

Spirits of Our Whaling Ancestors



**SPIRITS
OF OUR
WHALING
ANCESTORS**

Revitalizing Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth Traditions

CHARLOTTE COTÉ

Foreword by MICAH McCARTY

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FRONTISPIECE: Whaler photograph by Edward S. Curtis; Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria.

*This book is dedicated to my mother, the late Evelyn Georg,
whose love nurtured me, whose wisdom guided me,
whose knowledge of our language and culture educated
and enlightened me, and whose spirit continues to support
and nourish me through life's journey.*

Contents

Foreword by Micah McCarty	<i>ix</i>
Kleko Kleko / Thank You	<i>xi</i>
Orthography	<i>xiv</i>
Nuu-chah-nulth Pronunciation Guide	<i>xvi</i>
Abbreviations	<i>xx</i>
INTRODUCTION	
Honoring Our Whaling Ancestors	3
1 / TSAWALK	
The Centrality of Whaling to Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth Life	15
2 / UTLA	
Worldviews Collide: The Arrival of <i>Mamalhn'i</i> in Indian Territory	42
3 / KUTSA	
Maintaining the Cultural Link to Whaling Ancestors	69
4 / MUU	
The Makah Harvest a Whale	115

5 / SUCHA

Challenges to Our Right to Whale 150

6 / NUPU

Legal Impediments Spark a 2007 Whale Hunt 166

7 / ATLPU

Restoring *Nanash'aqtl* Communities 193

Notes 209

Bibliography 247

Index 265

Foreword

IN THIS VERY RELEVANT STUDY OF MAKAH AND NUU-CHAH-NULTH whaling traditions and practices, the reader is afforded an inside perspective on modern aboriginal self-determination from the point of view of a Native scholar.

The Native drive to sustain the ancient traditions of whaling is forced to adapt to the pressures of Western civilization, an experience that can make for a “two-world” sense of identity. The realities of the Native homeland and those of the outside world are often an ocean apart; most people are far from their ancestral homes and disconnected from a natural experience of an organic environment. On the other hand, there is a place we Natives call home, where we understand one another better than most mainstreamers will ever know and where we return throughout our lives. We are taught from a place-based perspective, with a multi-generational, long-term observation of the world that provides the means by which we define ourselves. Charlotte Coté will introduce you to a “West Coaster’s” place in the world heritage.

As a Makah who steadfastly values what it means to know who you are and where you come from, I find this book to be a proud affirmation of family history and a sense of belonging, demonstrating a thread that connects and a chord that resonates with Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth, regardless of the legal divisions of colonial borders. Dr. Coté makes an important contribution to indigenous scholarly resources, a contribution from the heart of the West Coast. Because she herself was active in the movement to revitalize Makah whaling, she sees the need for a two-pronged campaign: one that is a culturally grounded education of our people, by our people, for our people, and one that is steeped in the

diplomacy of educating peoples of the outside world. She takes the reader along on a “canoe journey” to explore both approaches, so that the Native and the non-Native worlds can better understand each other. This canoe journey is a fitting metaphor for cultural sensitivity in light of the recent United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Rights. Only four member nations voted against the Declaration—New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States of America—which is an interesting fact about English-speaking colonialism.

Dr. Coté introduces the reader to our people and provides identifying elements of our history, and then her canoe takes us to the heart of an emotionally charged debate on the philosophical differences between Native beliefs and those founded in the animal rights movement. She assertively confronts the school of thought that animals, and especially whales, are not for human consumption. She exposes a New Age dogma that is both pious and inflexible, a dogma that may well be a product of the corporate “Save the Whales” culture, in which the financial sustainability of a nongovernmental organization (NGO) can compromise its ethics and may have spawned another brand of supremacist with another style of ethnic cleansing.

This book is profoundly important to the advancement of a better understanding of cultural diversity. It is also a must-read for Native students and scholars. Dr. Coté takes a proud stand on a controversial issue; she sheds light on our sacred traditions and helps safeguard their endurance.

MICAH MCCARTY
Vice-Chair, Makah Tribal Council
April 2010

Kleko Kleko / Thank You

THIS BOOK WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE LOVE, support, and encouragement of my beautiful family, my Tseshaht community, my *haw'iih*, and my entire Nuu-chah-nulth Nation. It was their words, stories, and teachings, their strength and honesty, that guided my hands as I wrote the book. They encouraged me to pursue my scholastic dreams, but at the same time to stay always rooted in my culture and community. They have all given me so much in my life and made me the proud Tseshaht woman I am today. My deep appreciation also goes to the many Makah people whose wisdom threads throughout these pages. To all, kleko kleko! I hope with this book to humbly give something back.

To my parents, Jack and the late Evelyn Georg, kleko kleko for their unconditional love and support and for encouraging me to *thlulh silh a*, to do something good with my life. My mother's spirit is always with me, and knowing this keeps me going. I will hold her in my heart forever. Kleko kleko to my late grandparents, Hughie and Grace Watts, for their wonderful teachings and beautiful stories. Kleko kleko to my late brother-in-law, Art Thompson, and my sister, Charlene Thompson-Reid, for opening their home and their hearts to me. I will forever carry with me the utmost respect for and gratitude to Art, who was always available to share his knowledge and his amazing and insightful whaling stories, which were filled with passion and sincerity.

A special kleko kleko to my friend Makah Tribal Council vice-chair Micah McCarty. In the many conversations we had over the years, Micah demonstrated to me how important the whaling tradition was and still is to the Makah people. His passion for his culture, his whaling identity, and his devotion to commu-

nity continue to empower me. I am grateful to him for graciously sharing family whaling stories and his knowledge of Makah history. Throughout this process, Micah has become a dear friend.

My sincere gratitude goes to my cousin Lena Ross and my late aunty Linda Watts, who work/ed extensively with the Nuu-chah-nulth language and helped me understand and write our words. Kleko kleko to *Haw'ilth* Tom Mexsis Hap-pynook for sharing his knowledge and being available at any time to answer my questions; to Makah linguist and cultural expert Maria Pascua for cordially providing me with the Makah words I use in this book; to Makah whaler/harpooner Theron Parker for sharing with me thoughts and reflections on his own whaling history and identity and for providing me with rich details of the 1999 hunt; and to Makah whaler Wayne Johnson for our conversations, which, although brief, displayed his great passion for his whaling identity.

I would respectfully like to thank my elders Nelson Keitlah and Stanley Sam for taking the time to sit with me and share their personal stories about our whaling tradition. I still smile when I think of some of the candid stories Stanley told me. Kleko kleko to anthropologist/historian/archaeologist Denis St. Claire for helping me write my history and gather information about my great-great-grandfather Sayach'apis, and for showing such a deep love and respect for my elders and culture. Kleko kleko to my aunty Misbun (Eileen) Haggard and cousin Anne Hunter for sharing their cultural knowledge with me throughout many years. Thank you to my uncle Bob Soderlund, my sister Gail Peterson Gus, and my nieces Evelyn and Carmen Thompson for providing me with photographs, many of which I have used in this book. Thank you to Robin Wright and the Burke Museum and to Debbie Preston and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission for additional photographs.

My deep thanks go to my friends Susan McCallum and Marty Sands not only for proofreading my manuscript but, more importantly, for providing me with love, support, and encouragement during those times when I felt that I could not write another word. Thank you to my colleague Sasha Harmon for reading, critiquing, and editing my chapters. Thank you to University of Washington Press managing editor Marilyn Trueblood for guiding me through the manuscript revisions, to Tom Eykemans for his wonderful design, and special thanks to acquiring editor Jacqueline Ettinger for being so supportive and most of all patient as we worked through the process of turning my manuscript into this book. I am also extremely grateful to the Capell Family, who have shown keen interest in the book and given generous support to it.

A special kleko kleko to all the Makah people who showed me great hospital-

ity when I was in Neah Bay in 2000 conducting interviews and who have continued to help me throughout the years. To all my friends, colleagues, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews, elders, and community members, kleko kleko for providing me with guidance, support, love, patience, and knowledge, for never doubting me as I struggled to complete this book, and for always encouraging me. And finally, to the spirit of my great-great-grandfather Sayach'apis and to all the spirits of my whaling ancestors whose presence warmed and comforted my heart and soul as I wrote this book, kleko kleko!

Orthography

THE LANGUAGE OF MY PEOPLE IS THE SOUTHERN WAKASHAN, A LANGUAGE group that consists of Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka), which itself has several dialects; Ditidaht (Nitinat, Nitinaht); and Makah. The Wakashan language family is made up of seven related languages, spoken along the coast of British Columbia, on Vancouver Island, and on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State.¹

There have been various phonetic systems developed throughout the years to write the Nuu-chah-nulth, Ditidaht, and Makah languages. In the early 1900s, anthropologist/linguist Edward Sapir conducted fieldwork in Tseshaht territory, where he analyzed and recorded our language. He worked with Tseshaht member Alex (Alec) Thomas to develop a notation system based on Franz Boas's system that could be used to write Nuu-chah-nulth words.² Even after Sapir's death in 1939, Alex continued to work on a writing system for our language and sent thousands of pages of language and cultural material to the National Museum of Canada. Alex died in 1969, and in 1974 a practical orthography based on his work was published to help Nuu-chah-nulth people learn their language.³ Other writing systems were also developed by linguist Morris Swadesh, ethnographer/linguist Randy Bouchard, anthropologist Philip Drucker, and anthropologist Eugene Arima. In 2005 linguist John Stonham published *A Concise Dictionary of the Nuu-chah-nulth Language*, much of it based on Sapir's fieldwork materials.

In the last thirty years, the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth peoples have made great efforts to revitalize and preserve their languages. The Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council initiated a language program in the 1970s and began collect-

ing language resource materials. Nuu-chah-nulth elders and linguists worked together to develop a system of writing the Nuu-chah-nulth language by modifying the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). In 1989 the NTC produced the first Nuu-chah-nulth dictionaries based on this new language system: *Our World: T'aat'aaqsapa Cultural Dictionary* and *Our World—Our Ways: T'aat'aaqsapa Cultural Dictionary*. Each includes a brief introduction of the writing system used, a guide to the reading and pronunciation of words, and the writing of words in the various Nuu-chah-nulth dialects.⁴ The Makah also undertook to preserve their language and established the Makah Language Program through the Makah Cultural and Research Center. In 1978 the tribe created a dictionary using a modified form of the IPA and developed curriculum materials for their school.⁵

Although there is a system for writing our language, I have chosen instead to write the Nuu-chah-nulth and Makah words phonetically. I did this because the two languages have some sounds and symbols that are not used in English, and that notation can be difficult to understand, to read, and to say. Spelling the words as closely as possible to how they are pronounced makes them easier to read by those unaccustomed to reading symbols. My goal is to allow all readers to focus more on the meaning of the words. As I have not followed an established writing system, readers should use my spelling of Native words for pronunciation only and not for study of the Nuu-chah-nulth or Makah languages.⁶ Readers who would like to know more about systems to transcribe Wakashan languages are encouraged to consult the works described in the notes to this section.



I have provided a sample of the Nuu-chah-nulth words I include in my book to demonstrate the differences in how I write the words and how the words are written today in the Nuu-chah-nulth writing system. The sample shows the words written in English; written with a phonetic spelling, which I use; and written in the Tseshaht/Nuu-chah-nulth style, which is used by linguists in my community. For clarification, I use an apostrophe (') to denote a glottal stop, a hyphen to denote a break in the word, and a line under a letter to denote a breath sound (see also the Nuu-chah-nulth Pronunciation Guide, below).

English	Phonetic Spelling	Nuu-chah-nulth Language System
chief	<i>haw'ilth</i>	<i>haw?ił</i>
chiefs (plural)	<i>haw'iih</i>	<i>haw?iih</i>
lineage group	<i>ushtakimilh</i>	<i>ushtakimilh</i>
Native name	<i>qu'atsiic imtii</i>	<i>quʔaáciic ?imtii</i>
Nuu-chah-nulth	Nuu-chah-nulth	Nuučaan?u?
one	<i>tsawalk</i>	<i>ćawaak</i>
ritual bathing	<i>oo-simch</i>	<i>uu-simč</i>
thank you	<i>kleko kleko</i>	<i>ł?ekoo ł?ekoo</i>
Tseshaht	<i>Tseshaht</i>	<i>ćišaa?ath</i>

NOTE: The words written in our Nuu-chah-nulth language were provided to me by Tseshaht First Nation Education Services Manager Lena Ross, who is one of the Tseshaht language specialists.

NUU-CHAH-NULTH PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Vowels

- a has the sound in English *what*, or the “u” in *cup*
- aa has the sound in the British pronunciation of *father*, the first part of a sneeze, *ah-choo*
- e has the sound in *pet*
- ee sounds like the e in *eggs*
- i has the sound in English *it*
- ii has the sound in *greed* or *see*
- oo has the sound in *only*
- u has the sound in *took* or *note*
- uu has the sound in *boot* or *road*

Consonants

- c pronounced like “ts” in *nuts* or *bats*
- ć glottal sound, sounds like “ts” in *hats* pronounced explosively
- č sounds like “ch” in *chop*
- c sounds like *watch it* with the “ch” pronounced forcefully
- h has the sound in *home*
- ḥ sounds like an “h” made deep in the throat

k	has the sound in English <i>kite</i>
k̰	pronounced like a hard “k” with a popping sound
k ^w	sounds like “qu” in <i>queen</i>
k̰ ^w	sounds like “qu” in <i>quack</i> followed by a popping sound
ṭ	barred “l” sounds like “th” and exhaling
λ	barred landis, sounds like “tla” and placing your tongue behind your teeth
λ̰	sounds like “tla” with an “a”
m	has the sound in <i>morning</i>
m̰	sounds like an “m” with an “a,” “ma,” pronounced forcefully
n	has the sound in <i>nose</i>
n̰	has an “n” sound but pronounced forcefully
p	has the sound in <i>pig</i>
p̰	pronounced as an explosive or forceful “p”
q	sounds like a “k” made deep in the throat
q ^w	sounds like a “q” with a “w”
s	has the sound in <i>six</i>
š	sounds like the “sh” in <i>shoe</i>
t	has the sound in <i>toast</i>
t̰	sounds like a “t” with an “a,” pronounced as an explosive “t”
w	has the sound in <i>wish</i>
w̰	sounds like an explosive “wa”
x	sounds like a cat’s hiss
x̰	sounds like clearing the throat with an “x”
x ^w	sounds like a hiss plus a “w”
x̰ ^w	sounds like clearing your throat with your lips rounded
y	has the sound in <i>yes</i>
y̰	sounds like a “y” with an “a” with an explosive sound
ʔ	pharyngeal, sounds like an “i” made deep in the throat
?	glottal stop, denotes a pause between vowels

Notes

- 1 For more information on languages in the Pacific Northwest, see Lawrence C. Thompson and M. Dale Kinkade, “Languages,” 30–50, and M. Dale Kinkade, “History of Research in Linguistics,” 98–106, both in *Handbook of the North American Indians*, vol. 7: *Northwest Coast*, ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1990). For more information on Southern Wakashan languages, specifically the Nuu-chah-nulth and Makah languages, see Toshihide Nakayama, *Nuu-chah-nulth (Nootka) Morphosyntax* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Eun-Sook Kim, “Theoretical Issues in Nuu-chah-nulth Phonology and Morphology,” Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 2003; Matthew Davidson, “Studies in Southern Wakashan (Nootkan) Grammar,” Ph.D. diss., SUNY Buffalo, 2002; Suzanne Marie Rose, “The Kuquot Grammar,” Ph.D. diss., University of Victoria, 1981; and *Our World: T’aat’aaqsapa Cultural Dictionary* and *Our World—Our Ways: T’aat’aaqsapa Cultural Dictionary* (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, 1989 and 1991). The Southern Wakashan languages are closely related, with the main differences being phonological and lexical; see Davidson, “Studies in Southern Wakashan,” 17–18. Also see the University of Washington Web site <http://www.depts.washington.edu/wll2/languages.html>.
- 2 See Edward Sapir and Morris Swadesh, *Nootka Texts: Tales and Ethnological Narratives with Grammatical Notes and Lexical Materials* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), 8–13. Edward Sapir et al., *Whaling Indians: Tales of Extraordinary Experience*, Part 1, Sapir-Thomas Texts (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2000), x–xii.
- 3 *Nuu-chah-nulth Phrase Book and Dictionary. Barkley Sound Dialect* (Banfield, B.C.: Barkley Sound Dialect Working Group, 2004).
- 4 Four Nuu-chah-nulth Groups—Huu-ay-aht, Ucluelet, Uchucklesaht, and Toquaht—also created a dictionary and phrase book, *Nuu-chah-nulth Phrase Book and Dictionary. Barkley Sound Dialect* (see note 3).

- 5 From the Makah Nation Web site:
<http://www.makah.com/language.htm>.
- 6 I use a style of writing similar to the one that Chief Umeek (Richard Atleo) utilized in his book *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004). In *Tsawalk* (p. xx), Umeek says that he spelled the Nuu-chah-nulth words roughly according to the Ahousaht accent rather than following any phonetic system.

Abbreviations

EA	environmental assessment
EIS	environmental impact statement
FONSI	finding of no significant impact
ICRW	International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling
IFA	Indian Fisheries Association
IHS	Indian Health Service
IWC	International Whaling Commission
MCRC	Makah Cultural and Research Center
MMPA	Marine Mammal Protection Act
MTC	Makah Tribal Council
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NMML	National Marine Mammal Laboratory
NTC	Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PAWS	Progressive Animal Welfare Society
PBR	potential biological removal
PCFA	Pacific Coast Feeding Aggregation
PETA	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
PSA	Public Service Announcement
S/SPAWN	Steelhead-Salmon Protection Action for Washington Now
UPOW	United Property Owners of Washington
WCW	World Council of Whalers

Spirits of Our Whaling Ancestors

INTRODUCTION

Honoring Our Whaling Ancestors

IT WAS MAY 17, 1999, THE DAY MY SISTER CHARLENE CALLED FROM Victoria, B.C., to share the news that members of the Makah Nation had been successful in their whale hunt in the ocean waters near Neah Bay, Washington. A thirty-foot *maa'ak'* (gray whale) gave its life to feed the Makah people, an act that elicited in me a sense of excited disbelief. "What! No way!" I shouted. I was sitting at my computer immersed in writing my dissertation, nearly 1,000 miles away at the University of California, Berkeley. I was overwhelmed and ecstatic at what the Makah tribe had just achieved. For the previous couple of weeks, my niece Katherine Thompson, who lives in Neah Bay, had been calling me with updates on the hunt that was about to take place. "Keep me posted," I told her. "And, if you come across any newspaper articles on the hunt, please keep them for me." Then, the call came from Charlene . . .

"Sis, the hunt has been on every TV station," she said. "There are hundreds of people over there right now." She told me that she and her husband, Art Thompson, were going to Neah Bay that weekend to attend the potlatch the Makah tribe was holding to commemorate their first whale hunt in more than seventy years. "It's so exciting," Charlene exclaimed, "we're going to get to eat whale!" My brother-in-law came on the line. "Lottie, they did it!" he yelled excitedly into the phone, "You need to get your butt over to Neah Bay immediately!"

At the time I was teaching and working on my dissertation that analyzed the cultural significance of the revival of whaling for the Makah tribe and my people, the Nuu-chah-nulth, two groups that are related to each other culturally, linguistically, and geographically. I had planned to go to Neah Bay after I completed teaching in a couple of weeks, with the hope that I would be there when a whale

was caught. I hung up the phone, sad and disappointed that I could not be there to share in the celebration with my Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth relatives. And I was also upset that I was not going to get the opportunity to taste whale meat.

A week later I received a large package in the mail. I opened it and, to my delight, found numerous newspaper articles about the Makah whale hunt. My niece had not forgotten my request. Every article on the hunt that she had come across she clipped and sent to me. Immediately I phoned to thank her for such a wonderful gift, and then I spread out all the articles on my living room floor and slowly and meticulously read through them. The newspaper captions read: "Makah Hunt Brings Back Memories of Whaling on B.C.'s Coast," "Makah Relish Link to Their Past," "Hunting for Pride," "Such a Sensation: Joyous Makah Kill Whale." I read each article intently. When the Makah announced that they were going to begin their hunt that May, newspaper and television reporters immediately went to Neah Bay, many of them camping near the community. As they waited for the "big event" to happen, they reported on the day-to-day activities leading up to the morning the whale was caught. In their daily reports, they commented that the whaling crew had already gone out and had come upon a whale but had been unable to harpoon it; they reported on how the anti-whaling protesters were attempting to thwart the hunt by steering their boats between the whaling crew and the whale and by playing killer whale sounds from a boat close by; they mentioned how calm the sea was on the morning of the day the whaling crew caught the whale; they reported on how the harpooner stood up in the boat and heaved his harpoon, how it successfully struck the whale, and how the whale reacted when it realized it had been struck.

Each story was accompanied by one or more pictures, each capturing in vivid detail a moment in time that will never be forgotten by the Makah people. The pictures showed the Neah Bay shoreline teeming with hundreds of people, many of them proud Makah tribal members who were holding drums and singing songs as the esteemed whale was being towed to shore. The photos captured one of the most powerful images of the hunt: the harpooner, Theron Parker, standing on top of his beached prize and ceremonially sprinkling it with eagle feathers.

The newspaper articles also covered the activities that took place once the whale was on land. They described how the Makah people prayed and sang songs to the whale, to show it respect and to thank it for giving itself to their community. They discussed how, after all the proper rituals were performed, the whale was cut up and readied for distribution in the Makah community, with some meat and blubber saved for the potlatch that was to follow. A couple of days later the Makah held their potlatch, and the newspaper reporters and camera crews were

there once again to report on the ceremonies. The reporters noted that people from all over the world attended—people from as far north as Alaska and from as far south as Fiji; people of all ages and racial backgrounds; and people from the neighboring Native communities and from my own Nuu-chah-nulth Nation.

Newspaper photos showed images of proud Makah men, women, children, elders, and tribal leaders, smiling and shaking hands with all the guests who came to Neah Bay to share this very special day with them. There were pictures of the Makah dressed in their finest ceremonial regalia, holding their most powerful drums, singing and dancing their traditional songs, many of which were directly linked to their whaling heritage. There were pictures of the guests eating a traditional Makah meal of salmon, halibut, and shellfish. And, finally, there were images never before captured: pictures of the curious faces of the guests and of the proud faces of the Makah members as they sampled, chewed, and ate a food that a majority of them had never tasted before, the prized cuisine of the evening, the meat and blubber of the whale.

I put down the newspaper articles and thought about everything I had just read. I thought about the Makah and how proud they must be feeling to have accomplished something so culturally significant. I thought about my Nuu-chah-nulth people and how important the capture of this whale by our Makah relatives was to us, since we, too, were planning to revive our whale hunts.

Five years earlier, following the removal of the gray whale from the Endangered Species list, the Makah tribe had made the announcement that they were going to revive their whale hunts, an integral right of their culture that they had not exercised since the early 1900s, when the gray whale was hunted by commercial whalers to near extinction. Following their announcement, the Nuu-chah-nulth declared that we were also going to revive our hunts. The Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth peoples' decision to revive their whaling practices was met both with support and with vehement opposition. Many people, Native and non-Native, supported what we planned to do and understood its cultural relevance. But there were also people who opposed the revival of the whale hunts because they did not understand how important this practice was to us. They claimed that since whaling was no longer part of our material culture it was obsolete. Then there were the anti-whaling and animal rights activists, who seemed to make no effort to understand why we wanted and needed to hunt whales—they did not want whales killed for any reason, cultural or not. And that brings me to why I wrote this book.

“IT’S WHO WE ARE”

I explain in this book how reviving our whaling tradition has cultural, social, and spiritual significance and will reaffirm our identities as whaling people, enriching and strengthening our communities by reinforcing a sense of cultural pride. Historically, whaling served important social, subsistence, and ritual functions that were at the core of our societies. Whaling held economic importance as well as spiritual significance and prestige for the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth peoples. Stories contained within our oral traditions that have been passed down through generations tell of the great Thunderbird, T’iick’in, and how he brought the whale, *iihtuup*, to our people to feast upon. We have stories about great Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth whaling *haw’iih* (chiefs) who spent years physically, mentally, and spiritually preparing for a whale hunt. Some of them were such great whalers that they could bring home up to five whales in one season. After a whale was caught, it was brought back to the community to be ceremoniously divided up among the village members, providing an enormous amount of food for the community. Killing a whale was considered the highest glory, and the more whales a chief caught, the more prestige, respect, and physical wealth he received.

Until the late 1920s, whaling was still a very important component of both groups’ cultures and was intertwined in the intricate web of social interactions that constructed our identities. By the early 1920s, however, over-harvesting of whales by commercial whalers had severely depleted the whale populations. As the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth whale hunts declined, the ritual and spiritual elements that were central to our tradition also began to diminish. The loss of whaling also meant a weakening of the social connections that were integral to this tradition. Simultaneously, the U.S. and Canadian governments were initiating policies that effectively undermined our social system. The introduction of new subsistence pursuits, such as sealing and fishing, provided the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth with the ability to acquire food, prestige, and wealth from new sources. And, finally, the introduction of a European cash economy into both communities created a shift in emphasis away from whaling, as our people were pulled into the global market. From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth societies underwent major economic, political, social, and spiritual transformations that weakened our traditions and destabilized our cultures. As a result, our entire social fabric began to unravel.

When investigating indigenous cultures and the impact that non-Indian contact had on our societies, many scholars focus on cultural disruption and the breaking down of social networks and traditions. In this book I focus on cultural

continuity. I demonstrate how, even though our societies faced disease epidemics and federal policies that harmed our cultures, we have remained connected to our traditions. This connection can be viewed as a line that threads from our precontact cultures to the present day. That line has been stretched, it has been tattered, and it has been weakened—but it has not been destroyed.



Beginning in the 1850s, our societies began to face rapid economic, political, social, and cultural changes that ultimately led to the end of whale hunts in the 1920s. My ancestors faced diseases that severed many of the hereditary lineages that had helped structure and maintain our social systems. We faced government policies that took our children away, banned our ceremonies, and taught us that our way of life was savage. We were introduced to new technologies and new economies, which we successfully adapted into our societies. Although whaling was no longer part of Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth material cultures, our whaling tradition continued to inform our lives and remained firmly connected to our cultures and our identities.

Throughout the years, the commercial whaling industry continued to threaten the whale population, and international rules and regulations were enacted in the 1960s that prohibited whaling on the Northwest Coast. Even though the Makah have the right to whale secured in their 1855 treaty with the United States, they, along with the Nuu-chah-nulth, supported the international bans and stopped whaling. As prohibitions took effect and whaling became more regulated, most of the whale populations began to recover from the devastation caused earlier by commercial whaling. The California gray whale population was so decimated, however, that it did not rebound the way other whale stocks did, and as a safeguard it was placed on the Endangered Species list in 1970. Because of this extra protection, by the 1990s the gray whale population had successfully recovered, and in 1994 it was removed from the list. When the Makah tribal leaders heard that the gray whale was no longer endangered, they announced that they were going to revive their whale hunts. The Nuu-chah-nulth made their announcement shortly after.

The revitalization of the whaling tradition is part of a larger cultural revitalization and self-determination movement that Native peoples throughout the world began experiencing in the 1960s. Our leaders saw that many of the social problems that plagued our communities could be overcome by strengthening our cultures. They recognized that traditions, customs, and languages were impor-

tant elements of our cultures that needed to be rejuvenated and reinforced for community growth and development.

Taiaiake Alfred, a leading Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) scholar, has dedicated his life to indigenous struggles and to articulating ways for Native people to make self-determination a reality. In his book *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Alfred urges Native people to ground their communities in traditional values and principles that will provide them with the strength to move beyond the five hundred years of pain, loss, and suffering inflicted on them following colonization. In order to decolonize, Alfred says, Native communities must “commit themselves to self-conscious traditionalism,” whereby community members and leaders work together to selectively re-adopt core values and traditions and make these the center of their social and political lives.² In his book *Wasáse*, Alfred maintains that by revitalizing our core philosophies and traditions, we will effectively control our own destinies.

Survival is bending and swaying but not breaking, adapting and accommodating without compromising what is core to one's being. Those who are emboldened by challenges and who sacrifice for the truth achieve freedom. Those who fail to find balance, who reject change, or who abandon their heritage altogether abandon themselves. They perish. The people who live on are those who have learned the lesson of survival: cherish your unique identity, protect your freedom, and defend your homeland.³

The Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth no longer need to hunt whales for subsistence. However, the whale's nutritional value could help alleviate some of the health problems that plague our communities. Clinical health studies have found that sea mammal oil can be used to ameliorate diseases that afflict our people, such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Putting whale oil and meat back on our dinner tables means a return to a healthier lifestyle at the same time that the harvesting, use, and sharing of these foods unites our communities. The umbilical cord that connects us to our whaling tradition has remained unbroken and continues to nourish and strengthen our communities. The tradition is in our family names, in the names of the land we live on, and in the names of waterways we subsist on. It has continued to live on through the stories contained within our oral traditions, through our ceremonies, songs, and dances, and through our artistic expression. We have always been known as a whaling people; as former Makah Whaling Commission Chairman Keith Johnson maintains, “It's who we are.”⁴

THE HEART AND SOUL OF OUR COMMUNITIES

I am a member of the Tseshaht First Nation, one of the fifteen culturally and linguistically related groups coming under the name Nuu-chah-nulth, which means “all along the mountains and sea.” Our traditional territories are on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I was born and raised in my community and grew up understanding that our whaling tradition informs every aspect of our lives. Tseshaht names refer to sacred places in our territory. The name Tseshaht itself directly links my people to our whaling tradition. We received the name from our former principal village, Ts’ishaa, meaning “people from an island that reeks of whale remains,” which referred to the rancid smell left from whales brought up onto the beach following a hunt.⁵ Traditional names, and their continued usage, serve as constant reminders of how important whales and whaling were to our past and still are to our present-day community. Place-names can be utilized to encode, enrich, and structure accounts of the past. Place-names act as a memory aid to glue history together. These names are key to understanding our history because important historical events can often be recalled by a term for a feature of a particular place or landscape.⁶

Whales and Nuu-chah-nulth whalers are central characters in our stories and legends, which are passed down orally from one generation to the next. When I was a young girl, my grandfather, Hughie (Watts), would gather his grandchildren together and tell us stories that he had heard as a child. I still have vivid memories of all of us gathered at his feet in the middle of my grandparents’ living room, staring up at my grandfather, captivated by and hanging onto every word that flowed from his lips. He told us stories about Pitch Woman stealing the little children, stories about the marriage of Mink. And then there were those wonderful stories about Thunderbird and Whale, and the grand stories about our powerful Tseshaht whalers. Native scholar Angela Cavender Wilson (Tawapaha Tank Win) says that stories in the oral tradition “provide a sense of identity and belonging, situating community members within their lineage and establishing their relationship to the rest of the world.”⁷

Our whaling ancestors continue to breathe life into our rich whaling narratives, preserved and reinforced through oral traditions. They give power to our drums as we dance and support our voices as we sing. They continue to guide the hands of our artists as they create powerful images of the great Thunderbird and majestic Whale. We perform the ceremonies that keep us connected to and reaffirm our identities as whaling people.

METHODOLOGY

My goal in writing this book is to provide an understanding of our whaling tradition. I achieve this through the utilization of written and archival material and archaeological data, balancing these with Native oral stories and narratives, as well as my own personal reflections, so that a multitude of voices emerges from the text. The writing process was challenging and deeply personal. I also found the experience to be rewarding because in many ways it felt liberating to tell “our” story, to be able to offer my own Nuu-chah-nulth perspective on a tradition that means so much to me and my people. For Native scholars, as First Nations writer Janice Acoose asserts, “the act of writing thus becomes an act of resistance, an act of re-empowerment.”⁸

All but one of the newspaper articles, journal articles, and book chapters, and the sole book that was published on the topic of Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth whaling were written by *mamahn’i* (non-Native) scholars. In fact, in examining the larger picture of Native studies, I found that over 90 percent of the literature on Native peoples and their histories is written by non-Indians.⁹ Native scholar Donald Fixico (Shawnee, Sac & Fox, Seminole, and Muscogee Creek) notes that Native American Studies has been dominated by non-Native scholars who have defined its parameters. Non-Native scholars, Fixico argues, “attempted to determine its forms of evidence only as written accounts, professed limited theories, and devised methodologies from a non-Indian tradition.”¹⁰ Thus, there is a need for Native histories to be written by Native people.

On the other hand, as Choctaw/French scholar Devon Mihesuah points out, “using the Native voice exclusively may not yield a precise picture of past events, but neither will the sole use of skeletal remains, midden heaps, or non-Indians’ diaries, government records, and letters.”¹¹ We cannot ignore the material that has been written by non-Indians. In fact, much of the material that has been written about my people was invaluable to my research. Linguists and anthropologists who worked with my people in the early and mid-1900s have left rich and detailed ethnographic accounts that came from the words of our ancestors. For example, I use linguist/anthropologist Edward Sapir’s and linguist Morris Swadesh’s ethnographic data throughout this book. Between 1910 and 1923, Sapir conducted fieldwork in Tseshaht, and while there he interviewed many Nuu-chah-nulth elders and worked extensively with one of them, Sayach’apis, my great-great-grandfather. Sapir made every attempt to write the stories and present the ethnographic material he gathered in a manner that was true to the way they were told to him. He worked closely with Sayach’apis’s grandson Alex

Thomas, who recorded and translated the data for Sapir. The Tseshah and English versions are included in his published texts. The writing of the original texts in our language allowed the cultural nuances to remain and people within my community have utilized these as educational and language tools. The English-version stories were also published as close as possible to the way they were originally collected by Sapir and by Thomas, so that even these stories can still be read through a Tseshah and Nu-chah-nulth lens. When I was in Neah Bay interviewing the Makah whaling crew involved in the 1999 hunt, one of the crew members, Theron Parker, told me that he had read some of Sapir's material on whaling, and it provided him with valuable information that he never knew about whaling, information that had never been passed down to him by his elders. So this is why these types of texts can work alongside our own Native-based narratives and the stories that have been passed down to us. The challenge, then, is finding a way to successfully merge vastly different methodological approaches, supporting this written data with our oral traditions, so that the Native voice is evident and directs the narrative.

This is what I have set out to accomplish in this book. I have combined these methodologies, writing from both an academic space and a Native-centered space. Native scholar Duane Champagne (Chippewa) says that Native scholars who have grown up in their communities, immersed in their cultures, can provide considerable insight into their societies, insight that could take non-Native scholars conducting fieldwork years to achieve. And, he adds, this cultural and historical knowledge that the Native scholar has will often lead to critical investigations of issues that non-Native scholars might not recognize. This does not mean that a Native scholar will, by virtue of being Native, be better at writing Native history than non-Native scholars. Champagne writes: "The mere presence of Indian blood within a scholar, however, does not ensure better or more sensitive historical or cultural understandings of Indian peoples. This can come only with training, motivation, sensitivity, knowledge, and study."¹² As a scholar, I have endeavored to present a study that is comprehensive and critically and academically rigorous but, at the same time, keep my writing sensitive to my community and respectful of my people.

In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses some of the critical issues that indigenous scholars face in conducting "insider" research. At a general level, Native scholars need to establish ways of thinking critically about their disciplinary processes and relationships, and about the richness of their data and analysis. But, she argues, "[that person] also needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to [an indigenous] commu-

nity as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position.”¹³ My research and analysis are grounded in my experiences growing up in a Native community, and I utilize the knowledge I have gained from elders and family members. My knowledge comes from the family I was born into and the community in which I was raised. My education comes from my relatives and my elders. The words I write come from the spirit of my ancestors who have guided my hands and my heart throughout this process. As a Native person, you never write for yourself or by yourself. Cree scholar Winona Wheeler says that the knowledge Native people acquire comes through listening, because we are an oral culture. And, she further explains, our knowledge also comes from the relationships we form “with the Creator, the past, the present, the future, life around us, each other, and within ourselves. And, like my ancestors, I am here on this earth to learn.”¹⁴

As I began the research for this book, I began to “really” listen to what was being told to me by family members and elders. Our discussions would bring me back to when I was a child and how I was raised to understand and respect where I came from and to be proud of who I was. I would think about things that I never had thought about before, how, even though the main language in our community is English, we still use certain words and phrases in our own language to explain where someone comes from and to make references to certain geographical locations. I remember my grandparents, who lived next door to me, saying in Tseshahk the names of the things around us, attempting to keep our language alive.

Memories are powerful. As Wheeler exclaims, “Memory is a beautiful gift.” She says that there are very few historians, or few scholars for that matter, who realize the “deep effect that the oral transmission of knowledge has on the individual.”

Memories are also experienced at the somatic level and in the soul. To remember those times spent listening to old people tell histories at the kitchen table, on a road trip, or in the warm glow of a campfire, is to relive them. Memory, in the context of Indigenous oral traditions, is a resonance of senses—it evokes the relationship the listener had with the storyteller, and it evokes the emotional responses and the feeling of total absorption experienced at the time. The smells, nuances, facial expressions, body language, and range of audience response are as much a part of the memory of the story as the story itself.¹⁵

I had one of the best childhoods anyone could ever have experienced. Too many times, when scholars write Native American histories or about our contemporary communities, they focus on negative aspects: the cultural and social breakdown, the pain and violence stemming from the boarding-school system, family dysfunction, social problems of alcoholism and drug addiction, and the health issues that plague our communities today. I was raised in a world that included each of the things I just mentioned, but the family that I was raised in gave me the strength and the wisdom to see beyond these social problems in our communities and to write about what makes us strong, not what has caused us pain and sorrow.

Each day that I walk on this earth I come to appreciate more and more the teachings I was raised with. Each time I sit down with my relatives, with my aunts, uncles, siblings, cousins, and elders, the learning process continues. Each time I communicate with them by phone or through an e-mail, I gain more knowledge and strengthen the ties I have to them and to my community. I am always thankful that I have a family who has stayed close, united in our cultural and familial ties and in our love for one another. Even though my career as a professor has physically removed me from my community, my heart has never left it. And at every opportunity, I take that five-hour trek to be physically home with my family and immerse myself in my community to reinvigorate my mind, heart, and spirit with more cultural teachings.

I am the second person in the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation to pursue doctoral studies and receive a Ph.D. The first person to attain a doctoral degree is one of our respected hereditary chiefs, Umeek (Richard Atleo), who taught First Nations studies at Malaspina University-College and is currently the research liaison at the University of Manitoba and associate adjunct professor at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. Chief Umeek wrote an excellent book, *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview*, that combines Nuu-chah-nulth and Western views of the nature of existence to advance our understanding of the universe. In *Tsawalk*, he discusses our law of generosity and the ways in which Nuu-chah-nulth-aht are raised to be generous. He connects giving and generosity to our overall well-being. “The collective Nuu-chah-nulth experience teaches not only that a generous person is never without the necessities in life, but also that the art of giving generates a sense of personal well being, a sense of balance and harmony.”¹⁶ This is my way of giving back to my Tseshaht community, to my family, and to the Nuu-chah-nulth and Makah peoples.



In chapter 1, I examine the Makah and Nuuchahnulth whaling tradition before the arrival of *mamalhn'i*, illustrating how whaling was connected to our economic, political, and religious systems, entwined in a complex system of social interactions that served important social, subsistence, and ritual functions. Chapter 2 details the history following contact with *mamalhn'i* to show how Makah and Nuuchahnulth interactions with non-Indians and colonial policies produced increased political, economic, spiritual, and societal changes that challenged my ancestors' ability to maintain their cultural traditions, which led to the end of our whaling practices.

While Makah and Nuuchahnulth societies underwent dramatic transformations leading to the demise of our whale hunts, I demonstrate in chapter 3 how our whaling tradition has been maintained through place- and personal names, songs, ceremonies, and artistic expression, and, thus, how it continued to be significant to Makah and Nuuchahnulth cultures and identities. The decision to revive our whaling practices was sparked by events in the 1960s and 1970s, and in chapter 4, I explore how the movement toward self-determination influenced Makah and Nuuchahnulth cultural revitalization. Makah and Nuuchahnulth leaders saw the revival of whaling as a way to reinvigorate cultural traditions and reaffirm our identities as whaling people, but the revitalization was contested by some environmental and animal rights groups. Chapter 5 looks at the rise of the anti-whaling movement. Through the utilization of the "Indian as savage" image, the whaling opponents undermined the Makah efforts to initiate a whale hunt in the late 1990s and challenged their cultural and treaty right to whale. The anti-whaling coalition grew, drawing in politicians known for their anti-Indian and anti-treaty positions. In chapter 6, I focus on how this anti-whaling/anti-Indian coalition developed a successful legal campaign, utilizing federal environmental laws, to stop the Makah from whaling.

In the final chapter, I examine the cultural, social, and dietary reasons why the Makah and Nuuchahnulth want to bring whale meat, oil, and blubber back into our diets. I discuss the diseases plaguing Native communities today and the renewed focus on traditional foods as a way to overcome health problems. And, finally, I examine Native whaling communities in Alaska and northern Canada to illustrate how, through their annual whale hunts, these people have maintained strong community ties by communal hunting, processing, distributing, sharing, and consuming whale products.

1 / *Tsawalk*

THE CENTRALITY OF WHALING TO MAKAH AND NUU-CHAH-NULTH LIFE

STORIES CONTAINED WITHIN INDIGENOUS ORAL TRADITIONS PROVIDE a window into Native societies and cultures, helping to define and explain their way of life. In Nuu-chah-nulth and Makah oral tradition, a story has been passed down from one generation to the next, one that is central to our identity as whalers. T'iick'in, the great mythical Thunderbird, was the first great whale hunter. The flapping of his wings caused thunder and his flicking tongue brought lightning. There were once four Thunderbirds that lived in our area, but three of them were killed by Kwatyat, the creator of all things. T'iick'in was known to feed on whales (*iihtuup*). He utilized Itl'ik, Lightning (Sea) Serpent, as a kind of harpoon or spear to throw at a whale to stun it. Once he had dazed the whale, T'iick'in swooped down and picked it up in his mighty claws and took it back to the mountains, where he enjoyed a feast of succulent whale meat and blubber. T'iick'in demonstrated that the *iihtuup* could be caught and utilized for food and tools.¹

In another version of this story, Thunderbird and whale saved the Nu-chah-nulth people from starvation. It was a very bad season for fishing and people were having a difficult time finding food to eat. Thunderbird saw how hungry we were and went out in search of a whale. He took Lightning Serpent and wound it around his waist as he flew along the coast hunting for a whale. Finally, he spotted one, and he took the serpent and threw it down at the whale, hitting and stunning it. While the whale was stunned, it remained floating on the surface of the water, making it easy for Thunderbird to grab. Thunderbird dived down, picked up the whale in his powerful talons, and brought it to the village for all the people to eat, so that they would no longer be hungry.²

I heard Thunderbird, Whale, and Lightning Serpent stories when I was a young girl. The legends have been passed down the generations and throughout the years have been recorded by ethnologists, anthropologists, and historians. There are many different versions, but they all contain the same message: the whale was, and still is, central to our culture and identity. In this chapter, I discuss how, before the arrival of the *mamalhn'i*, whaling traditions were central to our very existence as a people and were intricately connected to Makah and Nuuchah-nulth economic, political, religious, and social systems.

MAKAH AND NUU-CHAH-NULTH CULTURAL SYSTEMS

The Makah and Nuuchah-nulth peoples' traditional territory is on the central Northwest coast, the Makah in the Cape Flattery area at the northwestern tip of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State and the Nuuchah-nulth on the west coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Topographically, the Makah's and Nuuchah-nulth's traditional territory consists of steep and rocky terrain, with the Coast mountain range in British Columbia and the Cascades mountains in Washington and Oregon acting as natural dividers, cutting off these seafaring, maritime peoples from the inland hunting-and-gathering societies. These natural boundaries surrounding the various indigenous groups resulted in a large number of small, autonomous societies along the coast.³

The Makah and Nuuchah-nulth are among the Wakashan-speaking peoples, sharing linguistic ties, cultural patterns, and a tradition of hunting whales. Early explorers' accounts noted the similarities in Makah and Nuuchah-nulth social organization, language, subsistence patterns, and ceremonialism.⁴ Since the Makah are the only tribe in the United States who speak the Wakashan language, this led some scholars to suggest that they moved to the Cape Flattery area from Vancouver Island. This conjecture is supported by both Makah and Nuuchah-nulth oral histories, which not only link the two groups but also provide a clue as to how the tribes became territorially disconnected. This is a story passed down through the Makah oral tradition and recorded by James Swan, the first non-Indian to live among the Makah in the mid-1800s.

A long time ago . . . the water of the Pacific flowed through what is now swamp and prairie between Waatch village and Neah Bay, making an island of Cape Flattery. The water suddenly receded, leaving Neah Bay perfectly dry. It was four days reaching its lowest ebb, and then rose again without any waves or breakers till it had submerged the Cape, and in fact the whole country except



Territory of Nuuchahnulth and Makah groups. Adapted by Barry LeVely from *HuupuKw anuum Tupaat: Nuuchahnulth Voices*, ed. Alan Hoover (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 2000). Inset: Mid-nineteenth-century Makah settlements. From Renker and Gunther, "Makah," in *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 7.

the tops of the mountains at Clyoquot. The water . . . as it came up to the houses, those who had canoes put their effects in them, and floated off with the current, which set very strongly to the north. Some drifted one way, some another; and when the waters assumed their accustomed level, a portion of the tribe found themselves beyond Nootka, where their descendents now reside, and are known by the same name as the Makahs.⁵

Although the two groups are separated by land, they are connected by the waterways that were the major travel routes of the coastal peoples. Historical evidence and oral history support the cultural linkages between the Makah and Nuuchah-nulth peoples. Archaeological excavations and carbon dating indicate that the Makah villages of Ozette and Wa'atch were occupied for at least 1,500 years. Radiocarbon dating shows that the Nuuchah-nulth people have lived in their territory for more than 4,000 years.⁶

The Makah call themselves kwih-dich-chuh-ahtX, "people who live on the cape near the rocks and seagulls." They received the name Makah, a word meaning "generous with food," from their Clallam neighbors. The name was adopted by American officials in the 1850s. Before the 1855 Treaty of Neah Bay brought all the Makah onto one reservation in Neah Bay, the Makah comprised several groups that were divided into five principal winter villages and two summer villages. The winter villages were Neah (Diah), which was on the site of an old Spanish fort; Wa'atch (Wayatch), on the south side of Cape Flattery; and Tsoo-yess (Tsu-yess, T'sues) and Ozette (Hosette, Osett), located at the Flattery Rocks. The fifth village, named Biheda (Bahaada, Ba'ada), was abandoned in 1852 following a smallpox epidemic. The summer villages were located at Klasseset and Tatoche Island. In the post-1855 reservation period, all Makah eventually moved to the village site in Neah Bay.⁷

The Nuuchah-nulth are a collection of village groups that are linked through a common language and similar cultural components. They were established as small, socially independent groups that came together in single villages. The members of these villages or local groups shared rights to the use of specific resources within geographically limited territories. The local groups were composed of *ushtakimilh*, or lineage groups, which had their own head, *haw'ilth* (chief), who represented the line of descent from an original ancestor. The village also had a *taayii haw'ilth* (head chief), who was from the highest-ranking *ushtakimilh*. Archaeological and historical evidence shows that the structure of the Nuuchah-nulth villages continually changed during both the pre- and the post-contact periods. This was a result of tribal warfare over territory, resources,

and after-contact disease epidemics, which ultimately led to amalgamations that transformed the villages into the fifteen distinct groups that exist today.⁸

My people were mistakenly called Nootka or Nootkans (also spelled Nutka), a name given to one of the Nuu-chah-nulth groups (Mowachaht) by Captain Cook when he visited the territory in 1778. The name was later extended to include all of the groups, including the Makah. At this time, we did not have one specific overarching name to define ourselves as a larger tribal group, but we had names for local groups that were linked to places of origin. Gilbert M. Sproat, a Scottish businessman who came to our territory—to what became known as the Alberni Valley—in 1860, referred to us as the “aht” people, which is the general ending of our ancestral names (Ahousaht, Tseshaht, Toquaht, etc.). “Aht” translates literally as “people of.” However, Cook’s name, Nootka or Nootkan, was the name that was eventually adopted by Canadian Indian agents, anthropologists, and others, and was used externally and internally to refer to these coastal groups.

My great-aunt Winnie (Winifred David) heard a story when she was a young girl about how we became known as the Nootkan people. She carried many of the stories she heard as a child into adulthood, thus continuing our oral tradition. As an elder, she was interviewed by numerous anthropologists and historians, and her remembrances were important in creating comprehensive written accounts of Nuu-chah-nulth culture and history. The story of how the Nuu-chah-nulth people got their erroneous name begins with Captain Cook and his initial visit to the region in 1778. Cook’s ship sailed into an area of Nuu-chah-nulth territory that he later named Nootka Sound. His ship came upon the Mowachaht village of Yuquot, which was renamed Friendly Cove by Cook. He was met by the local village members, who paddled out to the ship in their canoes in an attempt to help Cook’s crew navigate the rocks. The people yelled to the crew a word that sounds like Nootka, a word in our language that in English means “to circle about or around.” Aunty Winnie discussed this in an interview in 1977:

They started making signs and they were talking Indian and they were saying: *nu-tka-icim nu-tka-icim*, they were saying. That means, you go around the harbour. . . . So Captain Cook said, “Oh, they’re telling us the name of this place is Nootka.” That’s how Nootka got its name. . . . But the Indian name is altogether different. Yeah. It’s Yuquot, that Indian village. So it’s called Nootka now and the whole of the West Coast (Vancouver Island), we’re all Nootka Indians now.¹⁰

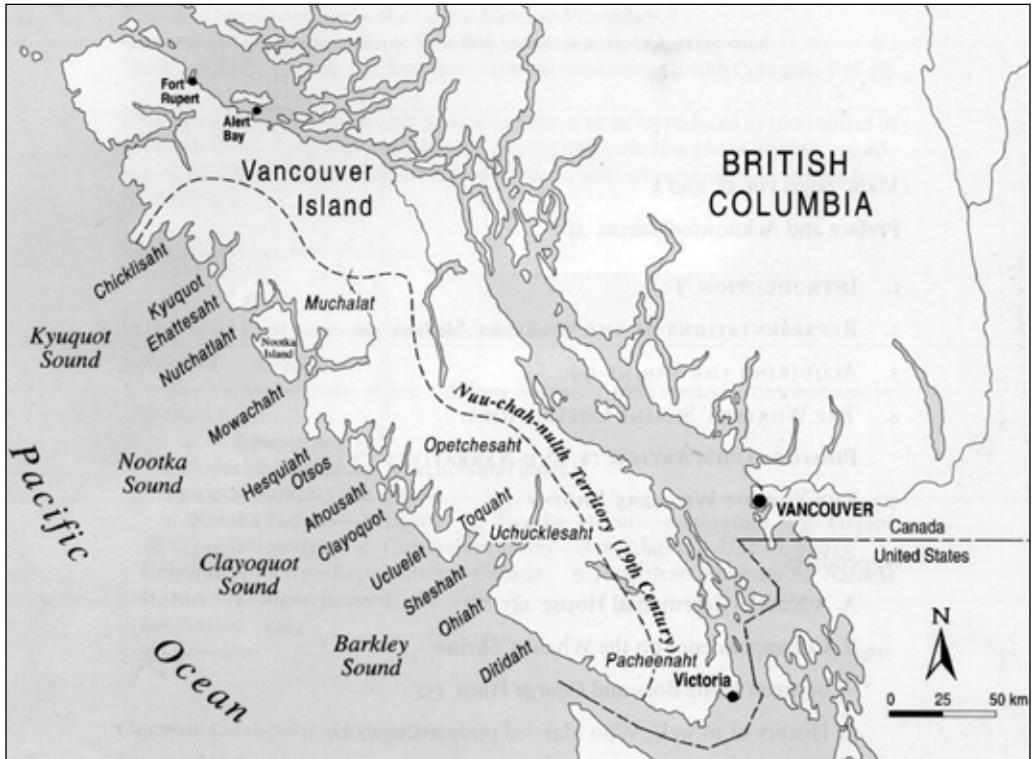
Throughout the years, the Nuu-chah-nulth groups on Vancouver Island worked at establishing a unified political voice for all the groups. In 1958, we formed a col-

lective body and renamed ourselves the West Coast Allied Tribes (later changed to the West Coast District Council). A year after Aunty Winnie told her story to W. L. Langlois, the so-called Nootkan people officially adopted the more appropriate name of Nuu-chah-nulth, which means “all along the mountains and sea.”

WHALING AND NUU-CHAH-NULTH AND MAKAH ECONOMIES

Whalebones found in archaeological sites in Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth territories show that whales were significant to Native cultures as far back as 4,000 years.¹¹ Before Native economies shifted following contact with *mamaln'i*, Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth were marine people who derived most of their subsistence from the ocean, inlets, and nearby rivers. The people fished primarily for halibut and salmon, harvested the local shellfish, and hunted sea mammals. While they did not focus on developing land resources for subsistence, they did hunt deer, bear, and elk and gathered roots and berries, which contributed to their diet. The majority of the food gathering took place during the summer months, and the two groups traveled to areas along the waterways where they could extract the resources; while there, they erected dwellings. As a result, these coastal peoples had both summer and winter residences: semi-permanent summer residences along the ocean and river shores, and more permanent winter houses also close to the waterways but in more sheltered areas to protect them from the harsh winter climate.

The Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth relied on the sea for most of their subsistence and placed much emphasis on hunting sea mammals, such as seals, sea lions, and whales. Archaeological data provide evidence that their greatest economic resource was whaling.¹² Early historical documentation gives varying non-Native viewpoints on the economic significance of whaling. Some early writers suggested that the prestige value of whaling was more significant to the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth than the economic value, whereas others saw whaling as an important subsistence resource. However, nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature reassessed the economic significance of whaling, with studies based on new archaeological data and oral histories. This new ethnographic research shows the importance of whaling to a subsistence life, with whales providing an enormous amount of food, particularly in the springtime when winter provisions were exhausted and food was more difficult to obtain. The faunal remains uncovered during excavations at the Makah village of Ozette established that whales accounted for 75 percent of all meat and oil consumed; 846.6 metric tons of blubber and meat were recovered from whales, which is a substantial amount



Nuu-chah-nulth groups, nineteenth century. From Aldona Jonaitis, *The Yuquot Whaler's Shrine* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999).

of edible food. Whale meat, blubber, and oil were considered tasty and appetizing. The people used the oil as a dipping sauce to complement other foods, and, because of its high nutritional value, whale meat was also one of their most wholesome foods.¹³

Archaeological excavations in traditional territories in the 1960s and 1970s uncovered thousands of artifacts, many of which were connected to whaling. These discoveries showed the variety of uses for the whale bones. They were carved into rattles for use in rituals and ceremonies and reconstructed into tools and implements, such as bark shredders, clubs, and spindle whorls. They were utilized in the construction of water diversion systems that ran alongside the houses and channeled rainwater away from the villages. The bones were also used to stabilize small mudslide areas around the village centers. Whale sinew was used to make rope and cord, and the stomach and intestines were inflated and dried to make containers to hold the oil.¹⁴

THE PREROGATIVE OF THE *HAW'IIH*

An important component of Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth pre- and early-contact cultures, whaling was entwined in a complex web of social interactions and served important social, subsistence, and ritual functions. It was the unifying interactions of these various activities that formed an elaborate and interconnected network of economic, ceremonial, and redistribution rights and privileges.¹⁵ The Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth lived in small kin-related village groups that centered on their *haw'iih* and their *ushtakimilh* (lineage group). Social organization was based on a stratified rank-and-prestige system. Societal distinctions between individuals and between groups permeated every aspect of social life. Social organization was based on the hereditary transmission of status and privilege, which was affirmed and enhanced through the accumulation and giving away of material wealth.¹⁶

The villages consisted of people from all ranks; those in the higher echelons were *haw'iih*, the chiefs or titleholders who were the heads of their family units based on their hereditary birthright. The *haw'iih* were also the wealthiest members of the local group, acquiring and sustaining wealth and status by holding great potlatches, where food, goods, and ceremonial items were distributed. The head chief held the largest and most lavish potlatches, which provided him with great esteem and further elevated his status.

The next in this ranked social order were the *maschimes*, or the commoners, who were related to respected *haw'iih* of some standing in their community but who did not generally accumulate wealth or potlatch. *Maschimes* could raise their status by mastering skills, such as by becoming great canoe makers, respected warriors, or esteemed healers.¹⁷

The lowest members of this social organization were the *kohl*, or slaves. *Kohl* were considered a group unto themselves and did not really fit into the graduated system of ranking. Slaves were captives, mostly women and children, who were taken during warfare. Although they were considered part of the tribal unit, because they were not free, they could not achieve higher status. They were considered possessions of the chiefs, and only their owner had authority over them. The more slaves a *haw'ilth* had, the more prestige he acquired, since ownership implied success at war or great wealth.¹⁸

All people from all social categories lived under the same roof. Housing structures consisted of permanent posts with detachable walls and roofs made out of cedar, which could be carried from the larger winter villages to the smaller summer villages. The winter houses were from 30 to 40 feet wide and could reach

a length of 100 feet. Each house was overseen by a *haw'ilth*, who had ultimate authority over his *ushtakimilh*. The people living in the big houses in this large extended family social structure worked together for their *haw'ilth* and for the common good of the *ushtakimilh*.¹⁹

The chief's position was tied to many social obligations and it was up to each *haw'ilth* to make sure that his lineage group was looked after. His connection to powerful ancestral spirits provided him with an extraordinary ability to manage the resources that were tied to his position and to make sure that these resources were distributed to all members of his local group. The *maschimes* received housing, protection, and access to resources through their association with a chief; in return, they exploited the resources of the chief's land and marine space, creating a social system that was both stable and mutually supportive. The members of an *ushtakimilh* always had the ability to leave and join another village group, which could lessen the power of one chief and heighten the power and status of another.²⁰

Birth into the differing social categories determined not only one's status and position within the society but also how an individual would be raised, the labor he or she would perform, the food eaten, the clothing worn, choice of marriage partners, and burial rites. Rank and status distinctions were most marked in Makah and Nuuchahnulth ceremonial life but also extended to subsistence activities and productive labor. Fishing for ordinary subsistence was carried out by the *maschimes* and the *kohl*, but activities that required great skill, such as killing a whale, were inherited privileges reserved for chiefs.

The whaling tradition reflected aspects of the stratified social system. Killing a whale was considered the highest glory: the more whales a chief caught, the more prestige, respect, and physical wealth he received, thus serving to elevate his status and position inside and outside his village or social group.²¹

OO-SIMCH: WHALING AND SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Our whaling tradition was immersed in spiritual, ritual, and religious practices. The whaling *haw'iih* underwent months of complex rituals and ceremonial preparation to assure their success in whaling. It was believed that a chief's ability to catch a whale was derived from the spiritual world that provided him with power or medicine that other members of the tribe did not possess.²² In the Pacific Northwest, there was a common belief among all the indigenous peoples that human beings could obtain extraordinary power from spiritual entities in the nonhuman world. This tradition is known as the Guardian Spirit complex,

and it was a fundamental aspect of the coastal peoples' cultures and traditions.²³

In this tradition, individuals would go on a spiritual quest to seek out a spirit known as *tumanos*, or *tamanawas* in Chinook Jargon. Once acquired, this spirit would assist them in being successful in fishing, hunting, or other pursuits. Many individuals would also seek out spirit power to live long and healthy lives. These spirits would make themselves known during an individual's vision quest or journey, which was held at a young age. Once the spirit was obtained, the individual would be responsible for maintaining this relationship through respectful rituals and ceremonies so that the guardian spirit would continue to provide him or her with certain abilities and protections.²⁴

An individual could obtain a powerful spirit through rigorous ritual cleansing, observances of taboos, fasting, and prayer. This ritual cleansing is known in Nuu-chah-nulth as *oo-simch*.²⁵ The first syllable, "oo," means "be careful." When used in a spiritual context, "it invokes supernatural fear," or as Chief Umeek, Richard Atleo, explains, it is "human fear in the presence of spiritual mystery."²⁶ Therefore, *oo-simch* could be interpreted as "careful seeking" within a "fearsome" surrounding or environment.²⁷

Oo-simch continues to be an important ritual that Nuu-chah-nulth-aht perform before fishing, hunting, or preparing for a potlatch and for overall spiritual well-being. Born in 1908, the late Ahousaht elder Peter Webster was taught the *oo-simch* ritual by his father and grandfather. Peter said that each family had its own rituals that consisted of bathing in the sea, scrubbing the body with twigs and branches, and singing prayer songs. These rituals cleansed the body, mind, and soul and would be carried out each day in a secret and secluded place. *Oo-simch*, he said, was to make the body "clean inside and outside" out of respect for the guardian spirit.²⁸

When my cousin Linsey turned sixteen in 2003, her mother, Eileen Haggard, held a *iichhuutla*, or "coming of age" potlatch, to acknowledge her daughter's passage into adulthood.²⁹ My aunt asked me to be one of her daughter's chaperones, to sit with Linsey and watch over her during the potlatch. In our culture, during the time leading up to a coming-of-age ceremony, the young girl is secluded and cannot come in contact with anyone other than older female relatives who *haahuupa*, educate her about life.³⁰ During Linsey's potlatch, female relatives were designated to watch over her and take care of her needs. Because of the importance of keeping the young girl clean and pure, her attendants also need to be ritually purified. Leading up to the potlatch, each morning before dawn, I went with my aunts, Eileen and Pauline, and my cousin, Gail, up a mountain to a secluded stream, where we would *oo-simch*, cleansing and purifying our bodies with cedar boughs.

My great-great-grandfather, Sayach'apis, born in 1843, was known to be a great hunter of sea mammals. He was brought up understanding the importance of *oo-simch* and received constant instruction from his father and uncle on ritual cleansing. He knew that if he wanted to be a successful hunter he needed to observe the proper protocol and spiritual preparation. At certain times of the year, Sayach'apis would go to his secret sites in the mountains, where he would stay for many days. While in the forest he would ritually bathe, rubbing himself with hemlock branches until his body ached from the pain. Nuu-chah-nulth have a belief in four *haw'iih*: Above (or Sky) Chief, Horizon Chief, Land Chief, and Undersea Chief. These chiefs were called upon during all ritual bathing and preparation. As Sayach'apis conducted his rituals, he would pray to the chiefs, asking Sky Chief for a long life and success. Sayach'apis caught many sea mammals in his lifetime, and he credited this to his careful and diligent adherence to *oo-simch*.³¹

This same kind of ritual behavior and ceremonial preparation was essential for all subsistence activities and many social practices, but, because of the social, economic, and spiritual significance of whaling, the *oo-simch* connected to that activity was even more rigid, strenuous, and complex.³² Peter Webster's great-uncle was one of the last Nuu-chah-nulth whalers of the early 1900s. He told Peter that the ritual preparation he went through was lengthy and strenuous and involved abstaining from certain foods and from sexual activity in order to preserve all of his strength for whaling.³³

Haw'ilth UmEEK comes from a long line of whalers from the village of Ahousaht,³⁴ one of the northern Nuu-chah-nulth groups. He says that before a whale hunt, his great-grandfather, Keesta, born around 1866, would go up into the mountains to his special cleansing site, where he would spend eight months conducting spiritual and physical preparations, believing that "the great personage of the whale demanded the *honor* of extended ceremony."³⁵

In his preparations of a whaling expedition Keesta fasted, abstained from conjugal sex, performed ritual cleansing, and sang prayer songs over a period of eight months. He took with him the curled tail feather of a mallard duck. Since a curly tail feather does not uncurl under natural conditions, Keesta said that he would know whether his prayers were strong medicine when the curly tail feather straightened out of its own accord. Eventually the curly tail feather did just that, and only then did Keesta come down from the mountain. . . . Keesta "captured" three whales in the traditional Nuu-chah-nulth way.³⁶

Umeeek says that Keesta attributed the capture of those whales to the effectiveness of his prayers and that “the straightened tail feather was a supernatural sign indicating the tangible relationship between spiritual powers and physical powers.”³⁷

THE CENTRALITY OF THE *HAQUUM* TO THE WHALE HUNT

The whaling chief and his *haquum* (queen) underwent the same rigid and complex rituals and spiritual preparation and obeyed similar taboos to demonstrate their connected spirituality and power.³⁸ Husband and wife abstained from sex during their ritual preparation. Sometimes the husband even moved into another house during the whaling season. Within these complex and elaborate ritual ceremonies was the underlying concept of imitative power, meaning that the whaling chief’s and his wife’s actions during their preparation affected how the whale would act during the hunt as well as after it was caught.³⁹

An aspect of the rituals that the whaler conducted before the hunt involved performing certain movements while bathing that imitated a whale’s movements or actions. The whaler would begin his ritual bathing early in the morning in a freshwater lake or pond. He submerged himself four times and after each time rubbed himself with hemlock branches. As the whaler emerged from the water, he would blow mouthfuls of water toward the center of the lake or pond, emulating the way a whale moved in the ocean. He performed these movements very slowly and quietly in the belief that his actions would induce the whale to act in the same way.⁴⁰ While the whaler conducted the rituals, his wife held a rope tied to her husband’s waist, which represented the harpoon line. As the chief sang his whaling songs, he walked calmly around his wife, making slow movements that mimicked the movements of the whale. In turn, the wife sang her songs, repeating over and over, “This is the way the whale will act.”⁴¹

Once the whale hunt commenced, the wife also had to take great care in her actions, because even after her husband left for the hunt, her movements affected how the whale acted while being pursued. After the whaler and his crew left the shore, the wife returned to her home and did not go out for the duration of the hunt. She lay very still in a dark room. Any movements she made had to be calm and slow. It was believed that her power was so strong at this point that she could actually become the whale. If she made any quick or shaky movements, she would cause the whale to become unruly, making it difficult to catch. The wife was not allowed to comb her hair because it was thought that if the comb broke it would cause her husband’s whaling harpoon line to snap. It was believed that

the wife exerted such a “special influence over the whale” that she could actually “call it” to the shore.⁴²

Although all crew members were expected to observe intense rituals, training, and taboos, it was only the whaler and his wife who went through the most elaborate rituals and ceremonial bathing that influenced the whale’s spirit and induced the whales to allow themselves to be captured.⁴³

WHALING SHRINES AND THE DRIFT WHALE RITUAL

The chiefs utilized shrines in their ritual preparation for all subsistence activities. Rituals conducted in these shrines served to bring strong runs of salmon, herring, or other resources.⁴⁴ However, the more elaborate shrines were used by whaling chiefs to prepare spiritually and ritually for their whale hunts. These whaling shrines, also called whalers’ washing houses, held great spiritual significance in both Nuu-chah-nulth and Makah societies. They were utilized exclusively by the whaling chiefs for their purification rituals.

Whaling *haw’iih* inherited secret sites where these shrines were erected. They would go there to perform their sacred rituals and prayers to the spirits, asking them for what Mowachaht *haw’ilth* Jerry Jack called *cheesum*, or “whaling magic,” which was needed to capture a whale. Even the techniques utilized by the whalers were connected to the spirit world. It was understood that whalers’ ancestors were instructed by spirits on the proper rituals to be performed in these secret locations. This sacred knowledge and the methods used in preparation were then passed down and closely followed by the next generation of whalers.⁴⁵

The shrines were also used by whaling chiefs to conduct rituals to entice dead whales onto their beaches. A drift whale was considered a chief’s property, and once it was brought to shore, it would become the possession of the *haw’ilth* on whose beach it had landed. In the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth belief system there was an understanding that the power an individual received from the spirit world could be transferred to another person after that individual died. The drift whale ritual incorporated this philosophy and involved the use of human corpses. The dead, especially the cadavers of successful whaling chiefs, were believed to have “mysterious power over whales.”⁴⁶ *Haw’ilth* Jerry Jack said that the whaling *haw’iih* would tell other whaling chiefs, “When I die, I want you to use me, to cut my head off and use me for *cheesum*. I’ll help you reach the creator to give you that strength that you need to get that whale.”⁴⁷

The great Mowachaht chief Maquinna had an elaborate whaling shrine hidden on an island close to the village of Yuquot.⁴⁸ The shrine contained over eighty

anthropomorphic carvings and numerous human skulls. There is a story that says that one of Maquinna's ancestors was taught by Thunderbird how to use this shrine. Thunderbird told the chief to ritually bathe and to make implements to harpoon whales. Once the chief received his training from Thunderbird, he swam out to the island, where he prayed to the "Great Chiefs" and to the carvings and skulls, asking them to give him the strength to whale.⁴⁹ In his prayers the chief addressed the spirits of his ancestors who had allowed their corpses to be used for these sacred ceremonies.

Now, my father, I have come to you, although you are dead; but your spirit is alive and is standing alongside of me now, in this house that your great-great-grandfathers built for you to come and pray to the four chiefs of this world; to whom you used to pray for help, in this house of the great spirits. You used to bring me with you here to hear you saying your prayers to our four great protectors and helpers; and I used to see you take your father's dead body on your back and carry him into the lake and dive with him into the water, to find the spirit of the whale that you were going to harpoon and to kill; and whenever you said that you had found the spirit of the whale you would take it into the house of the spirits and would give it to the wooden images in the house of prayer; and they would hold it for you until your time was ended for washing. And now I ask you to come, my father, on my back and help me in trying to find the spirit of the whale: and I will leave it in your charge now; for you used to do everything to help me while I was a little boy, the son—your son; and even now your spirit is taking care of me; so come with me now, and I will carry you on my back.⁵⁰

THE QUEST FOR GOOD LUCK

During their ritual and spiritual preparation, whalers would continue their quest for help from the spirit world and also seek out material objects that would provide them with additional power or "luck" needed to hunt and kill a whale. These tangible objects could be used like a charm or amulet and would be sought for all hunting and fishing activities, but the most powerful ones would be sought for whaling. Once a charm was acquired it was kept secret, because secrecy was supposed to help in maintaining its power and effectiveness.⁵¹ In Makah oral tradition there is a legend, "The Whale and the Little Bird," which tells the story of a whaler who noticed a connection between a whale and a little black bird called a *gakatas*. The whale and the *gakatas* lived together, and the little bird provided

protection for the whale. It was considered very lucky to find one of these little birds, and if a whaler obtained one for his whaling power it would bring him many whales.⁵²

Charms were sought for more than just subsistence activities. They were also sought after for wealth, love, and healing. They provided an individual with a material connection to the spirit world, and amulets were often obtained when individuals were conducting their rituals to seek a spirit helper. These charms could be blind snakes, crabs, and spiders or fragments of supernatural animals.⁵³ In Huu-a-uyaht oral tradition, there is a story about a young boy who got his strength to hunt whales by coming in contact with a supernatural power called a *michtach*. The young boy told his father that he wanted to become a great whaler. The father responded that in order to become a great whaler the boy must prepare himself by cleansing his mind and his body through physical preparation and spiritual cleansing. He told his son to find a secluded area to *oo-simch*, which the son did for an entire year. While he was in his sacred place conducting his prayers and rituals, the boy saw a strange creature. He tried to catch the creature but it was too quick and got away. He followed the creature up a mountain, where he came upon another strange creature. The son told his father about the unusual creatures, and his father explained that these were spirits and that he needed to seek out the one that was for whaling.⁵⁴

Months went by and the young boy persisted with his ritual bathing and prayers in his attempts to seek out this strange creature that would provide him with the powers to whale. He ate very little during his *oo-simch*, only small strips of whale blubber that provided him with the strength to continue his purification. He was determined to get his whaling spirit, his *michtach*. Finally, he came in contact with the supernatural creature again. The creature was creeping along the side of the mountain bluff and did not notice the young boy. The boy slowly and quietly sneaked up behind the creature and grabbed the tip of its arm. The creature wiggled out of the young boy's grip, but as it fled, it left behind a piece of its tentacle. The young boy was very happy and wrapped his new "power" in a soft skin and returned home. On the fourth day after acquiring his spirit power, the young boy went out into the ocean and caught four humpback whales. His determination and perseverance in his ritual cleansing and bathing, and his respectful prayers asking the spirit world for supernatural power, paid off. He was now a "proven whaler" and his village would never go hungry now that he had the power to bring home whales to feed them.⁵⁵

In Makah oral tradition there is a story about Thlu-kluts, Thunderbird, a giant who lives in the highest mountains and who feeds on *ch'ih-t'uh-pook* (whales).

When Thlu-kluts is hungry, he puts on his Thunderbird clothing and soars over the ocean in search of the whale. When he spots a *ch'ih-t'uh-pook*, he takes the Ha-he-to-ak, the Lightning Serpent, which he has tied around his waist, and throws it at the whale, first dazing and then killing it. He seizes the whale and brings it up the mountain to eat. The Makah whaling chiefs believed that the Ha-he-to-ak possessed great power, and when lightning struck a tree or land, they would go to that area in search of a piece of the Lightning Serpent. If they were fortunate enough to find even a small piece of its bone, this would provide the chief with supernatural strength, helping him to excel as a whaler.⁵⁶

PREPARING FOR A WHALE HUNT

The Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth pursued various species of whales, but the *maa'ak* (*sih-xwah-wiX* in Makah), or gray whales, and the *iihtuup* (*ch'ih-ch'ih-wad* in Makah), or humpback whales, were the most sought after and most commonly caught. The *iihtuup* and *maa'ak* are relatively slow swimmers and travel close to the shores, making them easy to hunt. The gray whales have one of the longest migration routes of any cetacean, traveling 5,000 miles in each direction, beginning in Mexico and ending in Alaska. They pass Washington State and Vancouver Island in April and May and reach the Bering Sea in late June. Their southward migration begins in the fall, reaching Vancouver Island and Washington in late October to mid-December. The humpback has a similar migratory pattern, passing along the coast of Washington State and Vancouver Island in May and June and then returning on its southward migration in October and November. Some gray and humpback whales stay in the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth marine space throughout the summer months as well.⁵⁷

Archaeological excavations at the Makah village of Ozette, occupied for at least 1,500 years, indicate that the Makah whaling activities focused more on the gray than the humpback whale. Of all the whalebones excavated, more than 95 percent of the bones identified were from gray and humpback whales. Slightly over 50 percent were from the gray whale and 46 percent were from the humpback whale.⁵⁸ Archaeological excavations in Nuu-chah-nulth territory in Barkley Sound found that approximately 80 percent of the whalebones collected were from the humpback whale, while only 13 percent came from the gray whale. These figures demonstrate that many of the Nuu-chah-nulth groups pursued the humpback whale over the gray whale. The reasons for this could be that the humpback whales were larger and more plentiful than the gray whales; they contained a lot more oil than other whales; and they stayed in the Nuu-chah-nulth

marine space for longer periods of time.⁵⁹ Our language could also provide a clue to the preference of whale species. In the Nuu-chah-nulth language, the generic name for whale is *iihtuup*, which is the same word for humpback whale. In the Makah language, the generic name for whale is *ch'ih-t'uh-pook*, which is not connected to any of the whale species; all the whales have their own distinct names.⁶⁰

In 1792, Spanish explorer Juan Francisco de la Bodega y Quadra sailed into Nootka Sound on an expedition to investigate Spanish claims to the area and to negotiate with British captain George Vancouver the terms of the 1790 Nootka Convention. Quadra brought with him a young botanist, José Moziño, whose duty it was to compile a written ethnographic study of the indigenous cultures in the area. While there, Moziño took exhaustive notes concerning the Mowachaht people's traditions, lifestyle, and language. During his five-month residence in Nuu-chah-nulth territory, he was able to gather valuable and detailed information on indigenous lifestyles before contact with non-Indians began to change the Native cultures. In his personal journal, Moziño produced the first known written account of a Nuu-chah-nulth whale hunt. He notes:

They thrust into the whale, with great force, a sharp harpoon attached to a long and heavy shaft so that it will pierce more deeply. This shaft is then recovered by means of a rope, and at the same time they slacken another [rope], tied at one end to the harpoon and at the other to an inflated bladder, which floats over the water like a buoy, marking the place to which the wounded animal has fled during the short time in which it stays alive.⁶¹

Moziño could sense by the way the whale hunt was conducted that it was a very important Mowachaht tradition. He noted: "Among all the types of fishing, none is more admired than that for the whale."⁶²

James Swan was employed as the first schoolteacher in Neah Bay and resided among the Makah in the mid-1800s. During that time he collected data on their customs and lifestyles and was greatly intrigued by the seagoing capabilities of the Makah. Swan wrote extensively on Makah whaling: the types of harpoons used, the rituals surrounding the hunt, the distribution of the meat, and the feast that followed the cutting up of the whale. He noted the Makahs' marine skill and how they excelled in maneuvering their canoes, especially when pursuing whales.⁶³

Canoes were central to marine-based cultures. They were the main mode of travel, transporting coastal peoples up and down the coast to exploit the sea resources, conduct trade, and attend potlatches and for warfare with other

indigenous groups along the coast. Since most of their subsistence came from the oceans and rivers, the canoe played a central role in sea resource extraction, the fishing and hunting of sea mammals. The canoe was constructed out of the western red cedar tree. The canoe maker would take great care in choosing a tree for his canoe. Once a tree was chosen, proper rituals and prayers would be conducted, asking its spirit for success in the pursuits the canoe was to be used for. It was then felled and split in two, with one side being used to make the canoe. Because of the great importance placed on whaling, even greater care was taken in the selection of a tree that was to be made into a whaling canoe. The whaling canoe was large, between 28 and 38 feet in length and sturdy enough to carry eight men. Other canoes would accompany the whaling canoe and would assist the whaling crew when a whale was captured.⁶⁴

A harpoon was used to kill the whale. The harpoon head was a sharp blade made of a large mussel shell. This shell was situated between a pair of antler or bone barbs and held together with spruce gum. A thin cord of sinew was wrapped tightly around the head and another coat of gum was added. Attached to this were a harpoon staff and a long line. Buoys made out of inflated sealskins were attached to the line and were used to help keep the whale afloat.⁶⁵

PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL PREPARATION:

PAYING RESPECT TO THE WHALE

Every protocol had been observed between the whaling chief and the spirit of the whale. Keesta [Chief Umeek's great-grandfather] had thrown the harpoon, and the whale had accepted it, had grabbed and held onto the harpoon according to the agreement they had made through prayers and petitions. Harmony prevailed, whale and whaler were one.—Umeek, Richard Atleo (*Tsawalk*, x)

Proper religious observances were also conducted during the hunt. The whaling crew continued their prayers throughout the hunt, maintaining their connection to the spirit world and to their spirit helpers who provided them with “more than human strength” to capture the whale.⁶⁶ My ancestors believed that a whale was not caught, but, with the proper rituals and utmost respect shown to the whale, it would give itself up to the whaler and to the people who had shown it the most esteem. This is why the rituals had to be conducted with great care and commitment before, during, and after the hunt. Songs and prayers were sung by the whaling crew during the hunt to demonstrate to the whale their appreciation for its gift of itself.



Makah whaler, ca. 1915. Photograph by Edward S. Curtis;
courtesy of the Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria.

Whale, I have given you what you wish to get—my good harpoon. And now you have it. Please hold it with your strong hands. Do not let go. Whale, turn towards the fine beach . . . and you will be proud to see the young men come down . . . to see you; and the young men will say to one another: What a great whale he is! What a fat whale he is! What a strong whale he is! And you, whale, will be proud of all that you hear them say of your greatness.⁶⁷

Once harpooned, a whale usually responded by heading toward the open sea, and it could drag the whaling crew for days. However, if a whaler had obtained strong whaling power, had correctly prepared for the hunt, and properly honored the whale's spirit, the whale would head toward the shore. If the whale thrashed about and the canoe capsized or was damaged by the whale, this was evidence that the whaler had not adequately prepared for the hunt and was careless in his ritual observances.⁶⁸

The Nuu-chah-nulth name for whale, *iihtuup*, means "big mystery." Huu-ay-aht elder Willie Sport said that the chief's ability to establish such an intimate connection to a whale was seen as being both spiritual and mysterious.

A whaler believed that a specific whale gave itself to him, through a mysterious power. Prayer and cleansing the mind and body made the whaler worthy of the great whale's gift of life. When the whaler went out to sea and reached the place where thousands of whales were migrating up the coast, when he got there he didn't harpoon the first whale he saw, he identified the one that he was intended to kill. That one was looking for him, too. They recognized each other. The whale gives himself to the hunter who has been praying and who is clean.⁶⁹

A whaler's success was regarded as proof that he had not only acquired a powerful whaling spirit but had also shown proper respect to the whale's spirit. The more success in whaling a *haw'ilth* had throughout his lifetime, the more powerful a spirit he was believed to have obtained.

When the whale tired, the crew in the other canoes would throw their lances into the whale until it finally died. A crew member then dived into the water and cut a hole through the whale's upper lip and lower jaw and sewed its mouth shut, to hold in the buoyant gases that would keep the carcass afloat.⁷⁰ Floats were hooked to this and other lines attached to the rest of the whale's body. The whale could then be towed to shore, to the accompaniment of songs and prayers to make the task less difficult. When the crew finally reached the village shores, they were greeted by community members with shouts of praise for the whaling

crew and with songs to welcome the whale, an honored guest, to the village. The Nuu-chah-nulth community of Ahousaht had a tradition of having all the young children grab hold of one of the lines attached to the whale, to help pull it the last few yards up onto the beach.⁷¹

When the whale was brought to shore, the whaler's wife was usually the first person to greet it and would sprinkle it with eagle down. A song called *chuchaa* was sung to the whale and then the *chakwa'si*,⁷² or dorsal fin, was removed. The chief kept the saddle of skin and blubber from the *chakwa'si*, which was considered the prize part of the whale. It was believed that the whale's anthropomorphic spirit resided in the dorsal fin. The body of the whale was its canoe, which carried the human spirit. After the *chakwa'si* was cut from the whale, the saddle was put on display and treated to four days of ritual prayers to pay respect to the whale and "to make [its] spirit feel at home."⁷³ Songs called *ts'its'ihimik'yak* were sung to the *chakwa'si* to induce the human spirit to leave it and enter another "canoe," or whale.⁷⁴ In my family, we have a song passed down by my great-great-grandfather that was sung to the *chakwa'si* after it was brought into our whaling ancestor's house to be honored. The song was sung after the four days of rituals and prayers. The main chorus of Sayach'apis's song is "I finish coming to the land";⁷⁵ it was a way to complete the ceremony and confirm that the whale spirit had finished its journey as well.

After these prayers and rituals were performed, the whale was divided among the community members. Strict and careful protocol would oversee the allocation of the whale parts. First the crew and the other village members who helped capture the whale were given choice pieces of blubber. Then the rest of the whale pieces were given out according to inherited privilege.⁷⁶ Whale bones that were not utilized for specific purposes were stacked up on the beach in front of the chief's house as a testament to his whaling prowess.⁷⁷ The distribution of the whale helped fulfill a chief's responsibilities to his community while also serving to reinforce his social position.

PA-CHITLÉ: REINFORCING COMMUNITY THROUGH THE WHALING CHIEF'S POTLATCH

The West Coast peoples had, and still have in the twenty-first century, a ceremony or social gathering known as the potlatch.⁷⁸ The word comes from the Chinook trade language and was derived from the Nuu-chah-nulth word *pa-chitlé*, which means "to give."⁷⁹ The potlatch reflected and perpetuated the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth social organization and was utilized to validate status and

hereditary privileges acquired at birth. The *haw'iih* and the *maschimes* had certain privileges, but the titleholders and their families were the ones who hosted the potlatches to announce and make a claim to these rights or to acknowledge the rights and status of those below them. In the precontact and early-contact period, only the higher ranking *haw'iih* potlatched and only those people who were free could attend the potlatch; thus, slaves were excluded.⁸⁰ Although high rank was a birthright,⁸¹ *haw'iih* had to hold potlatches throughout their lives to “keep up” their names through the ceremonial gifting of foods and goods.

These public events were held by high-ranking families to bestow names and rights, to validate marriages, to recognize a youth's coming of age, and to mourn the death of a tribal member. All Northwest Coast peoples had a variety of highly ritualized ceremonies, each having its own specific name and objectives. For example, the Nuu-chah-nulth have a sacred ceremony called a *tloo-qua-nah* (Makah, *klukwalle*),⁸² which is an initiation ceremony dramatizing the capture by wolves of human initiates, who are then recovered by former initiates after they have received special powers and privileges from the wolves.⁸³ At the end of the performance, a potlatch takes place, where the initiates dance and display the ceremonial privileges bestowed on them by the wolves.⁸⁴ *Mamalhn'i* settlers who witnessed our ceremonies mistook the verb *pa-chitle* for the name of the ceremonies because it was used repeatedly throughout. Eventually the word was transformed into “potlatch” and came to be used to refer to all the coastal peoples' ceremonies.⁸⁵

As anthropologist Franz Boas asserted, the potlatch was a system of public record-keeping that served as a substitute for writing.⁸⁶ It also served an economic function through the ceremonial distribution of food and material goods. While the purpose of potlatches was to pass on titles of rank and their associated privileges to designated heirs of the *haw'iih*, they functioned also to distribute surpluses and special local products as “gifts” to the people invited to witness the claim being made. Their acceptance of these gifts acknowledged their acceptance of the claim.⁸⁷ Boas maintained that while the possession of wealth was considered admirable, the ability to hold great potlatches where wealth could be given away was even more admired: a chief's name “acquire[d] greater weight in the councils of his tribe and greater renown among the whole people” after each potlatch he held.⁸⁸

Sociologist/anthropologist Marcel Mauss asserted that the motives behind gifting in potlatches were much more complex than early anthropologists and historians understood them to be. The principle of gift giving functioned within a highly intricate system of reciprocity governed by what Mauss described as “the



Cutting up a whale at Neah Bay, 1910. Photograph by Asahel Curtis; courtesy of Washington State Historical Society, Pullman.

concept of mana.” Mana was the authority, honor, and prestige a chief derived by being known as a sophisticated and generous giver. A chief would constantly have to give gifts and have them reciprocated in order to keep and increase his mana. Problems could ensue if a gift was rejected or if a chief could not reciprocate.⁸⁹ In 1868, Gilbert Sproat noted that the collecting of property for the purpose of distribution was a constant aspiration of the Tseshah people. One *haw’ilth* who held lavish potlatches to distribute his material goods was greatly admired; this was reflected in the name given to him by his village members, “strong heart.”⁹⁰ Edward Sapir wrote that Sayach’apis became an honored member of his village and he and his family were respected throughout the West Coast because of the numerous potlatches he held in his lifetime.

The many feasts he [Sayach'apis] has given and the many ceremonial dances and displays he has had performed have all had their desired effect—they have shed luster on his sons and daughters and grandchildren, they have “put his family high” among the Ts'ishah'ath tribe, and they have even carried his name to other, distinct Nootka tribes, and to tribes on the east coast of the island.⁹¹

Sapir noted that Sayach'apis had such a large pile of blankets to give away at one of his elaborate potlatches that they poked through the roof of his longhouse. The potlatch goods were so heavy that the floor beneath them collapsed.⁹²

The potlatch was central to the marriage ceremony of a whaling *haw'ilth* and a *haquum*. During the potlatch, skill-testing ceremonial games associated with whaling, which were part of the chief's *tuupaati* (ceremonial prerogatives), were executed by male guests to demonstrate their whaling prowess. This potlatch contest was recalled by Ahousaht elder Peter Webster:

Often the large potlatch, which could last all day, started with a game. One of these used a large board shaped like a whale. This had a red spot painted on it to represent the heart of the whale. One person at a time would be called upon to pretend to harpoon the whale by throwing at it the feather of an eagle or swan. This “spear” could be thrown from some distance and was, naturally, very hard to control. The winners would be those who either hit the bull's eye, the heart, or came closest to the target.⁹³

After a whale was caught, it was divided among the tribal members, with the whaler keeping large quantities of whale oil and meat, which he used for trading purposes. Many chiefs became smart entrepreneurs and very wealthy by trading the whale oil and blubber to other tribes up and down the coast. Both the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth established lucrative and beneficial trading networks along the coast, with whale oil being a major product in this trade.

One of the most important potlatches the *haw'iih* could hold was the *tlaqsit*, or whale-oil potlatch. Successful *haw'iih* who acquired a large quantity of whale oil from the whales they caught would give away this oil at a potlatch to show how wealthy they were. At the potlatch the host would dress up in his whaling regalia and act out his successful whale hunts, with his wife acting as the whale. Other whalers invited to the potlatch would also act out their whaling success stories. Occasionally, the whalers would act out whaling stories in which they were not successful. One such story focuses on a whaler who pretends he is sleeping. The point of his theatrical performance is to show how he overslept, which

led to his not being successful in his whale hunting pursuits. This demonstrated the hunter's humility to the other whalers, and he was respected for his honesty.⁹⁴

Wilson Parker, one of the Makah tribe's last whalers of the 1920s, told a story about a feast his father had held after he killed four whales in one season. The whales yielded an estimated five hundred gallons of oil and Wilson's father gave it all away at a whale-oil potlatch. All the great whaling *haw'iih* came decked out in their whaling regalia. The feast opened with a young dancer who shook his whaling rattle as he danced, imitating the actions of a whale. The whaling *haw'iih* sang their prayer songs, and after the dancer was finished, they, too, danced, imitating the motions of a whale.⁹⁵

Participants sang a whale-oil song, which the chief had received from a whale he caught. The song signified how much wealth the whale brought to the chief, so much that he could afford to give away all the oil that was rendered. In the song, the whale questions the whaler's preparedness for all the people who would visit his village once they heard of his greatness as a whaler. The whale says to the whaler: "I have come to see how your house is. Is it prepared for large crowds?"⁹⁶

When the whale-oil ceremonies were completed, a canoe was brought into the potlatch house and whale oil was poured into it. Young female dancers wrapped themselves in blankets and the host then poured oil over them. The oil was also poured lavishly onto the fire in the potlatch house. This demonstrated the chief's great wealth by his seeming disregard for an item of such great value. The rest of the oil was then distributed among the whaling chiefs, who brought containers with them to carry the oil back to their villages.⁹⁷

While whaling elevated the status of the *haw'iih*, providing them with wealth that maintained their position within their societies, it also served an important societal function in maintaining social cohesion, communal sharing, and tribal unity. Distribution of the whale benefited all members of the village so that everyone had a stake in the whaling tradition. Even though only a few people actually hunted whales, the hunters relied on support labor from community members who helped process, preserve, and prepare the whale products.⁹⁸ The whaling *haw'iih* then acknowledged and thanked these people during the potlatch ceremony.

Haw'iih did not perform day-to-day activities such as gathering food and building houses because these jobs were done for them by the members of the village. Through the ceremonial distribution of food and material goods during a potlatch, the *haw'ilth* publicly acknowledged those who provided the labor. The laborers would then see rewards for their cooperation and would continue to support and serve the *haw'ilth*.

Consequently, while whaling potlatches helped raise and legitimize chiefs' status, the feasts and gifts were also mechanisms utilized by them to maintain a labor force and were a means of compensating the members of the village for their participation in the harvesting of the resources within the chief's territory. *Haw'iih* would strive to keep in good standing with all village members. Even though there seemed to be a power imbalance, with the chiefs having total dominance over the commoners, the relationship was in many ways reciprocal. The *maschimes* always had the ability to move to another local group or switch chiefs, and since to be successful the *haw'ilth* relied on the members of his village group, any tendency to exploit the *maschimes* could result in the loss of their support.⁹⁹

In Nuu-chah-nulth territory, a successful whale hunt was also used to develop cordial relations with neighboring Nuu-chah-nulth tribes. Father Augustin Brabant was the first priest to reside among the Nuu-chah-nulth, from 1869 until his death in 1912. While living among the Hesquiaht people, he witnessed the seizure of a drift whale in 1875. He noted that "in the heat of their happiness" in acquiring the whale, the Hequiaht people invited the people from the neighboring Ahousaht village to join them in their celebration. The Ahousaht people were invited to the house of the whaling *haw'ilth*, where they were entertained with songs and dances. Following the ceremonies, the guests were given a meal of whale meat.¹⁰⁰ Nuu-chah-nulth *haw'ilth* Tom Mexsis Happynook says that the whale hunts strengthened and affirmed relationships and alliances within and beyond Nuu-chah-nulth territory. He says that when a whale was caught, people came from great distances to share in the processing of the whale and in the celebrations that followed. This not only strengthened relationships between families but also served to establish and reinforce intertribal alliances.¹⁰¹

Ahousaht *haw'ilth* Earl George remembered a story told to him about great whale hunters from his community that also provides evidence of the communal sharing aspects of whaling.¹⁰² One particular whaler, Kista (Keesta) Atleo, would spend years preparing for a whale hunt. When a whale was captured, people from all the Nuu-chah-nulth nations were invited to feast on the whale meat and blubber. Ceremonies surrounded the distribution of the whale parts, George said, and "eventually, all the parts of the whale were given [to] all people of all parts of the coastline, [who] were rejoicing and feasting" on the whale.¹⁰³

People from all the Ahousaht Nation and farther away gathered to come and enjoy the celebration and feast of the killing of the whale. There were Kwaguilth people from the other end of the Island, Nimpkish Lake people came to attend the ceremony of the killing of the whale and enjoy the feast that was put on.

Also, people from Neah Bay, Washington, and the places near Neah Bay, Port Angelas and out to the outside areas, part of the Makah Nation which was also Nuu-chah-nulth. Of course there were famous whale hunters from all the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations that took part in that . . . famous hunters, who were well known for hunting and killing the giant whales. So, well over anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 people came to take part in that ceremony which made Kista Atleo a very famous man.¹⁰⁴



Whaling did not just provide my ancestors with wealth, status, and food; it was the basis of Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth worldviews, identities, and cultures. Whales were seen as sacred gifts providing the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth peoples with spiritual and nutritional sustenance. Following contact with non-Indians, the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth people's lives began to change dramatically. Economic dislocation, commercial whaling, and federal assimilative policies challenged their cultural and spiritual association with whales, leading to the eventual demise of whaling practices.