

# The G'psgolox Pole: Representations of the Haisla History

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The year was 1872 and the Haisla Nation, located in the north of what is now called British Columbia, faced disaster: a smallpox epidemic devastated the polity, killing the vast majority of the population.<sup>1</sup> Chief G'psgolox, leader of the Haisla, watched in horror as his friends and family died in terrible pain. One day, he went into the forest to ask for help and met a little man. The man told Chief G'psgolox to go to the edge of a mountain the next morning at dawn, where he would see his deceased people and learn to heal those still living. Chief G'psgolox complied and gained vital knowledge, learning the nature of the little man; the small one was T'sooda, the Haisla spirit of continuance and transition. As a thank you to the god for his help, Chief G'psgolox commissioned a nine meter tall totem pole with three figures. The bottom two figures commemorated the deceased and on top was a diminutive man in a top hat, called T'sooda. The pole, while commemorating the dead, told the tale of Haisla survival and comforted the Haisla as they returned to their summer grounds, once the site of so much sadness. The G'psgolox Pole, as it later came to be known, stood tall and proud until 1929, when the Haisla returned to the site and found that the pole had vanished.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gil Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*, Digital Film. Directed by Gil Cardinal. (Quebec, Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2003), and "Swedish Museum returns Totem Pole to Canadian tribe," *The Local: Sweden's News in English*, 18 November 2005. <http://www.thelocal.se/2527/20051118/>. (Accessed October 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

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In 1929, Olof Hanson, then the Swedish vice-consul to British Columbia, was given permission from the Canadian government to cut down a totem pole and take it to Sweden. He chose the G'psgolox Pole, cut it down at the base while the Haisla were away on their seasonal rounds, and donated it to the Swedish National Museum of Ethnography that same year.<sup>3</sup> The museum kept the pole in storage for decades until a proper building could be constructed for its exhibition. Finally, in 1980, the museum finished construction on a new building and erected the pole, supporting it in a standing position with a metal chain. Gerald Amos, the Haisla repatriation chair, heard about the pole and in 1991 finally went to see it.<sup>4</sup> When he saw the metal chain, he was distressed and infuriated. For him, the chain represented a shackle on the Haisla people.<sup>5</sup>

Amos asked the Swedish Museum of Ethnography to return the pole to the Haisla people who had been avidly searching for it without success since the theft in 1929. For more than ten years, debates over the pole and its ownership ensued. At long last a compromise, new in composition and content, was reached. The agreement was three-fold: first, the Swedish museum of Ethnography would return the G'psgolox Pole; second, the Haisla would build an exact replica for the museum which would be erected upright, free from shackle-like bindings; third, the Haisla Nation would build a historical preservation center for the original pole and build another replica to stand at the 1929 site of the original pole.<sup>6</sup> In short, two replicas and a cultural center would be produced in exchange for the repatriation of the original pole.

At last, in May 2006, the agreement was realized. Outside the Swedish Museum of Ethnography, a replica of the G'psgolox Pole sits on a stand of Haisla construction. In the original site a second replica stands. The Haisla historical center, however, has yet to be constructed due to lack of funding. The original G'psgolox pole, repatriated in 2006, lies in the neighboring Haida historical center, having been returned to the Haisla by a delegation of Swedish museum officials and presided over by the Sami – an indigenous people of Sweden.<sup>7</sup>

This repatriation was a historic event because the Haisla Nation was the first indigenous nation in Canada to negotiate repatriation from

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<sup>3</sup> “Swedish Museum returns Totem Pole to Canadian tribe.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Gil Cardinal, *Totem: Return and Renewal*, Digital Film. Directed by Gil Cardinal. (Quebec, Canada: National Film Board of Canada, 2007).

overseas without assistance. In addition, the repatriation recognized the changing role of indigenous nations in the international community. The complex history of the G'psgolox Pole is particularly important to scholars of indigenous history because it allows an in-depth analysis of North American indigenous and European interactions, as seen through an archaeological theoretical framework. The long history of the G'psgolox Pole can be divided into three parts based on the relationship between the Haisla and their European-descended neighbors: the construction of the pole, a time of *cultural entanglement*; the theft of the pole, *colonialism*; and the repatriation negotiations, a new form of *cultural entanglement*.

I examine the archeological frameworks of cultural entanglement and colonialism, and analyze how the G'psgolox Pole case study creates further nuances within these frameworks. In addition, I use the two frameworks as tools to extract further meaning from the G'psgolox Pole history itself. I conclude looking towards the future and seeing how the repatriation and the historic relationship shifts affect Haisla sense of sovereignty and outlook to the future of indigenous nations as international players.

## Why Use Archaeological Theory?

Archaeological study goes beyond examining written records to investigate material remains from the past. In many instances, there are little or no written records about the times, places, or peoples that archeologists study, and so they work to reconstruct history based mainly on physical objects. Archeologists have tried to theorize and categorize intercultural interaction during the full range of human history, unconstrained by a lack of texts. Therefore, archeological theory can look at the cultural interactions between oral cultures and written cultures, understand more fully the situation from both cultural perspectives, and give both a voice by studying the physical remains of those interactions.

Such is the case for the G'psgolox Pole of the Haisla people. The Haisla are an oral culture; they did not keep written records of the G'psgolox Pole, rather the pole itself was a record of Haisla history. They interacted with many Europeans who had written documents and communications. To understand the history of the Haisla people, I look to the G'psgolox Pole and reconstruct history by studying this material object. I use both historical sources and analyses of the pole itself to present both the Haisla and the European perspectives on the different types of interactions that occurred between the different peoples over the centuries. An archeological framework of cultural entanglement and colonialism is the best way to understand the shifts in power dynamics and sovereignty between the Haisla and their neighbors over time.

## The Construction of the G'psglox's Pole: Cultural Entanglement

In its earliest stages, interaction between the Haisla, Canada and Sweden can be called *Cultural Entanglement* because of the ambiguous power dynamic, shifting roles of the indigenous and European players and the undetermined outcome. Cultural entanglement, as an archeological framework, derives from Rani T. Alexander's summation of a 1995 *Visiting Scholar Conference* volume for the Center of Archeological Investigations where she presents a three-part typology for archeological culture-contact theory, dividing cultural interaction into colonization, cultural entanglement and symmetrical exchange. Alexander defines the second term:

Cultural entanglement is a process whereby interaction with an expanding territorial state gradually results in change of indigenous patterns of production, exchange and social relations. Development of the interaction network may lead to increasingly unbalanced economic relations, but these asymmetries are not characteristic of the original encounter.<sup>8</sup>

The Haisla's first encounter with European colonial powers involved neither Canada nor Sweden. Rather, the first Europeans that the Haisla, a Wakashan speaking nation<sup>9</sup> in the center of the British Columbian coast, encountered were the Russians, the British and the Americans who came to participate in the ever-expanding fur trade and sell the furs to China.<sup>10</sup> The Russians maintained trade in the north, along the Alaskan coast and through Tlingit territory, and further south in Oregon and California.<sup>11</sup> However, they were not a major player in the trade markets

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<sup>8</sup> Rani T. Alexander, "Afterward: Toward an Archaeological Theory of Culture Contact" in *Studies in Culture Contact: Interaction, Culture Change and Archaeology*, edited by James G. Cusick. (United States: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 485.

<sup>9</sup> Haisla Nation, "Our Community," *Haisla First Nation Online*. <http://www.haisla.ca/community>. (Accessed November 10, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774 – 1890*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), 2-3; Kent G. Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries and Merchants: Legacy of Colonial Encounters in the California Frontiers*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 5; and North West Council, "Fur Trade." *Columbia River History*. <http://www.nwcouncil.org/history/FurTrade.asp> (Accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries and Merchants*, 5-6.

of the central British Columbian coasts. At first the Haisla's main trading partners were the British, who were then supplanted by the Americans.<sup>12</sup>

The Haisla's major fur trade with Europeans began when Captain James Cook, a British maritime explorer, spent a month with Haisla allies, the Haida, at Nootka Sound in 1778.<sup>13</sup> Cook and his party discovered the richness and beauty of British Columbian sea otter pelts which would sell for as much as 120 dollars each in Chinese markets in 1784.<sup>14</sup> So trade began in earnest; the Americans soon realized the wealth of the British Columbian fur trade and between 1792, when the first American ship appeared on the coast, and 1801 had replaced the British as the main trading partner for the Haisla, the Haida and many other nations of the central British Columbian Coast.

During this time, the power dynamics of who held sway in the fur trade was unclear. Certainly the Americans out-competed the British early on, and though some European or European-descended traders became very rich, it appears that the indigenous nations of British Columbia were more powerful in this early period, gaining their desired goods at better prices and setting the prices on sea otter pelts for Europeans.<sup>15</sup> There was little demand among the coastal peoples for beads or small trinkets; rather much of the demand was for copper or iron—materials rare to the Haisla and considered valuable in the Haisla pre-contact cultural framework, a value which continued long after trade began—and blankets.<sup>16</sup> The Haisla and their neighbors were shrewd traders, always getting what they considered full value for their pelts in the goods they defined valuable.

Changes in the trading system began after 1805 when the Europeans discovered that the indigenous peoples did not like rowing four or five miles out to the moored European ships. In fact, the Haisla and their neighbors preferred trading at a slower pace all year long compared to a quick one-season flurry.<sup>17</sup> The Europeans found out at the same time that profits were much higher if they established year-round trading posts.<sup>18</sup> The creation of year-round posts is fascinating because it demonstrates the power of indigenous nations in the maritime trade. While the European traders reaped benefits from their year-round posts, the idea was not theirs and posts were not constructed from a European framework, but rather from an indigenous one. The

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<sup>12</sup> Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

accommodation of Europeans to indigenous demands shows the mutually beneficial nature of the trade, the mixed power dynamics and encapsulates the undetermined outcomes of the original trade.

This maritime trade peaked between 1792 and 1812,<sup>19</sup> and then collapsed to virtually nothing after 1821, when the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Fur Company merged and established a single European-run land-based fur company monopoly across the interior of Canada.<sup>20</sup> At first, the land trade preserved the maritime trade spirit.<sup>21</sup> However, the relationship between the Haisla and European nations changed drastically in the 1820s. The Hudson's Bay Company began militaristic expeditions to end competition, continuing a tactic they first used in Snake country in the far north of present-day British Columbia.<sup>22</sup> In 1833, the newly expanded Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post at Fort McLaughlin.<sup>23</sup> Yet this was a military post between British Canada and the Russians, rather than a peaceable trading settlement, and showed a shift in power dynamics as Europeans started coming en masse to settle along the coast and outbid the maritime traders for fur.<sup>24</sup> By the 1840s, relationships became tense and interracial conflict common; violence and war as well as trade began to reign along the coast.<sup>25</sup> Relations had fundamentally changed for the Haisla by the 1880s because increased direct contact had led to the first major epidemic of diseases introduced by Europeans 1871-72.<sup>26</sup>

In 1872, Chief G'psgolox commissioned the totem pole to commemorate the Haisla dead and to praise T'sooda who taught him the knowledge of healing the living,<sup>27</sup> providing him with the strength to continue the Haisla way of life—hunting, gathering, and fishing.<sup>28</sup> The totem pole marks the continuance of cultural entanglement between the Haisla and Canada because even after the introduction of disease, the Haisla continued their traditional subsistence round, though somewhat modified to procure furs for the Hudson's Bay Company. Power dynamics were still ambiguous as the Haisla chief and Hudson's Bay administration both claimed the same land, with neither one nor the

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<sup>19</sup> Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 3.

<sup>20</sup> North West Council, "Fur Trade."

<http://www.nwcouncil.org/history/FurTrade.asp>.

<sup>21</sup> Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>23</sup> *American Indians, Vol I: Abenaki – Hayes, Ira Hamilton*, ed. Harvey Markowitz. (Pasadena Salem Press, Inc. 1995.) s.v. Haisla

<sup>24</sup> Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>26</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Haisla Nation, "Our community," <http://www.haisla.ca/community>.

other gaining the upper hand for the moment. Hence the relation between the Haisla and Canada in the land-based fur trade throughout the 1870s and 1880s continued to be an experience of cultural entanglement, though one incredibly different from the Haisla's first relationship with maritime sea traders.

## Colonialism and the Theft of the G'psglox's Pole

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Haisla relationships with their European-descended neighbors changed drastically; from a period of ambiguous outcome and relative equality in trade relations came a time of dominance by European settler nations. Alexander, in her 1995 summation, calls this period of cultural interaction *colonization* and defines it: "Colonization is an asymmetrical form of interaction in which there is an extreme difference in political and military power held by the colonizers from that of the colonized."<sup>29</sup> While agreeing with the spirit of her definition, I feel that Alexander's terms could be improved by using *colonialism* instead of colonization. Kurt Jordan, in a 2009 article, succinctly differentiates the two:

Colonization is simply the process of establishing colonies, which produces a system of social interaction with at least three nodes: (1) the colonies themselves; (2) the indigenous groups impacted by the colonies; and (3) the colonial homeland or metropole..... In contrast, colonialism fundamentally involves relationships of intercultural domination.<sup>30</sup>

Thus colonialism is the term that fully embodies the realized domination of one people by another.

The definition can be further refined by incorporating more specificity, as Chris Gosden does in his article "A Model of Colonialism." In this article, Gosden proposes the Terra Nullius mode of colonialism:

Terra Nullius is the one form of colonialism that ignored and despised foreign modalities of sociability as a general rule, destroying, distorting or driving them underground to become resistance. For the colonized, Terra Nullius colonization meant usurpation, death, and dislocation... Land and landscape were crucial elements in this type of colonialism. Land taken by outside settlers was confiscated from the care of

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<sup>29</sup> Alexander, "Afterward: Toward an Archaeological Theory of Culture Contact," 482.

<sup>30</sup> Kurt A. Jordan "Colonies, Colonialism and Cultural Entanglement: The Archeology of Postcolumbian Intercultural Relations." *International Handbook of Historical Archeology* (2009): 31 – 32.

indigenous inhabitants, removing the physical basis of peoples' lives, the source of food, shelter and raw materials, but also the spiritual foundation of life through the links to landscape with its ancestral and other spirits, which needed their own customs of care and respect.<sup>31</sup>

Terra Nullius, as a term, has specific legal connotations in the Australian context that differ from the Canadian context which the Haisla faced. It is important to note that both my use and Gosden's use of Terra Nullius interaction is metaphorical and focuses on social context and general legal practice of usurpation, dislocation and extermination. I do not mean to imply that the situation in Canada and Australia are the same or that they had the exact same laws regarding indigenous people; however, I do argue that the intent of European lawmakers and settlers and the socio-legal context in both countries were similar. Thus, Gosden's Terra Nullius is a valid metaphor to use in analyzing the Haisla interaction with Canada and Sweden in this period of time.

The theft of the G'psgolox's Pole is a complicated case study of Terra Nullius interaction because three nations were involved: the Haisla Nation, Canada, and Sweden. The involvement of both Canada and Sweden complicates the picture of a one-way colonizer-colonized relationship because Sweden was neither the colonizer nor an imperial competitor; rather, it was a friend of Canada and acted with full consent of the Canadian government.

The period of colonialism in Haisla history began in the late 1890s and continued until the early 1980s. Right away, the land factor of Terra Nullius colonialism came into play for the Haisla Nation. In the late 1890s, the Canadian government established a reservation for the Haisla; some 1604 acres, in what is now known as Prince Rupert, was reserved for a people whose lifestyle demanded the use of just over 5000 square miles for annual subsistence rounds.<sup>32</sup> By 1905, the Haisla reservation was one of the poorest in Canada.<sup>33</sup>

Further Terra Nullius practices were implemented, such as forced boarding school education, bans on indigenous religions and languages, and marriage laws that defined who was Indian and who was not. European-styled education began for the Haisla in 1833, when missionaries came with traders to Fort McLaughlin and established day schools for indigenous children.<sup>34</sup> However, the forced education which

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<sup>31</sup> Chris Gosden, "Chapter 3: A model of colonialism," in *Archaeology and Colonialism*, edited by Chris Gosden. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 28.

<sup>32</sup> Haisla Nation, "Our community," <http://www.haisla.ca/community>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *American Indians, Vol I: Abenaki – Hayes*, Ira Hamilton, ed. Harvey Markowitz. s.v. Haisla



would be better called cultural genocide did not begin until the 1890s, when Western Canada received a huge influx of immigrants drawn towards the Yukon Gold Rush.<sup>35</sup> Children from First Nations across the Canadian state were stolen from their families by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police at gun-point. Once at school, children were placed in an English-only program and were beaten and abused for using Native languages as a part of the Canadian ban on indigenous tongues.<sup>36</sup> Beaten for praying in a traditional manner, refused trips home for speaking in their first language, and sexually and emotionally abused, children who attended school slowly forgot their traditional ways. Or if they did not, they learned to remain silent for protection of self and friends.<sup>37</sup> At the height of the Indian Residential School system, there were 82 schools acting to assimilate First Nation children into Canadian society.<sup>38</sup> When the children returned home, they discovered that they could not communicate with elders who spoke only indigenous languages, they did not know how to survive in communities far removed from urban centers, and their education was entirely useless in the wild because it did not help in hunting and preparing food.<sup>39</sup> In short, many alumni found that residential schools worked in alienating children from their traditional life ways, a major component of Terra Nullius Colonialism.

Many boarding schools in Canada were administered by religious organizations with authority and funding granted from the federal government. Such was the case for the Kitamaat<sup>40</sup> Residential School, run by the United Church of Canada, the boarding school that most of the Haisla people were forced to attend beginning in the 1880s through 1969.<sup>41</sup> Other Haisla students, like the famous author Gordon Robinson, went to Coqualeetza Residential School in Sardis, British

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<sup>35</sup> Assembly of First Nations Online. "Residential Schools – A Chronology." <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=2586>. (Accessed December 12, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Lloyd Dolha. "Alberni School Victim Speaks Out." First Nations Drum. <http://www.firstnationsdrum.com/education/Default.htm>. (Accessed December 12, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Assembly of First Nations Online. "Residential Schools – Fact Sheet." <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=2586>. (Accessed December 12, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Dolha, "Alberni School Victim Speaks Out." <http://www.firstnationsdrum.com/education/Default.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> Haisla Nation, "Our community," <http://www.haisla.ca/community>.

<sup>41</sup> Rev. James Scott. "Voicing the Past: A Presentation to Residential School Survivors." <http://www.united-church.ca/files/aboriginal/schools/voicing.pdf>. (Accessed June 7, 2010).

Columbia, along the Chiliwak River.<sup>42</sup> Haisla students were stripped of home, family, language, and culture when they were taken hundreds of miles from their homes and placed into boarding schools, stated Reverend James Scott of the United Church of Canada as he delivered the church's 2009 apology.<sup>43</sup> He related the apologies of past administrators, teachers, and church members who all acknowledged boarding schools as an important component of the colonization of the Haisla people. The honesty of administrators and faculty and the consistency of their accounts with those of residential school alumni give further nuance to the historical reality of the Canadian practice of Terra Nullius Colonialism during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In addition, Canada implemented other means of erasing the Native component of Canadian culture. In 1876, the Canadian government passed the Indian Act, which defined who could or could not be considered an Indian in terms of aboriginal treaties. The Indian Act stated that any woman married to a First Nation man was considered Indian, as were their children, while any First Nation woman married to a white man was no longer an Indian, nor were her children.<sup>44</sup> In so defining people, the Canadian government often ripped families right down the middle, where one half was subject to treaty law and the other to federal law. The schism of family and moiety ties in legal terms resulted in further divisions in the indigenous political structure and cohesion, adding another element of Terra Nullius practice into the mix. Not only did Canada actively kill native people in battle, but the government also attempted to entirely erase indigenous ways of life through forced schooling, banning Native languages and religions, and defining Indian peoples out of native identity. The height of this Terra Nullius process occurred in the 1920s, the same decade when the Canadian government gave the G'psgolox Pole to Hanson.

So where does Sweden fit into this gruesome picture? By the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Sweden was no longer an imperialist nation with colonies outside—or inside—of Europe. By 1800, Sweden had no

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<sup>42</sup> Smashwords: Your E-book, Your Way. "Gordon Robinson – Biography." <http://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/haislalegends>. (Accessed June 7, 2010); and MacLachlan 1999 and Oliver Wells, Ralph Maud, Brent Douglas Galloway, and Marie Weeden, *The Chilliwaks and Their Neighbors* 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), 31.

<sup>43</sup> Rev. James Scott. "Voicing the Past: A Presentation to Residential School Survivors." <http://www.united-church.ca/files/aboriginal/schools/voicing.pdf>. (Accessed June 7, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Canada in the Making "Aboriginals: Treaties & Relations." [http://www.canadiana.org/citm/themes/aboriginals/aboriginals8\\_e.html#indianact](http://www.canadiana.org/citm/themes/aboriginals/aboriginals8_e.html#indianact). (Accessed December 12, 2009).

trading companies in North America and was uninterested in the North American fur trade.<sup>45</sup> So, how did Olof Hanson get involved with the G'psglox Pole? Why did he want it? And how does this relate to the Canadian practice of Terra Nullius Colonialism against the Haisla?

Actually, the Swedish presence in North America was not entirely free of colonial intent or exploitative desire. To fully understand its importance, we must return to the beginnings of the Swedish Empire. Like most European nations in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden entered into a land-grab where power was determined by the size of colonial holdings.<sup>46</sup> The Scandinavian nation was at a loss throughout the century as it combated Denmark and Russia for control over the recently divided Latvian states.<sup>47</sup> When Ivan the Terrible came to power in Russia, the Russian interest in Northern Europe waned and the Russian military turned inward upon the serfs. Thus, Sweden finally overthrew the Danish presence and won most of Latvia and Estonia by 1595.<sup>48</sup> It continued to build its empire into the 17<sup>th</sup> century when it conquered parts of Denmark and Germany.<sup>49</sup> Once established as an imperial power, Sweden turned its gaze towards the Americas.

The Swedish presence in North America began in 1637 when Swedish stockholders conscripted their colonial German and Danish counterparts into establishing the Swedish Fur and Tobacco Company of North America. The company established a trading colony in what is today the Delaware Valley, just west of the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, with trading posts running from Virginia through Canada.<sup>50</sup> However, empire building is a costly business that wins more enemies than friends. The Dutch annexed New Sweden in 1654 and by 1681, the British took over the land. Sweden finally lost all claim to the area when it was chartered to William Penn.<sup>51</sup> Events in Europe were unfavorable for the Swedish as well. Russia renewed its interest in the Baltic States and Sweden lost its empire and economy to the Russians in 1710.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Swedish Colonial Society, "A Brief History of New Sweden in America." <http://www.colonialswedes.org/History/History.html>. (Accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>46</sup> Erik Esvelt, "The Swedish Empire in the Baltic States," <http://depts.washington.edu/baltic/papers/swedish.html>. (Accessed December 10, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Swedish Colonial Society, "A Brief History of New Sweden in America." <http://www.colonialswedes.org/History/History.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Esvelt, "The Swedish Empire in the Baltic States," <http://depts.washington.edu/baltic/papers/swedish.html>.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Sweden stood little chance of gaining new colonies to compete with now-dominant France, England, Germany, Portugal, or even the slowly declining Spain. As Gil Cardinal argues in his documentary, Swedish national culture took a different route; Sweden decided to unify national culture through scientific philosophy and perpetuate that philosophy through creation of a new education system and the proliferation of easily accessible national museums that Swedes of every class could enjoy.<sup>53</sup> As they could no longer boast of impeccable military prowess and a colony-based economic system, Cardinal states, the Swedish wanted to demonstrate their intellectual prowess by developing the most extensive cultural museums world-wide with exhibits from all over the world. Consequently, the Swedish government charged all its consuls to bring back exotic goods from their outposts.<sup>54</sup>

Museums were not only meant to show the great intellectual understanding of the Swedish people, but also to preserve world heritage. It was commonly believed in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe that the Native Americans were a dying race and it was the duty of Europeans, as the surviving race, to preserve the material culture of Native Americans in order to teach future generations about the world's heritage. Olof Hanson believed in this obligation and thought that a totem pole was the best symbol of Pacific Coast indigenous culture. In 1929, he felled the G'psgolox Pole to fulfill his duty to the Swedish government and his intellectual duty to the world.<sup>55</sup>

For the Haisla, this interaction embodies Terra Nullius Colonialism because Sweden forcibly removed a sacred object from Haisla territory that connected the Haisla to their deceased ancestors. The Swedish held the pole for over 77 years in an attempt to preserve world heritage but fundamentally misunderstood the purpose and role of totem poles for Canadian First Nations. In preserving the G'psgolox Pole, they created their own understanding of what the pole meant, separate from Haisla thought and tradition.

In Haisla religious tradition, totem poles are to be left alone and nature is allowed to take its course. The poles are destined to weather the elements, fall to the ground and rot, completing the cycle of life and ending the mourning period. With the end of mourning period, the dead are allowed to rest in the afterlife.<sup>56</sup> The theft of the pole represents Terra Nullius interaction, not only because of the physical removal of the sacred pole, but because of the interruption of the mourning period, which could never be completed while the pole was in a museum. So,

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<sup>53</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> "Swedish Museum returns Totem Pole to Canadian tribe."

<sup>56</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

according to Haisla tradition, the spirits will never rest in the afterlife.<sup>57</sup> The ignorance of Haisla cultural norms and failure to rectify that ignorance in the Swedish theft of the pole parallels the Canadian attempt to wipe out Haisla memory through forced assimilation in boarding schools. It also complicates Terra Nullius interaction with dual culpability between two European nations, one of which denied colonial intention at the time of its engagement in Terra Nullius colonial practice.

And what of the relationship between the Swedish and the Canadians? Is it also a form of colonialism because of the Swedish history of trading posts in North America or is it a different relationship entirely? This relationship was entirely new; Sweden was no longer an imperial power, nor officially was Canada. In terms of Canada's relationships with European nations, its official statement held true. Thus neither Sweden nor Canada were expanding nations and neither held dominance in the power relations between the two nations as Britain still dominated Canada. Moreover, Sweden did not make demands that Canada give it a totem pole, but rather asked politely for the authority to take one. Thus, it becomes clear that the relationship between Canada and Sweden regarding the Haisla totem pole was based on the European conception of Native Americans as a dying race and not on a power play or colonial past.

### **The Repatriation of the G'psgolox Pole: A Return to Cultural Entanglement**

The current relationship between Sweden and the Haisla nation is particularly difficult to define; both polities are negotiating their identities following a history of colonialism and for the first time in centuries the Haisla are recognized as a sovereign nation acting independently of Canada. Power dynamics are changing, not only between the Haisla, Sweden and Canada, but worldwide, as indigenous nations are reclaiming much of their lost bargaining power on an international scale by working with many international political organizations, such as the United Nations and the International Labor Organization.<sup>58</sup>

Because the modern relationship between the Haisla and Sweden exhibits ambiguous power dynamics, shifting roles of the indigenous and European players and an undetermined outcome, it is best classified as cultural entanglement, just like the early relationship between the Haisla

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ronald Niezen, "Recognizing Indigenism: Canadian Unity and the International Movement of Indigenous Peoples," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42(2000): 126-133.

and their European trading partners. However, the current relationship is distinct from the original interaction, proving the sheer breadth of the definition of cultural entanglement. The shift from colonialism back to a more equitable and vastly more complicated relationship is fascinating in light of greater globalization and interest about the repatriation in the larger global community. Repatriation plays a key role in denoting this shift into the changed realm of cultural entanglement.

Now we must examine the repatriation agreement more closely. The repatriation compromise was negotiated directly between the Haisla and Sweden, addressing the issues of Swedish colonialism; the exclusion of Canada from the agreement signifies that the Haisla have not yet finished contemplating their reaction and response to Canadian colonialism. In fact, the question remains: can if the Haisla, and other indigenous nations, formulate a response that addresses the severity of Canada's actions and also acts as a starting point for new relations in the future? The Haisla and the Swedish both recognize the repatriation as the beginning of a new friendship and an attempt by Sweden to address colonial actions even if they can never be fully rectified<sup>59</sup>.

The repatriation is a three part agreement in which the Swedish National Museum of Ethnography returns the G'psgolox Pole, the Haisla build an exact replica for the museum which will stand it in a Haisla fashion, and the Haisla build a historical preservation center for the original pole and build another replica to stand at the 1929 site of the original pole.<sup>60</sup> This repatriation is the start of a new relationship between the Haisla and Sweden, but a relationship that reflects the cultural entanglement and colonialism of the past.

Archaeologist Stephen Sillman in *Lost Laborers of California* presents an intriguing link between colonialism, labor and indigenous identity; he argues that *practice* is the effort expended everyday in routine tasks that returns an output for the practitioner and that person's family and friends, while *labor* is the work demanded by a colonial power that the colonized must do.<sup>61</sup> On the surface these two categories seem mutually exclusive. However, they are not. Sillman argues that when labor is internalized and becomes practice, then a form of ethnogenesis ensues in which people redefine themselves and their culture in terms of this newly traditionalized practice.<sup>62</sup>

Sweden demanded a large amount of labor from the Haisla people to return the totem pole: namely the construction of two exact

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<sup>59</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen w. Sillman, *Lost Laborers of California: Native Americans and the Archaeology of Rancho Petaluma* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

replicas of the G'psgolox Pole, the design of new stands on which to place the replicas and the completion of a historical preservation center in which to house the pole<sup>63</sup>. This seems to be demanded labor, a continuance of colonial tradition, according to Sillman's definition. However, the relationship with labor is complicated because the carving of totem poles is a traditional practice from before colonial times and the true beneficiaries of Haisla labor are the Haisla people who have the G'psgolox Pole returned to them. Sillman argues that when forced labor becomes internalized practice, indigenous peoples' self-identity is recreated. Thus it seems to me that when indigenous practice is willingly shared with other nations through a gift of labor, the opposite occurs: indigenous identity stays constant while the other nation's conception of the indigenous nation is changed. I believe that this re-conceptualization of the Haisla Nation by Sweden due to the Haisla gift of labor is what led to repatriation of the G'psgolox Pole.

By recognizing the Haisla claim, Sweden acknowledged Haisla political power and that indigenous nations have power on an international scale, thus complicating power dynamics between Sweden, Canada and the Haisla and fulfilling the definition of cultural entanglement in contrast with colonialism. Sweden both recognized Haisla sovereignty and apologized for its colonial practices; therefore, a period of negotiation of roles and identity ensued. Finally, looking at the construction of the replica poles as a Haisla gift of traditional practice in return for the repatriation of G'psgolox Pole instead of a colonial demand for labor, we see the new relationship between the Haisla and Sweden is a relationship based on Haisla notions of reciprocity and not the continuation of colonial exploitation.

However the repatriation, like everything associated with the G'psgolox pole, is complicated. While there is a form of role renegotiation with the physical return of the pole, the Swedish demand that the G'psgolox Pole be preserved for posterity's sake in a European-style cultural center can be seen as a continued suppression of Haisla religious tradition. Traditionally for the Haisla, the pole must be allowed to follow the course of nature if the deceased are to rest in the afterlife. Is the Swedish repatriation a continuation of colonialism because their demand is entirely opposite of Haisla tradition? Do the Swedish maintain European colonial attitudes and prohibitions against indigenous religious practice as they prevent the Haisla from returning the pole to its original site? How is this tension balanced in light of the renegotiation of relationships in the more equitable framework of cultural entanglement?

The Haisla community was originally divided on these important issues and discussed their course of action for many years before

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<sup>63</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

implementing it. Some community members felt that the Swedish demands continued in the colonial tradition because Sweden, which originally stole the pole from the Haisla, was setting the criteria for its return.<sup>64</sup> However, others believing that the Swedish were trying to compromise, appreciated the negotiation and worked to find creative ways to continue Haisla tradition.<sup>65</sup> Finally, the Haisla decided on a course of action they feel acknowledges the Swedish restrictions but still continues Haisla religion and life ways. When the pole was returned to the Haisla, they performed a religious ceremony transferring the spirit of the original pole into the replica pole that now occupies the original site.<sup>66</sup> The replica is now the link with the ancestors and will be allowed to disintegrate, following Haisla tradition and granting the ancestors their final rest. The original pole, currently housed in the Haida museum, will rest on its side, in accordance with the Haisla belief that a pole once fallen should never be re-erected. Swedish museum officials and the Sami were invited to join and participate in the Haisla ceremonies to demonstrate their support for continuing Haisla life ways. They did so.<sup>67</sup>

### **Future for the Haisla: Changing Relationships and Identities**

The historical and archeological analysis of the G'psgolox Pole gives us a starting point for examining possible future relationships by establishing where the Haisla Nation stands today in relation to Canada and Sweden and analyzing the change in that relationship as colonialism recedes further into the past. Thus I conclude by looking at the future of relationships between Canadian First Nations and nations abroad. I want to see how the 1929 theft of the G'psgolox's pole and current repatriation shape Haisla sense of self identity and other nations' views on the importance of indigenous nations in the future.

The Haisla repatriation chair, Gerald Amos, spoke to his people at the repatriation ceremony, grabbing the metal ring that held the G'psgolox Pole upright in Sweden:

This was the yoke that held up the totem pole in Sweden. When Louisa, myself and John Pritchard first walked in to the totem pole, and were the first Haisla to see it ... since it left in 1929, the symbolism of what we saw hit us between the eyes, right in the heart. The four wires that were holding it up, the pole up, and the yoke around its neck, to me were, and to Louisa were, very symbolic of what the history of native peoples, in general, and particularly the Haisla has been... Well,

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<sup>64</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



it is now off. And I believe that it is a huge victory, not only for the Haisla, but for all indigenous people of North America. A huge victory.<sup>68</sup>

And indeed, the repatriation is a triumph for the Haisla Nation. Swedish officials did not want to return the pole until the historical center was finished, but Haisla eloquence and grassroots lobbying moved the Swedish people who then demanded that their government return the G'psgolox Pole.<sup>69</sup> Now, Haisla people take their children to see the pole and explain to them Haisla history as remembered through it.

The Haisla look to the future with hope. The repatriation agreement itself taught the Haisla that they are strong enough to negotiate with nations abroad; it taught them that a First Nation can with eloquence and determination win back sacred objects and that the world will listen. The repatriation ceremony demonstrated that Haisla cultural practices are no longer criminalized and that Haisla children have the opportunity to maintain Haisla culture, language and lifestyle. The public support of the Swedish and various Canadian non-profit organizations has shown the Haisla that indigenous nations are no longer fighting colonialism alone.<sup>70</sup> The Haisla hope that other indigenous nations will have the opportunity to learn these same lessons<sup>71</sup> for learning not to be afraid is the true victory of the repatriation.

## Conclusion

The story of the G'psgolox Pole -- its construction, theft, and repatriation -- parallels the history of the Haisla people since they came into contact with European peoples. The three parts of the totem pole's history can be analyzed in the archaeological frameworks of cultural entanglement and colonialism. Yet, the analysis of the case study leaves many questions unanswered. What was the turning point from cultural entanglement to colonialism; what event led a relation of ambiguous outcome to one of determined domination? How does the relationship between Canada and Sweden affect Sweden's relationship with the Haisla, both in the 1929 theft of the G'psgolox Pole and in the repatriation negotiation? Also, the repatriation of the G'psgolox Pole is a new phenomenon. Yet is the repatriation compromise a continuation of colonial practice through demanding labor and preventing the disintegration of the original pole? Or is it a renegotiation of power

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<sup>68</sup> Cardinal, *Totem: Return and Renewal*.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

dynamics and a return to the more ambiguous relationship of cultural entanglement because the repatriation is based on Haisla concepts of reciprocity and the Swedish have participated in Haisla religious ceremonies continuing the life of the G'psgolox Pole? Finally, the case study begs us to pay close attention to the future to see if the Haisla example encourages other indigenous nations to push for repatriation. The future seems bright for the Haisla people and the G'psgolox Pole today lies on its side, a poignant testament to the Haisla belief that a totem pole, once fallen, should not be re-erected.

**Figure 1****The original pole in Sweden (1991)**

The Haisla searched for the G'psgolox Pole for 77 years since its theft in 1929 and found the pole in the Swedish Museum of Ethnography in 1991. The 9 meter tall pole was held in place by an iron circle that represented the figurative shackle on the Haisla people for the Haisla Repatriation Committee. The iron circlet is circled in red. (Photo taken by Lars Epstein.)

**Figure 2**

### **The replica pole in Stockholm, Sweden**

The replica of the G'psgolox Pole was begun on Haisla lands and finished in the Swedish Museum of Ethnography. The elders of Haisla Nation then came to Stockholm for the awakening ceremony for the replica. It stands outside the museum on a stand of Haisla design and construction, different from the traditional way of totem pole erection. The Haisla usually make the pole longer and bury part of it underground to stand the poles upright. However, when the artist was asked for an exact replica, that is what he made, cutting the pole short at exactly 9 meters.<sup>1</sup> (Photograph of the author with the replica of the G'psgolox Pole outside the Swedish Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm taken by Luis Paz.)

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