical value, but do not have the same scope of economic necessity that they did when herring fishing was at its peak, before environmental changes in the late twentieth century largely wiped out the herring fishery.²⁹ Alvin's motivation for using tools, however, was that he deemed it the most effective method for communicating Sliammon history to a newcomer. The herring rake was a symbol of a past way of life as well as a tool for communicating the impacts of colonialism to a new audience.

A close relationship exists between tools' histories and research methodologies with the Indigenous communities who hold these histories. As Indigenous studies scholars including Winona Wheeler (Cree) have noted, community-engaged oral history work should not be evaluated solely on its outcomes; rather, the process of building relationships needs to be explicit and evident.³⁰ When knowledge is co-created and the product of relationships, the kinds of conversations that take place are defined by many contextual details, including the less visible work and positionality of the researcher. Corey Snelgrove, Rita Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel have noted that paradoxically, the solidarity or allyship of non-Indigenous peoples with Indigenous concerns can create or reinforce hegemonies.³¹ The authors describe the "colonial status quo" that persists in scholarly institutions and processes.

During the research process I looked for ways to forefront community members' experiences within an academic context that has a specific definition of what successful scholarship should look like. Focusing on tools offered one strategy for hearing community members' perspectives on changing historical circumstances. I began my research with a critique of static depictions of tradition in mind. But after hearing community members like Alvin

Wilson speak about the value of historical knowledge that previous ethnographers had depicted as unchanging uses of objects over time, it became clear my understanding of tradition lacked nuance. Knowledge about traditional tool usage, even when gleaned from static ethnographic sources, was meaningful to community members. They could invoke that knowledge to critique the impacts of colonialism, emphasize their continuity in their territories, and resist ongoing racist and/or colonialist efforts to devalue their presence and histories.

Historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum's critiques Indigenous history as a discipline that has sometimes marginalized Indigenous historians like herself (McCallum speaks specifically about academic historians, but as Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Cornassel have noted, non-Indigenous academics' work can also sometimes overshadow similar work being done by community members).³² Furthermore, anthropologist Ruth Behar has commented that academics have tended to shy away from their role as personal listeners in a story, and instead have hidden behind a "wall" of observation without taking into account the participatory aspect of participant-observation.³³ As ethnographer James Clifford has noted, academics often encounter diverse and even contradictory perspectives when working with communities, but tend to downplay this complexity by creating a single, cohesive narrative.³⁴ Tools help to historicize tradition, gender, and politics, but for that to happen effectively, it is also important to take up calls to scholarship that decentres settler expectations. In Sliammon history as well as in my specific work there, tools represent processes of responding to colonialism through making things. They therefore help to inform research methodologies as well as historical interpretation.

Historicizing Tradition through TUS Studies and Tools

Social and political contexts in Sliammon have helped to shape the specific histories of tools that community members find meaningful. The Sliammon TUS interviews were conducted primarily with elders in 1996 to 1998, asking them to recall their parents and grandparents' generations. Over the course of the next decade or more, this era of historical knowledge would define what was traditional for the purposes of negotiations with the federal and provincial governments over land and resources. These ideas have been portrayed in similar terms by those who were involved in interviewing, translation, analysis, or community feedback during the TUS research. Introducing the TUS to a group of elders in 1995, interviewer Maynard Harry explained the motivations and goals for the project:

Well, I've got a list of questions I would like to generally touch upon these things . . .

What we're trying to do is, we've got all the written stuff about Sliammon. Most of it is written by white people . . . we're going to have general little meetings like this and we're going to try and touch upon everything that deals with Sliammon but from the perspective of the elders rather than having the white people telling our story. We want to get the story from you people and tell it from your perspective as to what really happened because a lot of the stuff that's been written is really general . . . I was just looking at this area that Sliammon is claiming [in the treaty negotiation process] . . . And some of these are over 2000 years old so we've been here for a really long time. I go by those signs in town and Powell River has this big sign there and on the other side saying "Historical Townsite." I really don't like that because we've been here for 2000 years I think and you don't see us putting up signs and they're really proud for being here for just eighty years and it really doesn't seem right to me.³⁵

The TUS interview process was intended to highlight the age and permanence of the community in archaeological and historical terms. To establish this permanence, participants were asked to comment on the oldest historical moments they had knowledge of. This approach served to reinforce a specific historical era and the practices associated with it as authentic ones for community members. That is, the historical moments that they named became ensconced as the ones with the most legitimacy in contemporary narratives about Sliammon's past, because they carried legal weight in the treaty negotiation process. When community members described historical tools in TUS interviews, the tools became traditional ones because community members have defined them as such. They have emphasized tradition to reinforce their agency and legitimacy on their lands, as colonial intrusion has shifted over time from arms-length governance to nearby and ongoing settler presence. As histories of making things show, the very idea of what is traditional in Sliammon is one that has a history and temporal specificity of its own.

Those interested in revitalizing historical tool usage have been motivated by nostalgia and by a desire to reinforce historical continuity. Like traditions themselves, assumptions of who would take part in which activities did not come about in a vacuum either. Members of the current informal weaving group, most of whom have been attending regularly since its inception in the 1980s, recalled that originally, the community-organized, band-sponsored carving and weaving classes took place concurrently (meaning that community members typically chose one or the other, often divided along gender lines).³⁶ Establishing the community classes created informal institutions in Sliammon through which knowledge was transmitted. Community members' use of tools has often been shaped by the structures (such as treaty negotiations or community craft classes) that helped the tools to remain relevant. Just as these structures had a

history, so too did the tools themselves. The behind-the-scenes tools were in fact also integral to Tla'amin people's work to emphasize their sovereignty and permanency, in response to settler colonialism that, when the community classes were introduced, had only recently ceased formally excluding Tla'amin people from some businesses in Powell River. Traditional tools responded to a contemporary need.

Like Melvin Mitchell's reflections on his awl, some TUS participants described a static tradition of carving, while simultaneously highlighting tools as symbols of change. Prompted by an interview that sought to record the presence of a craft-making tradition, elder Agnes McGee described her views on Sliammon traditions, and compared them to practices that she associated with other regions or communities. These traditions could also accommodate change while remaining locally significant. The generations that the TUS established as traditional were also generations that community members remember today for the ways that they engaged with an increased Euro-Canadian presence:

Karen Galligos (interviewer): Anything else they made on their own, did they make any masks or any tools?

Agnes McGee: No, no masks. Just real old timers like my grandfather. He used to make a dish, or some kind of bowl with cedar. It's just like a bowl and he made spoons out of cedar and out of alder. He'd shape it just like spoons, only they're big. They used to make their own spoons and bowls. And for carrying water, they made these baskets, baskets weaved real tight together. It was big as a pail or bigger. That's what they used for carrying water. Elsie [Paul]'s still got one basket like that from my mom.

KG: So you don't know of anybody like your grandparents that used to make masks?

AM: The first time I seen masks was; I might have been about six or seven years old.

When the Haida man came, Frank [Paul]. He made a whole bunch of them and nobody knew how. He was the only one who used to make them. [. . .]

KG: What about our old houses? What did they make that out of?

AM: The first ones that were made here, they were all made out of cedar shakes.

KG: Shakes? How did they used to make the shakes?

AM: I think it was when the white people came, they had axes and stuff to split the shakes.³⁷

Although the TUS interviews sought a singular depiction of historical authenticity that would support a legally-defensible definition of Sliammon permanence in the area, local people's understandings of tools in practice have reflected complexity and change across time and circumstance.

It would be simplistic, however, to suggest that Sliammon people's tool adaptations in the twentieth century were shaped only by contact with Euro-Canadian society. As Indigenous scholars from diverse parts of the world continue to note, although colonialism sparked resistance, ultimately Indigenous people have made changes to their practices with their own communities' needs at the fore.³⁸ TUS interviewees explained how tradition informed ways of affecting change within their daily activities. Several interviewees credited the introduction of carving for artistic rather than strictly practical purposes to Frank Paul, a Haida man living in Sliammon. Paul moved to the community as a young man in the early twentieth century and became known for his practices of dancing and ceremonial carving that, interviewees explained, had originated in other communities. They argued that only later--in the wake of a wider market for carvings and an increased interest in cultural revivalism in the latter half of the twentieth

century – did these practices become meaningful in Sliammon. Benny Charlie, a grandson of Frank Paul, explained to interviewer Maynard Harry that Frank Paul’s tools helped to build the foundations for an upsurge in carving as art:

Maynard Harry (interviewer): Did you do any artwork?

Benny Charlie: No.

MH: How about your grandfather?

BC: Yeah, my, well he’s a Haida. They make masks and rings.

MH: Oh, your grandfather was a carver?

BC: Yeah.

MH: You don’t have any of that stuff?

BC: No.

MH: What happened to it?

BC: When he passed away, all the people in Sliammon went crazy picking up his stuff, his tools for making rings. By the time I got there it was all gone. It didn’t bother me though. I was more worried about him passing away.³⁹

Benny Charlie did not regard his grandfather’s tools as exotic or novel, as other community members did. These contrasting perspectives help to show changes in community members’ relationships towards carving and its roles in Tla’amin histories. The interest in Frank Paul’s carvings mirrored the interest that non-Indigenous people took in Indigenous people’s creations at that time. The TUS interviews had a specific intention in mind for talking about traditional tools: to develop a framework for negotiating a treaty. But the interviews also show how Tla’amin people used tools to support cultural revival on their own terms, not only the terms set out by a legal process.

Frank Paul's tools and their products in Sliammon also show that the idea of tradition can be contested within communities. Whereas Frank Paul's descendant Benny Charlie suggested that Paul's carving was unique and somewhat foreign, another TUS interviewee, Thomas Albert August, argued that church and state intervention in the community had diminished Sliammon people's existing carving renown.

Karen Galligos (interviewer): . . . You were mentioning masks over here too, who used to carve masks here? Any clans?

Thomas August: We lost all that. We had it just as good as the Charlottes [Haida Gwaii] but we were subjected to those missionaries here. One time they took all them, even if it was just a knife, something like that is considered a weapon. They took all these people here, I'm not sure if they went to Sechelt. The Bishop got here, they called it firearms, the axes, the hatchets, all the carving tools, I think that is why Sliammon has lost their tradition of carving.

KG: And potlatches and dancing?

TA: Yeah, well they figured potlatches were sinful to their church, the Catholic church, so they quit that. I think those people considered it like a ritual or a ceremony when you honour your people, all your gifts to show you are a respectful person.

KG: Has there been anybody down here that you can remember, that has ever carved totem poles?

TA: I can't remember anybody doing that.

KG: Just recently, not that long ago when Willie Peters did his.⁴⁰ He was one of the first people that had a totem pole.

TA: I think the totem poles nowadays that these people do are imitation, imitating what they see. We just lost all that I guess, our culture like that.⁴¹

Thomas August saw authentic Sliammon tool usage as a product of a specific historical context. When he described missionaries interrupting a traditional Sliammon past, he helped to frame contemporary carving as a separate activity from carving that took place prior to colonialism. Although the same tools and processes were noteworthy in his narrative as in Benny Charlie's, the historical contexts changed their local significance. Community members used tools to craft responses to colonial depictions of tradition, by elaborating on the ways that tradition revealed the complexity rather than the static-ness of Tla'amin histories.

Tools -- or, the processes of making finished objects -- also created conversations around land use and occupancy. These conversations were particularly significant in treaty negotiations of the 1990s and 2000s. When elder Mary George enumerated the types of woods that would become household tools, her remarks also helped to inform future discussions about treaty protections.

Karen Galligos (interviewer): What kind of wood did you use for clam digging?

MG: There one called Xwe eh tay, that was their clam digging sticks, our first peoples, they would sharpen the end, it was big, it is really hard. It won't break, they shave it and make a point on it, that is for horse clams or cockles, that is the Xwe:etay, (yew tree). It is a very hard wood tree.

KG: I can't remember if it was iron wood or was it yew?

CW: I think it was yew.

MG: I think that is what it is called.

CW: Is there any around here? Yew tree?

MG: It is up in the mountains, the gang seen it. There is none down here though. I think it is close to the river. I think it is dark, that is what everybody used for clam digging, it is called “QayaX” after they made it, use it for digging, some are pointed and a little flat, it makes it real easy.

KG: So you used it yourself too? You helped your grandpa and your mom and dad dig?

MG: Yes, we all used it. They always had it in their boats, they always had it stored, and when they go ashore wherever they are going to go, there’s a bay, there’s clam beds, they used to say. Then they get that stick and that is what they use when they dig. For the cockles you use the small pointed stick; that is what our parents used to use.⁴²

Mary George held a practical skill in connecting tools and local knowledge of resources. When this knowledge became part of treaty discussions, it became not only crucial in making and using household tools, but also in discussions with broader-ranging political implications. Knowledge of making things helped to establish the definition of Tla’amin territory and rights, for the purposes of ensconcing it in the treaty. Histories of tools for making objects became tools for establishing new political relationships – and new responses to colonialism.

New Working Environments for Traditional Skills

In the latter part of the twentieth century, Sliammon people sought more opportunities to participate in the wage labour economy that was growing in neighbouring Powell River. Until that point, they had had access mainly to limited jobs in forestry or fisheries, which were generally only available to men. During this time, academics also took a closer interest in the histories of Indigenous peoples, whose assimilation or disappearance was considered even more likely as they adopted more aspects of Euro-Canadian society. Academics described the

significance of handmade items in part out of their own academic concerns for the objects, rather than for the sovereignty or wellbeing of the peoples who made them. Anthropologist Wilson Duff, who alongside other anthropologists and First Nations carvers like the well-known Bill Reid, worked in Northwest Coast Indigenous communities, particularly Haida and Gitksan, in the 1950s and 60s, was intent on bringing Northwest Coast carving into the international eye. His desire was motivated by a personal connection to the aesthetic style and a quest to salvage it from “extinction” by raising its public profile. Duff described Haida art, in particular, as worthy of British Columbian pride, expressing his dismay at the “near-tragedy of its close brush with extinction.”⁴³ By representing these objects as items to be salvaged from the onslaught of Euro-Canadian society, Duff helped to define them as commodities. As commodities, non-Indigenous consumers began to define their own value of the objects. Commercial contexts drew attention away from the local practices and tools that that were significant for the makers themselves. On a site visit to Kitsquala, Duff reflected in his field notes: “I tried to explain the importance of these things [totem poles] as ART by talking of books, shows etc. on [Northwest Coast] art. They seemed unable to divorce the concept of art from its social context. The ONLY meaning of poles to them seems to be as a symbol of social position.”⁴⁴ By attempting to communicate consumer categories and expectations to local makers (regardless of what makers themselves saw as significant), Duff helped to reinforce the creation of Northwest Coast carving as an iconic British Columbia art form. Significantly for carvers, this was an art form with increasing commercial value. Once again, tools became a way for makers to mobilize settler assumptions about tradition, to help them to make a living within colonial constraints.

The growing economies for Indigenous art forms were contested in the communities that Duff knew best. One of Duff’s informants, C. Clifford in Hazelton, resisted moving his family’s

totem pole to the local ballpark to make it more accessible. He was not only concerned about the expenses for himself; he also worried that if the totem pole's new location inspired an uptick in ceremonies, community members would spend money on feasts rather than on essentials like home repair. He subsequently changed his mind, deciding that it was better for young people to spend their money on feasts than on alcohol: a concern of particular immediacy, since it had only recently become legal for First Nations people to enter bars.⁴⁵ While questions about the necessity of traditional objects were not as prominent in Sliammon, the economies that arose around northwest coast Indigenous art had a trickledown effect to many other communities beyond the ones Duff surveyed. Traditional objects and the processes of making them were now commodities both within and beyond individual communities, including Sliammon.

Despite these new working environments for tools, the commodification of products of tools for outside audiences did not mean that tools suddenly represented a better income for makers. In fact, tools had facilitated engagement with diverse economies for many decades already. In 1915, the last Sliammon hereditary chief Tom Timothy (known as Chief Tom) explained to the Commission on Indian Lands and Indian Affairs:

We want to get some tools so that we can clean up our Lot and farm it. . . We want to get some horses to fix up our land, and we want some ploughs. We want you to help us get these things to-day. I guess next year we can get more land under cultivation and we want more tools to do it with. All of my people want to work their land. I want to get some seed potatoes so that we can put them in this spring. You know what is good for people to use so that they make their living. I am a pretty poor Indian and I have not been in school -- you Commissioners are away ahead of us -- you know how to make money.⁴⁶

Chief Tom hoped to establish an economic climate for the reserve that included agricultural success and that fostered a positive settler perception of the community. In this case, the tools as much as the final product were important for Chief Tom to highlight. In his argument, tools were intended to communicate to the commissioners that he understood their desire for Indigenous people to conform to defined lifestyles. These tools in 1915 conversations were intended to operate at least partially within a wage labour economy -- if not in agricultural pursuits then in Sliammon leaders' arguments to the federal government that their community was legitimate and respectable. In turn, the wage labour economy would support the trade and economic activities that enabled contemporary makers like Charlie Bob and Melvin Mitchell to continue their work.

As Dakota scholar Philip Deloria has noted, expectations for Indigenous people have been created and re-created through discourses: processes and conversations that have reinforced categories to which non-Indigenous people have expected Indigenous people to belong.⁴⁷ The “unexpected places” where Indigenous people have existed have been places where ideas of tradition and authenticity have intersected and sometimes conflicted. They have been spaces historically dominated by non-Indigenous perspectives. Processes of making things have sometimes offered inroads into these places, allowing makers and consumers alike to point out barriers. Makers have then been able to either choose to meet those expectations to cater to demand for their items, or challenge expectations to highlight the more specific needs of their families or communities. Even when community members stated rigid definitions of authenticity, their use of tools helps us to read between the lines for historical moments when personal economic needs and political definitions of tradition did not always match up tidily. Objects and the tools that have made them illuminate the complex relationships among the personal, the commercial, the aesthetic, and the political. They help us to focus on Indigenous individuals’

agency and perspectives, instead of expectations defined by settlers.

Tools, Gender, and Politics

The spindle and the awl are two tools that are based in part on skills that contemporary community members have defined as traditional. But their origins and subsequent uses make tools important for interpreting Tla'amin histories beyond a single perspective. In particular, as expectations for gender roles in Sliammon and in Canadian society in general have shifted in the twentieth century, the notion of tradition has become more diverse as well. The spindle and the awl were made with a gendered division of labour in mind. Historically, spinning had been a feminine task and carving a masculine one in Sliammon people's lives. This is not to say that either of these activities were strictly confined to either domestic or public spheres--quite the opposite, in fact, as knitted and woven items travelled widely by being sold in the community and beyond, while the most practical of carved items supported household needs.⁴⁸ For instance, Charlie Bob reflected on his grandmother's spindle and the sweaters that she knit from the resulting yarn. He explained that she sold the sweaters locally and on Vancouver Island: a broad geographic range that reflected the extent of her connections. While the tools themselves appeared static, tracing their use over time shows us how Tla'amin people adapted those histories to meet changing community perspectives and needs.

Awls like Melvin Mitchell's are also important tools for cedar root basket-weaving. Awls supported women's economic ventures in the early twentieth century, as many women in Sliammon relied on trading or selling baskets to consumers in Powell River.⁴⁹ The conditions in which women made baskets were part of an economy of making objects: Sliammon women were particularly dependent on selling baskets if they did not have a husband in the work force or able

to provide for the family in other ways.⁵⁰ Most often, women's basket work found interested takers in Powell River. This market facilitated Sliammon household work, but also sometimes offered inroads for these women's husbands or children to make connections with work opportunities in Powell River, since the consumers of baskets were generally affiliated with major employers like the paper mill. At other times, making traditional items supported Sliammon people's economic ability, for instance by creating baskets for clam digging and selling. Carved items, typically made by men before it was common to buy household goods in stores, were also found most commonly in quotidian uses. The TUS interviews helped to build a picture of both the activities and the expectations for men's and women's work, by showing which tool users created visible or public finished products like food or household items like baskets that were intended to be decorative as well as practical. This was work that, even while it appeared to adhere to gendered roles envisioned by the early twentieth century Canadian society, also made more fluid the boundary between public and private spheres. In this way, gendered uses of tools were in fact also ways to give Sliammon makers economic autonomy at a time when that was limited by neighbouring settlers.

All the same, it is evident today that the attendees of the regular traditional skills classes and gatherings--some sponsored by the Sliammon Band Council, others operating somewhat more informally--self-select largely by gender, with mostly women weaving baskets and mostly men carving. Sandy Point is one of several exceptions to this trend, as a regular attendee of both the weaving and the carving gatherings. He explained that when he decided to quit drinking several years ago, he needed something to occupy him, and turned to weaving, which he had first been introduced to several decades earlier but hadn't embraced until much later. Making the conscious decision to return to weaving was therefore also a conscious engagement with

personal and community histories: he explained that he enjoys weaving because it connects to his history and the people in it, enabling him to empathize with what they thought about.⁵¹ For him, the specific activity of weaving was not as significant as the depictions of historical continuity that weaving provided. Similarly, Charlie Bob is quick to note that, possibly somewhat to his surprise, “even the women” attend his weekly carving classes.⁵² Charlie’s remarks suggest that the processes of making things are now more significant than simply mirroring or recreating the original contexts in which objects were produced. Making things has adapted to changing gender roles. By extension, the tools in use in these contexts have not been static; they have literally helped to construct community members’ engagements with their histories.

Contemporary Advocacy through Historical Tools

The spindle and the awl highlight changes over time within community members’ arguments for their legitimacy as Indigenous people. For Charlie Bob, spindles created economic opportunity for both him and his grandmother: she sold fashionable Cowichan sweaters--or, as Charlie Bob and other non-Cowichan people sometimes refer to them, simply “Indian sweaters” -- knitted from the wool she spun. For Charlie, the spindle itself may or may not create another product, but is instead itself the handmade object of interest. The spindle now has as much a conversational role as a practical one; these objects can help to create or change knowledge relationships over time. Melvin Mitchell’s awl, for instance, has facilitated both acquisition and production. These two processes highlight the complex relationships among tools, the things they help to make, and ongoing negotiation of interactions among people in Sliammon and neighbouring Powell River. Melvin described to me how he has replaced the handle on the awl whenever it has worn out. When he does this, he reinforces the tool as a durable item that

continues to facilitate--explicitly, in his analysis--the connections created by the objects it carves. He explained how his grandfather would have to walk for three days to collect yellow cedar from a mountaintop and take on other relevant resource-harvesting tasks along the way, leaving the rest of the family to take care of the household. In this story, Melvin conveyed how even the smallest carved item was the product of extensive relationships. He sees his grandfather's and great-grandfather's tools, which he has inherited, as durable and living objects. These are objects that live on with his input, repair, and innovation--he described how he had once recreated an older tool using a car part.⁵³ Originally, the metal portion of the awl was purchased by Melvin's grandfather in a simple economic transaction between an Indigenous person and a settler. It was likely a transaction in which little understanding or exchange of ideas took place, since it happened at a time when the Indian Act dictated much of Sliammon people's lives, as did racial and social divides locally between Sliammon and the neighbouring industrial town of Powell River: Melvin Mitchell describes relationships between Sliammon and Powell River as "sometimes still like cowboys and Indians."⁵⁴

Racism has been a persistent theme. Ernie Harry, who in later years would become a particularly enthusiastic supporter of the controversial treaty commented in 1996 of Powell River municipal politicians: "And they're filling their guts up with food. And the Indians stand there with an empty plate, it took them 50 years to give us a glass of beer."⁵⁵ Throughout much of the twentieth century, relationships among Sliammon and Powell River people beyond the confines of the reserve were either intended to reinforce Euro-Canadian social and racial hierarchies, or to dictate the spaces in which Indigenous people's activities were deemed legitimate. For many Indigenous people, the town of Powell River was primarily a space of economic transaction, where women would go to trade or sell baskets or fish for food and clothing, and men would go

to purchase their personal tools or work in the paper mill. By contrast, recreational activities like visiting the movie theatre where until the 1950s Sliammon people were relegated to the upstairs balcony only, or participation in local sports leagues, were regular but incidental. Ongoing interpersonal relationships were usually infrequent, and the predominantly Euro-Canadian historical perspectives represented in the Powell River archives suggest both individually and in aggregate that it was through purchases and sales of tools, clothing, food, and handmade items such as baskets that Sliammon and Powell River people engaged with each other in the early-to-mid twentieth century. A 1961 article in the *Powell River News*, for instance, described then-chief Leslie Adams' employment history as noteworthy and unusual, stating:

The young Sliammon chief is one of only two Indians working at the local mill and...Adams, by his example is helping to break down barriers which have existed over the years as a result of the Indian's reputation as an unreliable worker. In the early days of the mill, particularly, Indians earned the reputation for being unsuitable for work in an industrial plant. The demands of a different culture's working pattern is not so irritating today. . . .⁵⁶

Given that this was the environment in which Sliammon families sought to make a living, Joe Mitchell's awl was, then, a tool that not only created objects; it also created the fundamental channels through which intercultural negotiations and (mis)understandings took place.

More recently, the items created by the awl have served as tangible interpretations of Tla'amin histories, communicated to Euro-Canadians who have lived as neighbours to the Tla'amin for decades, but have been able to exist there without engaging with the realities of Tla'amin lives and concerns. Some of the carved paddles that the awl has helped to create, for instance, have been used by local police and Tla'amin youth in a canoeing program intended to

facilitate positive relationships between the two groups. A new canoe, carved in the style of Melvin Mitchell's grandfather's, has become part of an exchange program between Sliammon youth and youth from the Heiltsuk community of Bella Bella, further north on the coast. The Bella Bella youth had given a hand-carved paddle to Sliammon, and in the summer of 2013, Melvin Mitchell was finishing a canoe that was intended for Sliammon youth to paddle to Bella Bella to bring a paddle of their own exchange the following summer. The intention is that each year, a new paddle will travel from one community to the other (Sliammon reciprocated in 2014), with a new design each year to mark the ongoing significance of the histories and narratives surrounding the making of these items.⁵⁷

Even as these items represent efforts at new relationships, Tla'amin and settler people alike interpret the objects as representative pieces of iconic and perhaps timeless Tla'amin histories. Yet in the very existence of the paddles, there remains an acknowledgement that the long-standing relationship between Sliammon and settler law enforcement was coercive or reactionary, particularly in the heyday of the most restrictive Indian Act policies but not limited to that era.⁵⁸ Similarly, the new relationships that the paddlers of the new canoe have sought to forge have not emerged from a vacuum. As Corinne Mitchell, Melvin Mitchell's mother, has noted, pre-contact era connections among communities extended in a network all along the coast and beyond. With the advent of nineteenth-century reserves and their restriction of Indigenous economies and lifestyles, previously-robust connections dwindled.⁵⁹ In efforts to recreate or restore inter-community relations, initiatives like the canoe and the paddle exchange program rely on builders of the physical objects as much as they rely on the historical narratives behind them. Tools, in these instances, have been communicative tools as well as practical ones. They have made it possible to reinscribe relationships in deliberate and tangible ways.

Tools and makers have responded not only to histories of contact or of a binary of “Native-newcomer” relations.⁶⁰ Tools also create a way to define historical timelines in Tla’amin narratives in more complex ways than as simply a history of reaction to outside incursion. They also show how Sliammon community members have shaped and exerted their own influence on past and present interpretations of the past. Burial boxes, carved to hold the remains of Tla’amin ancestors uncovered and studied by university archaeologists, communicate to settlers the importance of a long history in a place, while also allowing the community to renew its own commitment to this past. The tools have become a way of building conversation about histories among cultures and communities. At a ceremony to repatriate the remains of ancestors that had been returned to Sliammon from archaeology labs at Simon Fraser University in 2014, community leaders expressed ambivalence about the removal of these remains from their original resting place, but they also noted that the repatriation was an opportunity for youth and newcomers to the community to be exposed to histories that community members deemed important. Chief Clint Williams commented publicly at a repatriation ceremony on connections between made items and histories:

It’s somewhat of a shame that our ancestors have to be removed from their burial sites and brought to schools to be studied. I always feel it makes me angry; I’m sure it makes you angry, but I’m very proud to see them returned home. And I just want to acknowledge, we had a little bit of a ceremony here at the beginning, and I don’t know if everyone was clear on this, but . . . one of our elders, Alvin [Wilson], donated four paddles, he wanted one for each of these boxes here. I think that’s very symbolic in the fact that we’re helping our ancestors here on their journey home, and they’ll be going with all of our other ancestors that are buried in the Sliammon cemetery.⁶¹

Including these symbolic paddles was a means of constructing connections to ancestors, and the long histories of place and space that their presence represented. Yet the repatriation ceremony was also a place to construct histories of relationships to universities and other institutions.

Denise Smith, who spearheaded the initiative to bring the remains back to Sliammon, elaborated on the links between constructing things and constructing historical significance:

I want to thank Melvin [Mitchell] for a couple of things. Melvin was really man of the hour; we had a couple of problems with the size of the boxes, and he was able to just jump in and take care of that and make sure things were okay when we got here. So you know, he really went above and beyond to take care of that, and we're really grateful to you for that. He also, we gave one of his canoes as a gift to SFU. . . We thought that was really appropriate because it was their journey home, and we thought that was a nice gift to give to SFU and thank them for taking care of our ancestors while they were there.⁶²

In these discussions of objects, tools occupied a background role, but by reading the leaders' remarks in terms of processes rather than final products of making, processes of community history narration also become clearer. While the burial boxes themselves allowed the remains to be returned to Sliammon, Melvin's skill at resizing the boxes – in other words, his skill with tools – took on greater significance when the repatriation process ran into problems. This process of making and refining the burial boxes illustrated that repatriation was not only the arrival of the remains. Rather, undertaking the transport and the ceremony required community members to consider whether these steps were undertaken in a way that the ancestors would recognize. When the burial boxes needed to be changed, community members asserted their agency in the process by advocating for the repatriation to be done right, but beyond that, they also advocated that their historical knowledge of ceremony be upheld. The tools that constructed the items accompanying

the ceremonies were tools for asserting agency as well as historical facts. Indeed, Melvin Mitchell has commented that because his tools have fostered so many relationships, they are living things. The histories that they helped to construct therefore also responded to the practical and ideological needs of community members, as Melvin's tools met the need for appropriately-sized burial boxes.

Tools have been part of Tla'amin advocacy for a long time. In a TUS interview, Sliammon elder Nora Wilson relayed a disconnect between familiar pre-colonialism tasks and tools, and the expectations that colonial powers held for those same lifestyles in that time period:

Nora Wilson: My grandmother used to dig clams with a stick, a certain kind of stick that doesn't break. They have a name for it and she would dig clams and she would get sacks and sacks, just with that stick, not a fork. I used to be really amazed at her, she would sit there and pry all the clams out. She'd do really good. All the old timers did that, they never had forks, so they used sticks, about that fat. They have a name for that kind of stick that doesn't break. I used to admire her, she would get more than the ones that had a fork.

Karen Galligos (interviewer: What about tools in the old days? Like axes, knives?

NW: I guess there must have been, not that I've heard of. I don't know. I think they had knives all along, or they made their own out of some sharp rock I heard. My husband used to tell me all kinds of stories that his dad told him and I never listened and I'm sorry now. The first time the white people came around, they didn't know anything, they gave them flour, 50 pound flours. They come here to the beach give it to them, they didn't know anything so they just take the flour bag, spill the flour out, they didn't know how to use it. I don't know why they never had bread or what. That's the only thing I remember,

they said they take the bags and make a shirt out of it. I guess, they learned how after, I guess they showed them how. He used to tell me all kind of things but like I said I never paid attention. He used to tell all of us but we didn't pay attention. That's when the first white people came around.⁶³

In this encounter, tools formed part of a story about contact: a story in which misunderstanding or change was directly juxtaposed with expertise and a deep history. In Nora Wilson's analysis, adapting tools introduced by settlers was not necessarily an enhancement. Instead, the tools involved in these encounters offered to community historians an illustration of the ways that local people had argued for community resilience in the face of change. Through stories about contact, and about the construction of things and histories, community members have argued for a balance between histories that highlight longevity and resilience, and histories that comment on successful engagement with change. Although stories about tools may on the surface appear to be efforts toward defining a specific, static past, they also show how Tla'amin histories can be mobilized to emphasize agency in the face of colonialism that affected even simple domestic tasks.

Conclusion

As a newcomer to Sliammon, it is probably unsurprising that most of my conversations with community members have been didactic in nature, with local people seeking to interpret their community and historical narratives to me with the clear understanding that I was a settler, a student, and from another province. Innovation and change over time also feature in these narratives, perhaps more implicitly but no less meaningfully for the people involved. Indirectly, handmade items have helped to forefront specific historical connections that had fallen by the

wayside until new historical interpretations were both metaphorically and literally built and narrated by handmade items. Some of these new interpretations came from Melvin's stories of Joe Mitchell's awl. Other times, similar histories of making have been reinforced by new ideas like Charlie Bob's spindle. Melvin's mother Corinne Mitchell, whose husband Joe was the original owner of the awl, has in recent years found it personally meaningful to be involved with explicit creations or re-creations of a pan-Coast Salish world. Corinne and several people from Bella Bella further up the coast planned a large and ornate naming ceremony to forefront family connections between the two communities that had, they felt, been buried by the increasingly sedentary, localized nature of Coast Salish communities following the creation of reserves in B.C.⁶⁴ A particularly noteworthy seal on the ceremony was the exchange of woven blankets, intended to spark an ongoing reciprocity within these newly-reinforced family ties. Similarly, Corinne has also worked closely with planning and participating in the annual Canoe Journey, a multi-week canoe voyage through Coast Salish territories, involving dozens or even hundreds of Coast Salish people from communities all along the Pacific coast of Canada and the U.S. Both events took physical, handmade items as symbols of a pre-contact past, but in so doing, the same objects also helped to construct reinterpretations of that past that are intended to counter the legacies of colonialism that Sliammon people remember and resist.

The spindle and awl – like other tools -- have facilitated creation of personal items that show the connection between tradition and contemporary social, economic, and political statements. These specific case studies of two types of tools uncover both events and shifting historical narratives within these processes, and help to explore the relationships both created and embodied by handmade objects. Tools for Indigenous people were and remain means of creating cross-cultural and intra-cultural exchange; for non-Indigenous people interacting with these same

tools, these exchanges have been more temporary, despite the proximity of Sliammon and Powell River to each other. They have, however, shifted from being strictly economic or regulatory relationships, to ones that have incorporated Sliammon words and objects into local tourism, or responded to the treaty negotiation process and its outcomes. These relationships among communities have become more explicitly dialogic in nature — though not necessarily less contentious when settler colonialism remains a strong force. Looking at specific tools is a way to learn about changing relationships: relationships that have been both constructed and interpreted by the literal tools of history-making.

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NOTES

I would like to acknowledge the work and knowledge of community members in Sliammon, both those cited here, along with the dozens of others who have helped to build my awareness of Tla'amin histories, culture, and contemporary concerns. As a settler scholar, I have aimed to be aware of the inherent legacies of colonialism attached to my work, and while that task and any shortcomings are my own, I'm grateful to those in Sliammon who have made the time to explain their experiences and analyses to me.

¹ Typically, Sliammon refers to the place name of the village on the reserve, while Tla'amin is

the more accurate rendering of the people's name for themselves. I follow this distinction when referring to the place and the people who live there.

² Linguists and anthropologists have sometimes called the Tla'amin language "Mainland Comox," suggesting close linguistic and kinship ties with the Comox people on Vancouver Island (which community members acknowledge, especially as part of pan-Salish histories). In contrast, the three communities of Sliammon, Klahoose, and Homalco describe their relationship as uniquely intertwined – sometimes, depending on the account, even as three components of the same community.

³ See Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia*, Brenda and David McLean Canadian Studies Series (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2002).

⁴ Cole Harris has referred to this process as the "resettlement" of the region. See Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia*, Brenda and David McLean Canadian Studies Series (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

⁵ I first visited Sliammon in 2012, as a "field instructor" – working to support and facilitate students' research – at the first Tla'amin/University of Saskatchewan/Simon Fraser University combined ethnohistory and archaeology field school. My role grew out of my experience undertaking community-engaged oral history research in other communities rather than my familiarity with Sliammon: like the students I worked with, it was my first visit to the community. During that month, the students' research projects took precedence within the condensed time frame; I began to speak with community members about my work on subsequent

visits. Sliammon is a day's travel time by air from my home, a journey dependent on careful negotiation of ferry and flight schedules, or an ability to pay for flights directly to the neighbouring town of Powell River, which is unconnected by road to the more accessible Vancouver airport. By necessity my trips to Sliammon have been relatively infrequent (averaging two visits per year since 2012), for one-to-three-week stretches at a time. Travel considerations have allowed me several concerted stretches of immersion in daily rhythms of the community, but have also meant a rigidity in my schedule that has not allowed me to accommodate local people's availability to the extent that they and I would have preferred, or to be present for more than a few larger-scale community events. I have met community members mainly through personal introductions or recommendations from those community members I met during my first stay in Sliammon. Spending time at community events, workshops, or gatherings has allowed me to meet a wider range of people beyond those most closely connected to treaty office projects and interests.

⁶ Shepard Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1999).

⁷ I understood from my original conversations with Charlie that he was planning to carve a spindle. Since then, I believe he has decided not to undertake the project. Regardless, spindles shaped our discussions about carving and about Charlie's commercial enterprise as a carver. Charlie Bob, interview with author, January 2014.

⁸ Melvin Mitchell, interview with author, July 2013.

⁹ H. G. Barnett, *The Coast Salish of British Columbia*, University of Oregon Monographs. Studies in Anthropology, no. 4 (Eugene, OR: University of Oregon, 1955), 29–30. Historically, Tla'amin leadership was passed down through hereditary channels. With the advent of the *Indian*

Act in 1876, First Nations were required to conform to governance structures dictated by the federal government. This included electing chiefs according to western concepts of democracy, rather than following culturally specific leadership structures. See Elsie Paul, *Written as I Remember It*, 75.

¹⁰ McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940-1980*, 256.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

¹² Cited in McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940-1980*, 6.

¹³ Keith Thor Carlson, 'Innovation, Tradition, Colonialism, and Aboriginal Fishing Conflicts in the Lower Fraser Canyon', in *New Histories for Old: Changing Perspectives on Canada's Native Pasts* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 45.

¹⁴ Paige Sylvia Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ *R. v. Van der Peet* (1996) and *R. v. Delgamuukw* (1997) have been particularly relevant in British Columbian contexts, as both have laid out specific criteria for legal definitions of "traditional" Aboriginal rights or practices.

¹⁶ Anthropologist of material culture Arjun Appadurai has argued that material culture itself can be a bridge between perspectives from cultural anthropology and archaeology. In Appadurai's analysis, though, the idea of culture exists without historical context, either for the concept of culture itself or for the objects in question. His discussion of objects therefore remains largely separate from makers' own perspectives on the objects under their control. See Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

¹⁷ Carmen Robertson, “Clearing Paths,” in *Clearing a Path: New Ways of Seeing Traditional Indigenous Art*, ed. Carmen Robertson and Sherry Farrell Racette (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2009), 10.

¹⁸ More recent scholarship in the fields of archaeology, linguistics, and history have sought to address aspects of the colonial legacy of academia, regardless of specific disciplinary approaches. In the past two decades or so, some interested Sliammon community members have worked with linguist Honore Watanabe on developing a Tla’amin dictionary; with teams of archaeologists, often led by Dana Lepofsky and John Welch, to document and secure protection of village sites and resource-gathering areas; and with historians (mainly graduate students) on post-contact historical questions. For further discussion of these collaborations see, e.g., Johnathan Clapperton, “Desolate Viewscapes: Sliammon First Nation, Desolation Sound Marine Park and Environmental Narratives,” *Environment and History* 18, no. 4 (2012): 529-59; Honoré Watanabe, *A morphological description of Sliammon, Mainland Comox Salish: With a sketch of syntax*, Endangered Languages of the Pacific Rim, Faculty of Informatics, Osaka Gakuin University, 2003; John R. Welch, Dana Lepofsky, and Michelle Washington “Assessing collaboration with the Sliammon First Nation in a community-based heritage research and stewardship program,” *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 26, no. 2 (2011): 171-190.

¹⁹ Melvin Mitchell, interview with author, 2013.

²⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 2001).

²¹ Mary Jane McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940-1980* (Winnipeg, MA: University of Manitoba Press, 2014), 6.

²² Melvin Mitchell, interview with author, 2013.

²³ Linda Louie and Eugene Louie, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, 13 October 1998, 57.58.59, Sliammon Treaty Society.

²⁴ Dorothy I. D. Kennedy and Randy Bouchard, 'Utilization of Fishes, Beach Foods, and Marine Animals by the Tl'uhus Indian People of British Columbia, December 1974, 24, CH013, Sliammon Treaty Society.

²⁵ Stó:lō knowledge keeper Albert (Sonny) McHalsie has described how some Indigenous people are engaged in processes of re-establishing physical and ceremonial connections to their histories, which they feel are at risk of being lost after two centuries of colonialism. Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, 'We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us', in *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, ed. Bruce Granville Miller (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 85.

²⁶ Community members today have commented that undertaking subsistence activities is sometimes difficult, as settler property owners occasionally threaten violence when local Indigenous people seek to access traditional resources.

²⁷ Gitksan anthropologist Charles Menzies has discussed how taking Indigenous ethnographies of colonialism seriously sometimes disrupts existing power structures in academia. See Charles Menzies, "Standing on the Shore with Saaban: An Anthropological Rapprochement with an Indigenous Intellectual Tradition," *Collaborative Anthropologies* 6 (2013), 187. Therefore, although Alvin's and other makers' definitions of tradition can appear static or essentialized, they in fact respond directly to superficial ethnographies that did not account for complex motivations and community needs for using traditional tools.

²⁸ Alvin Wilson, interview with author, 23 February 2015.

²⁹ See Iain McKechnie et al., “Archaeological data provide alternative hypotheses on Pacific herring (*Clupea pallasii*) distribution, abundance, and variability,” *PNAS* 111:9 (2013). As well, Elsie Paul has described the consequences for her community when the herring fishery was opened to commercial fishery: “Now we don’t get herring anymore. It’s all cleaned out. Several years ago, they opened seine fishing in this area...And they scooped the herring. We never did get herring after that.” Elsie Paul, *Written as I Remember It*, 116.

³⁰ Winona Wheeler, “Social Relations of Indigenous Oral Histories,” in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2004), 201.

³¹ Corey Snelgrove, Rita Kaur Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, “Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 3, no. 2 (2014): 6.

³² See Mary Jane McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History, 1940-1980*, *Critical Studies in Native History* 16 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014).

³³ Cited in Adele Perry, “Historiography That Breaks Your Heart: Van Kirk and the Writing of Feminist History,” in *Finding a Way to the Heart: Feminist Writings on Aboriginal and Women’s History in Canada*, ed. Robin Jarvis Brownlie and Valerie J. Korinek (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 81.

³⁴ James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Authority,” *Representations* 1, no. 2 (1983): 132.

³⁵ Maynard Harry, 11 December 1995, MIS 8A/B.9A, Sliammon Treaty Society.

³⁶ Sliammon weaving group, personal communication with author, 2013.

³⁷ Agnes McGee and Lorna Mckay, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, 27 May 1996, TUS 27.28.28a, Sliammon Treaty Society.

³⁸ See Njoki Wane, “[Re]claiming my Indigenous knowledge: Challenges, resistance, and opportunities,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, #1 (2013): 93-107; and Albert (Sonny) McHalsie, “We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us,” in *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, ed. Bruce Granville Miller (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 85.

³⁹ Benny Charlie, interview by Dora Galligos and Connie Wilson, 2 May 1996, TUS 6.7, Sliammon Treaty Society.

⁴⁰ When I first met cultural coordinator David (Bud) Louie and described my doctoral research, he suggested I speak with Willie Peters about histories of making things. Although Willie opted not to meet with me, other community members often cited his work as representative of skills and objects they admired as traditional.

⁴¹ Thomas Albert August, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, 12 August 1998, MIS 55.56, Sliammon Treaty Society.

⁴² Agnes McGee, interview by Connie Wilson and Karen Galligos, 21 July 1998, MIS 48.49.50.51, Sliammon Treaty Society.

⁴³ Wilson Duff, ‘Sense and Nonsense on Haida Pipes’, n.d., 46–47, Wilson Duff fonds, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

⁴⁴ Wilson Duff, ‘Site Visits: Kitsquala 3-5’, n.d., Wilson Duff fonds, Box 3, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology.

⁴⁵ Wilson Duff, ‘Site Visits: Hazelton S-3’, n.d., Wilson Duff fonds, Box 3, University of British Columbia Museum of Anthropology. Tla’amin elder Elsie Paul has described how segregation played out in Powell River bars and other social situations. Even after Indigenous people were allowed in bars, women and men were segregated, and Indigenous women were required to leave

the premises by the early afternoon. Whether in town or on reserve, laws (both official and informal) were enforced strictly and often harshly, often involving arrests and jail time. See Elsie Paul, *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2014), 255-256.

⁴⁶ Canada, ‘Commission on Indian Lands and Indian Affairs’, 1915, RG10 microfilm B-1456, Library and Archives Canada.

⁴⁷ Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 4.

⁴⁸ Charlie Bob, interview with author, July 2014.

⁴⁹ Gail Blaney, interview with author, 19 February 2015.

⁵⁰ Elsie Paul has described baskets as being “all part of...our livelihood,” because they facilitated trade with settlers in Powell River for clothing and food. Because the baskets were part of business transactions, Sliammon people were permitted into Powell River: something that was allowed for business only. Elsie Paul, *Written as I Remember It*, 125-26.

⁵¹ Sandy Point, interview with author, 3 August 2014.

⁵² Charlie Bob, interview with author, March 2014.

⁵³ Melvin Mitchell, interview with author, 21 July 2013.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Melvin’s characterization of these relationships is particularly apt, given Elsie Paul’s reflections on the spaces in Powell River where segregation occurred. The local movie theatre, the Patricia Theatre, required Indigenous people to sit in the segregated balcony – where they would watch Westerns and the Hollywood conflicts between cowboys and Indians. See Elsie Paul, *Written as I Remember It*, 257.

⁵⁵ Ernie Harry, interview by Karen Galligos and Connie Wilson, 29 April 1996, TUS 1, Sliammon Treaty Society.

⁵⁶ ‘Chief Leslie Adams’, *Powell River News*, 24 August 1967, sec. B1.

⁵⁷ Melvin Mitchell, interview with author, July 2013 and August 2014.

⁵⁸ Melvin Mitchell, interview with author, July 2014.

⁵⁹ Corinne Mitchell, interview with author, August 2014.

⁶⁰ This term was pioneered and popularized by historian J. R. Miller in the 1980s. While it is useful in that it forefronts the fact that Indigenous people have been central to histories of Canada rather than outliers, it risks depicting relationships among cultures as simply two-sided exchanges rather than as complex, ongoing negotiations involving differences within as well as among communities.

⁶¹ Sliammon Repatriation Ceremony, Sliammon First Nation, published Feb 3 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISHq1Q-HHho>, 0:44

⁶² Sliammon Repatriation Ceremony, Sliammon First Nation, published Feb 3 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISHq1Q-HHho>, 6:18

⁶³ Nora Wilson, interviewed by Connie Wilson & Karen Galligos, May 15, 1996, TUS 20.21

⁶⁴ Corinne Mitchell, interview with author, July 2013.