

EATING GITXAALA, BEING GITXAALA: FOOD AND CULTURAL SECURITY

by

DANIELLE RENEE GENDRON

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Abstract

In this thesis, I explore the significance of a territory-based food system to an Indigenous culture. In particular, I work to provide an understanding of the myriad of ways in which the Gitxaala food system and its related practices contain cultural ways of knowing and being that is specific to Gitxaala Nation, a First Nation located on the North coast of what is known today as British Columbia. The fieldwork for this thesis was conducted at a time when multiple economic projects are being proposed/pursued in Laxyuup Gitxaala; the perceived ways in which such projects will alter the territory and Gitxaala's relationship with it have created a sense of fear among the Gitxaala people. Gitxaala food is used as the vehicle through which such fears for the future of Gitxaala Nation is discussed. Ultimately, this thesis examines how Gitxaala food reflects and reveals how Gitxaala people understand themselves as a unique Nation and differentiate themselves from others. I argue that the Gitxaala food system and all of its related practices acts as a method of cultural security.

Preface

This Master's thesis is an original work based on fieldwork conducted by the author from May to August 2014. I am entirely responsible for the research and writing of this thesis. My supervisor, Dr. Charles Menzies, and second committee member, Dr. Caroline Butler, reviewed several drafts of the thesis and provided content and editorial suggestions.

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Lastly, I extend a most special thanks to Gitxaala Nation for the warm welcome I received. Thank you for all of your smiles and kind gestures. Thank you to all research participants who happily spoke to me at length and/or allowed me to point a camera in their faces, and for teaching me about (and feeding me) delicious Gitxaala foods.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my daughters, Lozen and Zikala. Your boundless amounts of love and joy gave me the courage and drive to push through and finish this thesis during a time of much uncertainty. I hope that this accomplishment will serve as an inspiration for each of you to find your inner strength and realize that your power comes from within.

Introduction

I was sitting at the kitchen table when the news was delivered on national television. This was a day that that the people of Gitxaala had been nervously awaiting, the Government of Canada's announcement on the final decision for the Enbridge Northern Gateway oil pipeline project.¹ As the reporter spoke the focus of everyone in the room shifted from the projected image on the screen towards the large picture window overlooking the very place that would be affected.

Silence.

A somber voice came on the VHF radio: "It was approved" and clicked off.

That evening as family members gathered around the kitchen table, conversation turned to the implications of the approval of the Enbridge project for Gitxaala Nation and its territory. First, the conversation focused on what it would mean for the territory, the water, the animals, and the plants.

Destruction. Devastation.

It then shifted to what it would mean for the food harvested from the territory.

Inaccessible. Inedible.

¹ The Enbridge Northern Gateway oil pipeline project is to build oil and gas pipelines that would span over 1000 km, from the Alberta oil sands to Kitimat, B.C. Natural gas condensate would be imported via eastbound pipelines; diluted bitumen would be exported via westbound pipelines. While there are an abundance of environmental and cultural concerns related to the different components of the project overall, it is the tanker traffic that would navigate through Gitxaala territory that is of particular concern to Gitxaala Nation and therefore of relevance to this thesis.

This was a conversation about what it would mean for the people living in the territory, the Git lax m'oon,² the future of their lives and their grandchildren's lives, the transmission of culture, and ultimately the future of Gitxaala Nation.

“What other reason do we have to live here? Without the food I wouldn't live here,” one man lamented referring to the food harvested from the territory. This response to the Enbridge project decision, perhaps more than anything else I witnessed, illuminated the centrality of the territory-based food system to the culture and identity of Gitxaala Nation.

Projects like Enbridge have created a sense of anxiety among Gitxaala people. Such projects are understood as real tangible threats to Gitxaala territory, governance, and culture. The community and its research agents have tirelessly engaged proponents through education, meetings, and tours of Gitxaala territory to try to show them the beauty and wealth of Gitxaala culture and land. Community members often discuss how proponents “just don't understand” the value and deep connection of Gitxaala resources, and foods, to Gitxaala people. Gitxaala foods are interwoven throughout multiple facets of Gitxaala culture and are fundamental to everyday life. Gitxaala food is a topic that permeates daily conversations throughout the village. Much like the weather is a conversation opener for city folk, the foods currently being harvested are a typical way to engage in short casual conversations in the village. Each time I trudged down one of the gravel roads in the village I would come upon someone; pleasantries were often followed by comments on how the weather related to harvesting or processing of food. “Oh it's a stormy day out there, not a good day for picking”; “Sun is shining perfect for drying.”

Gitxaala foods and resource management are central in discussions surrounding the body of academic research conducted with Gitxaala Nation. When Git lax m'oon speak of their foods

² ‘People of the saltwater’ in Sm'algyax language along with Gitxaala being a name what refers to the people of the Gitxaala Nation.

they are not only talking about sustenance, they are speaking about themselves, their traditions, laws, and culture. Any threat to their territory and resources is also a threat to Gitxaala people themselves, their culture and traditions. Food is an intricate component to understanding and being Git lax m'oon.

The concept of food security is a popular buzzword when discussing the needs and well being of Indigenous peoples, particularly among those in locations inaccessible by road and/or without local access to grocery stores. Food insecurity is identified to be a problematic issue among many First Nations throughout Canada (Power 2008). Territory-based foods are understood as a steady and reliable source of food, although there are a host of issues surrounding the inability to consume such foods, such as costs associated with harvesting, time required (away from work) to harvest food, environmental contaminants, climate change, and other threats related to territory and ability to access territory. Typically, academic and governmental/public policy discussions of food security recognize the cultural importance of eating territory-based foods but often fail to consider the unique cultural significance and importance in each of the stage of Indigenous food system: harvesting, processing and storing, cooking and eating, as well as sharing. Embedded within each of these stages are cultural values and teachings unique to the place and the people whom are engaging with the food system. Furthermore, it is through these practices where relationships are established and maintained.

Involvement in the entirety of the food system and its activities, from harvest to consumption, are all acts which Alfred and Corntassel (2005) would consider as vital to living and 'being Indigenous'. These are the very practices that forge connection and relationships to the land and allow individuals and communities to understand what it means to be of the

laxyuup,³ while providing the means to interact with, build, and understand the community makeup. The Gitxaala food system is a principal channel through which the Git lax m'oon are able to connect with and practice what it means to be of the Gitxaala Nation.

Research And Conceptualizations

The importance and centrality of Gitxaala food to the lives of the Git lax m'oon is quite evident upon visiting Lach Klan. As I would wait at the seaplane base or the ferry terminal to travel to Lach Klan I was always provided with insight into what was going on in the village, especially in relation to Gitxaala foods. Talk of Gitxaala food seeps into most discussions of those waiting to go to Lach Klan; details of who has gone where and what (and how much) they harvested are exchanged, how the weather has affected ability to smoking fish or drying la'ask⁴, and who has had the latest brush with the DFO⁵ over harvesting Gitxaala foods were all topics of conversation I overheard. Conversations that include mention of the Enbridge pipeline or other resource extraction projects almost inevitably lead to discussion of Gitxaala foods. The vignette on the reaction to the pipeline approval in the opening of this thesis as well as the statement made by acting Chief Clarence Innis above, exemplify the typical feelings community members have towards Enbridge.

Beyond its prominent place in daily discussions in Lach Klan, Gitxaala foods are ubiquitous throughout the body of academic literature on Gitxaala. Anthropologist and member of Gitxaala Nation, Charles Menzies along with Caroline Butler, current GEM heritage research coordinator, have extensively explored Gitxaala's sustainable fishery and forestry management

³ Laxyuup is the translation for "territory" in Sm'algyax, the language of the Gitxaala people.

⁴ La'ask is the Sm'algyax word for the red laver seaweed (*Porphyra abbottiae*) typically picked May. Both la'ask and seaweed are used in the local vernacular to refer to the particular species eaten.

⁵ Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada

practices, including issues related to long colonial encounters, traditional ecological knowledge, and resource management and extraction, all of which concern Gitxaala food. With a particular focus on political economy, Menzies' work invokes the idea that Gitxaala food is interwoven with understandings of what it means to be Gitxaala. Menzies (2010) has explored how the moratorium on abalone, a culturally significant species, has created a sense of loss and grief among the people of Gitxaala; the government took a significant component of their cultural lifeway away.

In response to project proposals that would route oil and gas tankers through Laxyuup Gitxaala, Calliou Group, hired by GEM, has conducted several project-specific traditional use studies. The aim of this research is to map Gitxaala's use of territory and resources, including navigational routes, camping sites, and species, and to document the particular concerns of Nation members regarding the impacts of each project. The Gitxaala Use Studies illustrate the incredible breadth of resources harvested, and the geographic extent of territorial use. There are use polygons essentially covering the entire marine territory. GEM also contracted Firelight Group to conduct socio-economic research that included documenting the frequency of consumption of traditional foods. This research indicates both the cultural value of Gitxaala foods, and their contribution to community food security.

Gitxaala foods are a vital component to Gitxaala culture and identity and are interwoven throughout many different Gitxaala practices, relationships, and facets of life. This project builds and extends previous research with Gitxaala through my specific focus on Gitxaala foods and food practices. My research provides a glimpse into the deep connections that Gitxaala has with the foods provided by the territory, and provides a nuanced understanding to how ensuring the security of Gitxaala foods also contributes to ensuring cultural security.

GEM Collaboration And Internship

My research was made possible due to my summer internship with Gitxaala Environmental Monitoring (GEM). Based in Prince Rupert, GEM is an agency of Gitxaala Nation with a dual purpose: to conduct and oversee research done with and for the Nation and also to ensure that the Nation is represented and respected throughout environmental assessment processes for projects being proposed within Laxyuup Gitxaala. The research for this thesis was conducted over a period of four months, from May to August 2014. I visited Lach Klan to conduct research in one-week intervals while being based in Prince Rupert. My internship with GEM included basic research tasks such as literature and archival searches, as well as basic office organizational tasks. This internship was my entry point into the community and helped me to establish contacts with community members willing to be involved in research projects.

Goals And Methodological Approach

Following Power's (2008) call for qualitative research to determine Indigenous perspectives and definitions of food security, my research originally set out to find a Gitxaala specific definition. Power (2008) highlights the importance of the intricacies of the cultural elements embedded in food that are vital for Indigenous people's connecting to cultural traditions and ways of life. My research was conceived with interest in how food figures in understanding and being Gitxaala.

I took on the role of an apprentice⁶ in order to learn about the centrality of Gitxaala foods. As an apprentice there was a lot of time spent observing and little time spent doing. I used this time to video-record harvesting and food processing practices to create film vignettes for the community. My goal was to follow Gitxaala foods from ocean to fork, and to understand each

⁶ See Jarvenpa (1998) for ethnography of apprenticeship on Dene hunting.

stage of their food system: harvesting, processing and storing, as well as cooking and eating. Sharing is a vital component of the Gitxaala food system that is pervasive through each of the other stages.

I was able to approach Gitxaala's food system from two entry points. While in the village of Kitkatla I stayed at a bed and breakfast operated by a community elder. Annabelle continually provided me with some of my most flavourful (pun intended) fieldwork experiences. In her home I was introduced to many foods and dishes that I had never tasted or had even heard of before arriving in Lach Klan. From her I learned about eating Gitxaala foods. Annabelle is a fabulous cook, who prides herself in the preparation of each meal in her kitchen for her family and for guests. As a guest in her B&B I would often help prepare meals. I learned a lot about the many new foods that I encountered in Lach Klan and the many different ways that they can be prepared and eaten.

My second entry point into the food system was through spending time with a harvester. Cyril graciously taught me and allowed me to video record teachings about food. I took on the role of an apprentice who watches intently, does very little, and even got in the way once or twice. I was first introduced to Cyril while being shown around the village by Caroline Butler. Upon mentioning that he was drying la'ask later that day, Caroline jumped at the opportunity to arrange for me to tag along to film and to learn. A few hours later I apprehensively opened the door to the home that matched the description I was given. As soon as I opened the door I could smell a strong unfamiliar scent that I would later recognize as the smell of la'ask. A familiar voice greeted me as I moved down through the doorway, "Hello! I'm in the basement, just about to get started."

Gitxaala First Nation

The Git lax m'oon are an Indigenous people that live on the North Coast of what is known today as British Columbia. Laxyuup Gitxaala encompasses many islands on the edge of the sea, and the four clans established villages throughout this large territory. A history of colonialism, including waves of disease and the establishment of the reserve system, led the Gitxaala people to gather together in the village of Lach Klan, a longstanding place of ceremonial and political importance (known externally as Kitkatla). Approximately 40 kilometres Southwest of the Canadian city of Prince Rupert, Lach Klan is home to about 400 people and has been continually occupied for the past 10 000 years according to oral history.

For Git lax m'oon the sea is not simply the environment in which they live but with which they have developed a relationship that is interwoven throughout many different aspects of their daily lives and cultural practices. The academic literature has focused on Gitxaala Nation's resource management practices including forestry (see Menzies and Butler 2001) and fishing (see Menzies and Butler 2007). Gitxaala Nation is increasingly reliant on social assistance and imported foods, in large part due to colonialism, which has been detrimental to the health of the Git lax m'oon (Anderson 2007). The focus of this thesis is not imported foods or to question the health effects of the contemporary diet at Gitxaala, but rather is an examination of how Gitxaala foods figures within Gitxaala culture and worldview.

A core concept that underlines how resources are managed and shared at Gitxaala Nation is *syt güülm goot*.⁷ Menzies and Butler (2007) observe how this guiding philosophy “is premised upon a community-based conception of resource use in which people and nonhumans share important reciprocal relationships of trust, respect, and—when things go wrong—retribution”

⁷ is the translation for “being of one heart” in Sm'algyax, the language of the Gitxaala people.

(442-3). These types of mutually supportive relationships negate a need to stockpile food, or harvest all of the resources simply because they are available; syt güülm goot thereby negates reasons to overharvesting. Understanding the significance of syt güülm goot and how it applies to resources will provide insight throughout this thesis into why Gitxaala's food system is a vital component to the practice and transmission of Gitxaala culture and values.

Gitxaala Foods

Traditional food is often the term of reference when discussing Indigenous food systems. However, defining traditional food is problematic and elusive. Some foods introduced post-contact have become fully integrated into Indigenous diets, the most widespread example being fry-bread. Fry-bread has become intertwined with Indigenous identities across North America and is considered a staple of Indigenous diets. China Lily soya sauce provides a more localized example for the Gitxaala Nation. Its prominent place in the local diet is evident in its inclusion in many recipes throughout a traditional food cookbook compiled by the Tsimshian⁸ people of Port Simpson (1983), as well as by its place on refrigerator shelves in Lach Klan. Both of these foods are associated with health epidemics, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardio-vascular disease, rampant among First Nations (Anderson 2007). The connection of a 'traditional' food to negative health complicates debates on what foods can and should be considered traditional.

This thesis focuses on the foods harvested from laxyuup Gitxaala, thus I have chosen, following Anderson (2007), to use 'Gitxaala foods' as my point of reference. Anderson (2007) notes that Gitxaala foods are consistently referred to as 'our own' by the Git lax m'oon signifying the connection of foods to laxyuup. Though many of the same types of food can be harvested outside of laxyuup Gitxaala, salmon being the most popular example, the inherent

⁸ Anthropologists historically have situated Gitxaala Nation within the Tsimshian cultural group.

value of these foods comes from the specific places where they are harvested. Gitxaala foods are particularly prized by Git lax m'oon because they have unique flavours that are recognizable and preferred. Additionally, the same type of food will have a distinct flavour depending from where it is harvested within the laxyuup, which has developed diverse taste preferences among Git lax m'oon. A penchant for particular flavours will often dictate where and when individuals will harvest food and/or from whom individuals acquire their food.

Projects

The increasing number of resource projects proposed within Laxyuup Gitxaala threatens the continuation of the intricacies of Gitxaala's relationship with the land and sea. Gitxaala Nation is no stranger to resource extraction in their territory; there is a long complicated history of commercial fisheries in Laxyuup Gitxaala, which has provided both economic opportunity as well as displacement of individuals from harvesting practices (See Menzies and Butler 2008). Perhaps the most destructive intrusion to Gitxaala Nation has been the commercial overexploitation of the abalone fishery. Abalone is an important cultural keystone species (Menzies 2010) Gitxaala people tell a story of how their knowledge was exploited by government researchers in a manner that led to the decimation of abalone stocks and a complete moratorium on abalone harvesting (See Menzies 2010 and 2015).

The trip between Prince Rupert and Lach Klan showcases the landscape's long history with the timber and logging industry (Rogers 2007). There is barely a forest within Laxyuup Gitxaala that has not been witness to some form of logging over the last 150 years (Menzies and Butler 2001). Old logging sites, abandoned mills, and deserted equipment litter this area – left overs from a long history of industrial extraction.

Mining has also made a mark in the territory. One recent company, Yellow Giant Gold Mining, restarted exploration and commercial operations in a site abandoned in the early 1980s on Banks Island, a spiritually significant and popular Gitxaala harvesting site. Production at the mine was halted on July 31, 2015⁹ due to a shutdown order issued by the Ministry of the Environment in response to unauthorized discharges from the mine into the environment.¹⁰

Several more projects have been proposed and/or approved to commence in the near future. Currently there are extensive investigative permits for wind turbine farm projects within Laxyuup Gitxaala (Rodman 2013). There are several liquid natural gas (LNG) pipelines currently proposed to terminate within and/or route tankers through Laxyuup Gitxaala. In late 2014 Gitxaala Nation signed an LNG pipeline benefits agreements that will include Gitxaala Nation as a partner in and benefactor of LNG projects in their territory.¹¹

Gitxaala Nation understands Enbridge's Northern Gateway project, recommended for approval with 209 conditions by the National Energy Board's Joint Review Panel in June 2014¹², as being a much greater threat to its territory than any LNG project¹³ and launched legal action against the Government of Canada upon its approval. As of September 26, 2014 a Gitxaala

⁹ See Banks Island Gold official news release at: http://www.banksislandgold.com/s/NewsReleases.asp?ReportID=718267&_Type=News-Releases&_Title=Banks-Island-Gold-Suspends-Operations-at-Yellow-Giant

¹⁰ See local newspaper reporting on the incident at: <http://www.thenorthernview.com/news/318322581.html>

¹¹ See local newspaper reporting on the agreement at: <http://www.thenorthernview.com/news/289072531.html> and copy of official agreements at <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/gitxaala-nation-kitkatla>

¹² See CBC news reporting: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/northern-gateway-pipeline-approved-with-209-conditions-1.2678285>

¹³ <https://gitxaalanation.wordpress.com/2014/09/30/federal-court-to-hear-gitxaala-first-nation-challenge-of-northern-gateway-approval/>

Nation spokesperson announced that the Nation would move forward in its legal proceedings as the Federal Court of Appeal granted permission for the band to apply for judicial review of the Enbridge project approval.¹⁴ Final arguments for the appeal were given in October 2015 and the decision is pending. The prospect of the Enbridge project operating within Laxyuup Gitxaala has created great concern for the territory and for the food harvested there:

Gitxaala are united in our opposition to the Enbridge pipeline, which if built would result in hundred of massive tankers travelling through the pristine waters where we harvest our food — and food that ends up on tables of Canadians across the country. (Clarence Innis, Acting Chief, Gitxaala First Nation¹⁵)

Shortly after his installation as Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau announced his intention to formalize the moratorium on oil tanker traffic being routed throughout Northwest Coast: thus leaving the status of the Enbridge Northern Gateway project uncertain. At the time of my research, however, the JRP recommendation and the threat of oil tanker traffic was a shadow over the village.¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://gitxaalanation.wordpress.com/2014/09/30/federal-court-to-hear-gitxaala-first-nation-challenge-of-northern-gateway-approval/>

¹⁵ Full message from Acting Chief of Gitxaala Nation can be viewed on official Gitxaala Nation website/blog <https://gitxaalanation.wordpress.com/2014/10/24/message-from-clarence-innis-acting-chief-gitxaala-first-nation/>

¹⁶ <http://www.vancouverobserver.com/news/bc-first-nations-laud-trudeau-s-tanker-moratorium>

Food Security And Cultural Importance

Food security is defined by the World Health Organization as “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (World Health Organization 2016) and is considered to exist on three separate levels: individual, household, and community. Food security is maintained when its 4 pillars are upheld: (1) *access* to food source (2) *availability* of food (3) *utilization* of food and (4) *stability* of food supply (World Health Organization 2016).

Such a conceptualization of food security is the typical definition used throughout Canada when considering nutritional needs; it is widely used throughout the public health system, and research examining food practices and food availability in Indigenous populations. This definition excludes the practices associated with food outside of consumption, and also fails to incorporate the perspective of Indigenous peoples. Sociologist Elaine Power (2008) argues that Indigenous peoples of Canada have unique food security considerations related to harvesting, sharing, and consuming (I would also add processing) of their own foods and proposes that cultural food security be another level of food security to be included in working definitions of the concept.

Examining Gitxaala culture through following their food system from ocean to fork highlights the cultural values, teachings, and knowledge specific to Gitxaala that are embedded throughout the food system and its accompanying practices. By realizing that these practices enable individuals to engage with Gitxaala culture, ‘invisible losses’ become visible. Invisible losses can be understood as losses that are:

seldom considered, awarded compensation, or mitigated by decision makers and resource managers. Nevertheless, in terms of risk to peoples’ overall health and capacity for resilience, such losses may have even more profound impacts on individuals and

communities than those that are more visible and widely acknowledged. (Turner et al. 2008: 8)

A loss of Gitxaala food would also result in each of the 'invisible' losses that Turner et al. (2008) outline: a loss of culture and lifestyle, loss of identity, loss of self-determination and influence, emotional and psychological losses, loss of order in the world, knowledge losses, indirect economic losses and lost opportunities.

Dawn Morrison's (2011) work asserts that culture and history are embedded in Indigenous food practices and she advocates the need for Indigenous food sovereignty. Morrison understands Indigenous foods as a holistic medicine that is required for physical, spiritual and cultural health, and declares that Indigenous food practices "represent the most intimate way in which we interact with our environment" (Morrison 2011:98-99). Enrique Salmón (2012) expands on this connection to land through food and states that his identity and culture are reaffirmed each time that he eats foods traditional to his Indigenous Mexican culture. He stresses that it is more than just the ingestion of the food but all of the practices and processes surrounding the consumption of the food that "interconnect family, landscape, collection knowledge, story, and an encoded library of cultural and ecological knowledge, all of which sustain and revitalize a sense of self and place"(8). Harvesting, preparing and eating Indigenous foods are not merely about food delivery but are better understood as acts of 'being Indigenous' (Alfred 2008; Alfred and Corntassel 2005).

When the Git lax m'oon talk about their food, they are talking about themselves. The harvesting, processing, and consumption of Gitxaala foods are not just about the physical act of fishing or smoking or eating, each act is an experience that encompasses language, story, history, relationships. These are all acts of cultural practice and transmission that assert Git lax m'oon

identity and differentiates them not only from K'amksiwah¹⁷ but also from other Nations.

Ensuring the security of Gitxaala foods is vital to ensuring the continuation of Gitxaala cultural practices and values; therefore Gitxaala's food system can be understood as a source of cultural security.

¹⁷ The sm'algyax word for Euro-Canadian settlers.

Gitxaala Food System

My analysis begins with the Gitxaala food system as a whole. This approach provides a wide view into the significance of the territory-based food system. Each stage of the food system is embedded with different bits of cultural knowledge. Just as processing, storing, cooking, and eating expose knowledge not revealed by focusing solely on harvesting, each of these stages provides insight into each of the other stages that would not be realized without studying the system as a whole. Each and every stage of the food system embodies cultural values, relationships, and knowledge in unique ways.

The Gitxaala food system has several stages: harvesting, processing, storing, sharing, selling, cooking, and eating. Each stage, however, is not distinct and the stages often overlap. Syt güülm goot, which can be understood as sharing, is not a distinct stage but a vital component of the food system as a whole; syt güülm goot is foundational to the continued practice of Gitxaala food system. I attempted to follow food from ocean to fork and involved myself in food practices wherever and whenever opportunity arose. I did not learn in sequential order, my first point of entry was sitting around a table eating a meal. I first realized that there was much to be learned on the importance of food sharing simply by sitting on a couch listening to the VHF radio and people's offers, requests, and sales of food. I watched a lot of meal preparations and cooking before I was able to join a harvesting trip.

I have organized this thesis to focus on harvesting, processing and storing, and cooking and eating and discuss the sharing that is pervasive throughout each of these stages. Sharing and selling of Gitxaala foods are critical components of the food system, which permit access to food for those who cannot or do not harvest. The sale of foods within the community is not considered

legal according to Canadian law,¹⁸ however it reflects the long traditions of barter and sale between households within Gitxaala Nation and between Nations. It is critical to note the place of food sales in the food system, however this component and its related issues require greater inquiry and discussion that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The fragmented way in which I present the Gitxaala food system speaks to the experience of many individuals living in Lach Klan. Very few individuals are involved in each of the stages from harvest to consumption. Further, due to an abundance of sharing and selling individuals are able to process food they did not harvest, they may eat food they did not take part in harvesting or processing, and individuals harvest food that they will never eat. In this thesis I rely on the example of la'ask to demonstrate the importance and interconnectivity of all the stages of the food system at Gitxaala. La'ask is the food that I interacted with most; I was involved in all stages from ocean to fork. Each of the following stages embodies Gitxaala culture and social relations in a multitude of ways.

Harvesting

Cyril placed two empty white pails into his skiff before he hopped in it. He turned back toward me and took my video camera and backpack, then placed them on the bench before I stepped off the float¹⁹ and into the skiff. We readied ourselves; arranged our gear and buckled up our lifejackets. Then, Cyril let the motor rumble. As we zipped away from the float, Cyril looked into the lens of the camera that I held in my lap and smiled “We’re headed out to what we call our deep freeze.” A few moments later we arrived at an exposed rock. He jumped out of the skiff

¹⁸ See <http://cfnrfm.ca/dfo-cracks-down-on-illegal-seafood-sales-on-facebook/> for recent clash with DFO over sale of Gitxaala food amounting to a total of \$150.

¹⁹ The floating dock, the major entry point to the village of Lach Klan.

onto the rock and pointed out the dzik'wi'its²⁰, bilhaa²¹, and 'yaans²² and explained how these are foods that can only be picked at low tide. He cracked open dzik'wi'its on the side of the rock, split it apart, carefully slid the delicate golden brown roe out onto his fingers and placed it straight in his mouth, "breakfast" he said as he wiped his mouth clean. He picked up a bilhaa off the rock, turned to me and said, "We're not allowed to eat these," and told me about the current day DFO moratorium on their harvest (See Menzies 2010, 2015 for more detail). That particular morning we had set out to pick ła'ask so he leapt back into the skiff and continued to search for an exposed rock that would allow us to pick.

Ła'ask grows on tidally submerged rocks. It is somewhat iridescent and has a deep dark green hue. Its appearance and texture reminded me of VHS tape that was wavy along its edges. It hung from the sides of the exposed rock at low tide in different lengths. Cyril showed me how to pick the seaweed off of the rock.

"A young nephew of mine asked his grandma 'how do you pick seaweed?'. She said 'I'll show you...' she then rolled the roots of his hair close to his scalp around her fingers and pulled down quickly, '...that way you won't forget'."

Ła'ask is graded as it is picked. Some grows too fuzzy, some too thick; among the seaweed that is being picked to eat grow other kinds of seaweed. Learning how to dry ła'ask taught me what a desirable harvest looked and felt like, enabling me to grade as I picked. I wedged myself in crevices before picking, out of fear that I would slip off the rock. Cyril walked easily about the rock picking seaweed, as he worked he told me about safety on rocks only exposed at low tides:

"Three women paddled a boat out to an exposed rock not far from here at low tide to pick seaweed. Each woman jumped out onto the rock and busied herself picking seaweed. When the baskets were filled and they were ready to paddle back, the boat was gone. Each woman had assumed that the other had secured the boat's anchor to the rock. The tide soon rose and the women vanished."

²⁰ The sm'algyax word for sea urchin. Typically dzik'wi'its is used in the local vernacular

²¹ The sm'algyax word for abalone. Both bilhaa and abalone are used in the local vernacular.

²² The sm'algyax word for chiton. Typically 'yaans is used in the local vernacular.

These are cautionary tales about the knowledge and attention to detail required for interacting with places that are temporarily accessible. The act of harvesting and being present in these particular places brings up particular stories. The act of harvesting keeps the oral traditions alive, relevant, and ensures that they are shared.

Ła'ask can only be picked in early spring. Harvesters are able to identify that Ła'ask is nearly ready to be picked by the budding of particular plant species in the village. This speaks to the close relationship that the Git lax m'oon have with their Laxyuup, being in tune with the life cycles of different species acts as a way of 'telling time' to identify when certain activities can be practiced. Through harvesting the Git lax m'oon are enabled not only to live within the territory but to also interact with it, to know the territory and its ecosystems intimately. Ultimately it enables syt güülm goot to be practiced and lived.

Harvesting requires the use of a boat; maintenance and fuel expenses associated with operating a boat make the cost of harvesting prohibitive to many members of Gitxaala Nation. There is no shortage of people wanting to harvest, however there is a shortage of opportunity for those who do not own boats. Harvesters typically harvest with others to share the workload. Harvesting trips are a practice of relationship building. I spent several hours salmon fishing with five men on a wet, cold day. Cyril's own skiff is too small to carry all the gear required for salmon fishing, let alone the catch. He borrowed his nephew's boat for this harvesting trip. We left Lach Klan before sunrise in order to arrive at the site while the tide was low. Cyril, his son-in-law, his cousin, his friend, and I sat under the hood of the borrowed boat. Cyril's son rode alone in the smaller skiff.

We arrived at End Hill, a popular fishing spot, just after dawn. After setting up the net there was not much to do but wait. We all tried to stay warm and dry under the hood of the boat.

Periodically two men would hop into the skiff and pull fish out of the net and place them into Rubbermaid tote bins. Eventually we got out onto the rock to which we had tied to stretch our legs. A small fire was made atop of the rock, we stood around it to dry and warm ourselves. We spent the majority of the several hours with not much to do but wait; we sipped hot coffee from a thermos and ate food and snacks each had brought to share while sharing stories and jokes. After the fish were taken off of the net one last time and the net hauled back into the boat, we gutted the fish on a rock. Knives slit through fish bellies, guts were pulled out and left to wash out to sea, roe was set aside to take back with us. About 170 cleaned fish were put back in the totes before we headed back to Lach Klan. “A small haul” I was told, several more harvesting trips would be required to get the fish they needed for themselves and their families. Upon arrival back at the village the fish were divided up. Each of the six of us got a share of the fish. The next day a few of these same men went out and distributed that days catch between themselves and a few aunties.

Harvesting offers a vantage point to understand the life cycles of the territory and how all within this territory connects and shares life. Harvesting provides an opportunity to connect with people and is a place of relationship building. Harvesting brings people together where they share stories, knowledge, equipment, gear (such as boats and nets), and ultimately the catch itself.

Processing And Storing

Food harvested from the sea is understood as food as soon as it is gathered/caught/picked/shot/dug up/trapped, even before it is processed. After being harvested there are multiple different methods of processing to provide different uses and flavours of the food. Ła’ask is dried, pressed, chopped or frozen. Fish can be smoked, dried, jarred, or frozen. I

group these different activities all under one heading ‘processing and storing’ for ease of organizational purposes. No person I encountered in the village uttered the word ‘processing’ but instead referred to a specific activity such as, smoking, jarring, chopping ła’ask, et cetera.

This stage of the food system is a tremendous amount of work. Beyond the effort involved, significant amounts of time and knowledge are required in order to ensure the quality (taste as well as health and safety) of the food. After ła’ask is picked there are multiple stages for its processing before it is ready for storage and consumption. Some ła’ask is placed immediately into Ziploc bags and into a freezer for storage. Drying ła’ask begins shortly after its harvest.²³

My very first interaction with Gitxaała food, other than eating it, was laying ła’ask out to dry. Handfuls of ła’ask were taken from a mesh-lined bucket and spread out on the ha’li’lax si’ła’ask, a square slatted cedar board. Since it was overcast and rain was expected at any moment each of the ła’ask covered ha’li’lax si’ła’ask were left balanced on top of a box, freezer, wooden beam or washing machine in the shelter of the basement, until they could later be put out in the sun. These ha’li’lax si’ła’ask once belonged to Cyril’s father who made them. He told me how just a few weeks prior he had repaired the ha’li’lax si’ła’ask as some of the cedar slats had come loose or worn. After laying out a few squares, Cyril turned to me and asked if I wanted to try. Ła’ask is a little bit slimy, and reminded me of a garbage bag, in it’s texture, and while pulling it taut it had a little stretch to it much like a garbage bag; it also is translucent green similar to same garbage bag. As it is spread out on ha’li’lax si’ła’ask the ła’ask is graded, I was shown which pieces of ła’ask to discard; thicker and/or fuzzier pieces are not included to be dried. Learning to lay ła’ask out to dry prepared me for harvesting it. Other than eating, this is usually the first interaction that Git lax m’oon children have with ła’ask.

²³ Ła’ask used to be dried on the side of rocks, however this is done less frequently in recent times.

There are many ingenious methods used to dry ła'ask: drying it in the oven at the lowest temperature or in a dehydrator, using a mesh screen instead of ha'li'lax si'ła'ask, some people take the nearly dried squares off of ha'li'lax si'ła'ask and clip them to laundry hangers to finish drying. The number of squares is the local vernacular for describing and understanding how much ła'ask a family picked. Once squares are completely dry, some are folded up and placed into Ziploc bags for dry storage, some are then prepared for chopping.

Squares of dried ła'ask are layered into a box with fresh seawater sprinkled on top of each layer in order to help the layers stick together to make a cake. Once the box is filled to the top the layers of ła'ask are compacted to make a cake. I saw this done by placing a piece of clean cardboard atop the ła'ask and then the cardboard being repeatedly marched upon. A weight was then left on top of the compressed layers of ła'ask before it was left to dry. Once the 'cake' dries it is ready to be chopped. A large dried out log had been made into a chopping block, it arrived via wheelbarrow from a family members' home. The top of the block had been encircled with rubber to prevent the bits of chopped ła'ask from falling off the side of its flat surface. The homemade chopping knife was fashioned from a repurposed logging saw; the teeth of the saw were placed into a long piece of wood that served as the handle and the smooth side of the saw was sharpened and used as a chopping knife. Before ła'ask is chopped it is again sprinkled with fresh saltwater. I filmed as an Elder sat down on a short stepstool and chopped ła'ask; "There are other ways of doing this," she told me, "I do it this way because that's the way my parents always did". Her arm was in a constant steady motion bringing the large knife down onto the ła'ask. I soon offered to take over the chopping. It is physically exhausting work. As the ła'ask was chopped, the ła'ask flakes were laid to dry in the sun on a tablecloth. Annabelle told me that I had chopped the ła'ask too much; that the pieces were smaller than she prefers. This was not a

complaint or a judgment that I had ruined the ła'ask but was a matter of fact statement so that I would learn and change what I was doing. Once dried, the chopped ła'ask was funneled into large glass jars that once stored pickles and was placed into the pantry.

I followed Cyril through a gate and into a backyard, as we turned around the back of the house there was an extended family all working towards a common goal. There were five women, the homeowner, her three daughters, and one granddaughter, sat around tables that were set up under a blue tarp all cutting up the fish they had caught the previous day. One man, the husband of one of the daughters was preparing wood for fire. After being introduced to everyone I held up my video camera I asked whether it was okay to film what they were doing. All attention was then focused toward the matriarch of the family, "It's up to her," I was told by a woman sitting on a stool beside me as she continued to cut fish on top of a Rubbermaid tote bin. I was given a nod and a smile from the matriarch to acknowledge that it was indeed fine for me to start filming.

Jarring fish is a yearly tradition for this extended family. They harvest salmon together, and then smoke and jar fish together. Work and family obligations have caused two of the sisters to live outside of Lach Klan, but each year they take time away from their regular schedules to get their fish. "We've all worked in the cannery at some point or another and none of us would ever eat that fish. We've seen the way it looks when it comes in," I'm told as the women continue to cut the fish up, preparing it to be put into jars. Children run around the back yard playing, yelling, and periodically peeking their eyes up above the table.

Hours later, after all the fish is cut up and rinsed clean; it is ready to be packed into jars. A few pinches of salt are put into the bottom of each jar before they are packed with salmon. The rim of each jar is wiped clean, and then a brand new lid is placed on top of each jar before having

a ring twisted on to ensure the lid stays in place. Younger kids become more involved more at this point, periodically helping to fill jars, wipe clean the rims, and/or place lids on top of jars. Once the jars are packed with salmon and the lids are on they are ready to be sealed.

After about seven hours of cutting and packing jars full of salmon, the incredible number of jars were ready to be sealed. This was each of these five families' supplies of jarred fish for the year. Two large metal barrels that had been set up above a fire pit were filled with jars. There was not enough room to fit all of the jars so the rest were set aside for second batch that would fill another barrel and a half. The barrels were then filled with water from the garden hose, sheets of metal were placed on top of each barrel, and a fire was lit beneath. To seal the jars safely the jars need to be boiled for four hours. It was about six o'clock in the evening by the time the fire was started. From this point it would take several hours to get the frigid water to boil. The fire needed to be tended to all through the night.

While all of the jarring was taking place in this back yard the smoke house was filled with fish. As the jars were being loaded into the drums by the grandkids, smoked fish were taken out of the smokehouse. As a grandmother packed ziploc bags with smoked fish, she divided the bags into separate piles for each of the families involved in the workload to take home. A young woman entered the room; she had not been around all day. A noticeably smaller share of fish was slid towards her and she was told, "If you want more for your family next year, you need to be here and help".

Months later at a Canada Day celebration in a Prince Rupert park I saw one of the women that had been jarring fish that day in the backyard. She and I had a brief conversation, but she made a point to tell me that my presence and interest in something that was seemingly so ordinary to her (jarring and smoking fish) caused her to reflect on what it meant to her. She

expressed that it was something deeply important for her to do each year, to go home for smoking and jarring salmon. It was not only for the fish that she would get to eat throughout the year but also an opportunity to interact with the land and water, and to connect with her family.

Processing food is an exemplary practice of *syt güülm goot*. All are expected to share in the efforts to get all of the work done and to receive a share in the food. The idea that everyone is involved together is not only to share the workload but also to ensure the practice is continued. Furthermore, it is a practice that enables individuals to connect with and affirm relationships with ancestors, through practicing techniques that had been taught and passed through the generations or by using *ha'li'lax si'la'ask*, knives, or jars that had been previously used in by loved ones.

Cooking and Eating

As I spread out *la'ask* on the *ha'li'lax si'la'ask*, I turned to Rose and said, “there’s no way I need *all* of this. You should take some of it.” She looked at me and shot me a smile of disbelief. For dinner that night Annabelle took a Ziploc bag filled with dried *la'ask* out of the pantry and taught me how to deep-fry it. *La'ask* is prepared by cutting the large square up into smaller pieces. Deep frying *la'ask* is a delicate process; place it in oil for too long and it’s burnt, not long enough and it’s not crispy just greasy. Each morsel is placed into a pot of hot oil, flipped over, taken out of the oil, and then dropped into a bowl lined with paper towels in a matter of seconds.

“Do you see the colour of this?” Annabelle said to me as she held up a piece of fried *la'ask*, it was a brighter green after being fried “this is the colour it gets when we know it’s ready”.

“See this one,” pointing to a morsel that had brownish yellow bits around the edges “was cooked too long.”

She dipped another piece of ła'ask into the hot oil with tongs and took it out without flipping it over, "see this colour? Wasn't cooked long enough," it was still nearly black. "Now, taste it," she said handing me a bite-sized piece cooked to the bright green colour. It was crispy, salty, it melted in my mouth; it was reminiscent of a potato chip but far more satisfying. After I crunched into my first piece I said: "I don't think that I got enough to last me very long". Everyone in the kitchen laughed, "We knew you would change your mind once you tasted it".

"We've got a little Indian giver here," Rose could not contain her delight, "Just a few hours ago she was giving it away, now she wants more". I was affectionately teased about this interaction, time and time again. This became a story that was recounted to each new person that I would meet in the village.

Gitxaala foods are luxury foods coveted by outsiders: sockeye salmon, Dungeness crab, abalone, sea urchin, halibut, and herring roe, just to name a few. The love and gratitude that outsiders or the Git lax m'oon who no longer live in the village have for the quality, taste, and ease of access to Gitxaala foods is a channel through which people living in Lach Klan reflect on their appreciation for the steady supply of Gitxaala food. The very first time I visited Lach Klan the woman with whom I stayed lamented about how eating Gitxaala foods, which are often considered high quality delicacies by outsiders, is part of the everyday and ordinary in Lach Klan. She reflected that it is outsiders' taste and desire to only eat Gitxaala food while staying in the village (and also leaving the village with a supply of Gitxaala food) that helps to bolster the Git lax m'oon's appreciation of their own food while also hindering Gitxaala foods from being considered ordinary.

Gitxaala foods are incorporated into many different types of meals. From my own experience as well as the frequency of use documented in Firelight's study for GEM (2014), the vast

majority of meals eaten in Lach Klan include Gitxaala foods. Countless hours are put into transforming Gitxaala food from something that is a living in the laxyuup to something that is stored in the pantry or freezer. There are several ways of processing and storing la'ask and salmon. La'ask is a food eaten frequently in numerous types of ways. La'ask that is placed straight from the sea into Ziploc bags and stored in the freezer is added to stir-fries. Chopped la'ask can be used to make broths, added to soups, or sprinkled on top of rice. Dried la'ask squares can be crisped in the oven by baking at a low temperature, or deep-fried in oil. Jarred sockeye salmon is used to make salmon sandwiches or eaten straight out of the jar with rice. Smoked salmon can be made into sushi rolls. Frozen salmon is fried, baked, broiled, poached, and made into soups and chowders. There are endless creative ways that Gitxaala foods are and can be prepared and cooked.

There is more to cooking than purely acquiring necessary ingredients and having the knowledge and ability to follow (or recall) a recipe; cooking is a social act embedded with cultural meaning. Relationships are reaffirmed through the act of cooking Gitxaala foods. The knowledge and skills required to cook Gitxaala foods are typically passed down from mother to daughter. Each time a meal is cooked there is more than just a meal being prepared but it is also a practice of strengthening and honouring relationships. There is much thought put into what will be cooked and for whom. Ensuring that family members are fed their favored foods is an act of love and appreciation. It is inevitable that family members visiting from outside of Lach Klan will eat most if not all of their favourite Gitxaala foods and dishes while in the village, and will be provided with enough to take some home.

When food is served, compliments to the cook are often met with a sense of hesitant satisfaction and wistful responses such as, “You should try Ge’eh’s”²⁴ or “Thank you, but it’ll never be as good as moms.” Many times, Annabelle reminisced to me that she prepared food in the particular ways that she did because it was the same way that her parents and grandparents did; it was a way for her to connect to and remember them. Additionally, she recalled a few recipes that she had never made herself but remembered watching her mother make, “one of these days I’m going to make it.”

The amount of food prepared for a meal is not simply for those expected to eat, but a surplus tends to be made for leftovers, in case of an unexpected dinner guest, or to be shared with others. Many nights around dinner hour you can hear offerings over the VHF radio, “I’ve got enough boiled seal meat here for about four people. Bring a pot or container over if you want some.” Cooking is not just an act of food preparation but is an exercise in remembering and connecting with both, ancestors and family.

When a large bowl of fried la’ask was placed in the middle of the dinner table along with a pot full of rice, a few jars of sockeye, and soya sauce everyone in Annabelle’s kitchen quickly found a seat at the table. This was a meal I had on several occasions while staying with Annabelle; I was told it is a preferred meal for many of her family members. Annabelle’s adult son popped off the lid from a jar of sockeye and proclaimed his love for the contents, “The best there ever was, the best there is, the best there ever will be.”

The jars of sockeye were scraped clean, the mountain of fried la’ask quickly dwindled. Annabelle and her four family members with whom I sat around the table were thrilled by my love for this meal. Sitting around the table is also a time for conversation and political

²⁴ The sm’algyax word for grandmother.

conversation (Maracle 1996): family members talk about memories of previous harvesting trips and future plans to harvest, but also about the future of Gitxaala's food system. Often casual conversation about the food would lead to discussion of how projects in the territory would affect the health of the laxyuup (tanker traffic introducing invasive species affecting the ecosystem, tanker spills), the continued ability to engage in harvesting practices (environmental degradation and increased vessel traffic in waters limiting Git lax m'oon's access to sites and resources), and thus capacity to eat Gitxaala foods (the health, safety, and quality of foods). These dialogues contained more than concern for food but also an anxiety for the impacts such a future would have on Gitxaala Nation and their cultural practices.

I was offered the last piece of fried la'ask left on the oil soaked paper towel, I cheerfully accepted. Everyone around the table smirked as I proceeded to finish off the last of the crumbs in the bowl. Rose turned to me laughing and said, "I guess we should have mentioned to you earlier that eating seaweed gives you real stinky farts".

The room roared.

A few fart jokes were made. I thought they were all teasing me, which had become a regular occurrence.

They were not.

I was thankful later that night to have a bedroom all to myself; these were by far the most pungent smells I had ever created. This, however, was not the first time that I was warned of the after effects of eating Gitxaala foods. The first time I ever ate cockles I was told of the delicious flavour of the saltwater that they were cooked in. As a few others slurped up the salty broth I was cautioned against tasting any, as that they didn't want me to be embarrassed by the resulting unpleasant odours on the ferry I was about to take from Lach Klan to Prince Rupert.

The aromas (or stench) that food creates after digestion is not something regularly considered part of a food system, in fact this is a facet of human life that has rarely been studied in the discipline of Anthropology.²⁵ However, due to the distinct smell that the saltwater foods create after digestion individuals are mindful of what they eat, when they eat it, and around whom they eat. That is the resulting flatulence is understood to be part and parcel of eating particular high saltwater content Gitxaala foods.

There is much more happening in the kitchen other than cooking and eating; it is where the assemblage of time, effort, knowledge, and relationships culminate. Eating is the final and necessary act in the Gitxaala food system that demands the continued practice of all the efforts completed in order to provide the meal. It is the desire to eat Gitxaala foods that warrants that Gitxaala food continues to be harvested and processed, and in turn ensures that the knowledge and relationships embodied within these practices continues to live.

²⁵ See <http://popanth.com/article/silent-but-deadly-farts-across-cultures> for a discussion on the undertheorization of flatulence in Anthropology

Conclusion

On more than one occasion I was informed that Gitxaala la'ask is the best tasting. For instance Annabelle told me when she and Rose were teaching me to fry seaweed: "When we were in Bella Bella last year for the canoe journey, everyone wanted to eat our fried seaweed. Gitxaala is known to have the best tasting seaweed. We're the best at cooking it too". Declaring that Gitxaala la'ask as the best tasting emphasizes the wealth of the Laxyuup while also confirming the value of the Git lax m'oon's knowledge and relationship of/with the Laxyuup that enables them to ingest laxyuup. Ingesting food that came from the laxyuup allows for Git lax m'oon to become literally made of laxyuup and thus forges deeper connections and strength in the Git lax m'oon's relationship with one another as well as with laxyuup.

I have attempted to weave the pervasiveness of syt güülm goot in guiding the actions and practices involved in the Gitxaala food system throughout this thesis. This principle is present in each of the stages of the food system. Each time food is harvested it is shared between all whom were present at the time of harvest but also with friends and family members. A load of fresh harvest is dropped off at several homes before harvesters return back to their own homes with their own share. Those who process food do not then, pack their own pantries and freezers full but share the food with friends and family members who reside in and outside of Lach Klan. Food is cooked and then shared at mealtime; leftovers are often offered to the wider community. It is not only the distribution of the food itself that is guided by syt güülm goot but the transference of knowledge and skill surrounding food and the stages of the food system is also guided by this philosophy. How and where species sought for harvesting grow/live; when and how food is to be harvested; how fish is supposed to be cut for smoking as opposed to jarring;

how fish is to be hung for smoking. Additionally, the sharing of vessels, equipment, and gear required for harvesting and processing food are propelled by the value of syt güülm goot.

This concept lies at the core of understanding the significance of the Gitxaala food system to Gitxaala culture. Syt güülm goot connects and integrates the Git lax m'oon with one another and with laxyuup Gitxaala. It guides actions and thereby fosters respectful relationships that are caring and mutually supportive. The food system breathes life into the concept of syt güülm goot; it is through actions that this value becomes more than an abstract idea, but a way of life. Thus, the food system is a necessary channel for culture to be practiced, understood, and transmitted. The Gitxaala food system assures cultural security for the Git lax m'oon and Gitxaala Nation.

Given this connection between food and cultural security, it is no surprise that food becomes a focus in any discussion of the risks associated with development projects planned in Laxyuup Gitxaala. Food is a vehicle used to discuss the impacts and threats that are posed by projects in Laxyuup Gitxaala. The Git lax m'oon lament over: how tanker traffic would affect their ability to navigate through waters and access harvesting sites; what invasive species would be brought into the territory by tankers and how would they affect the foods they harvest; what kind of devastation a potential spill would bring and which harvesting sites are most vulnerable. When the Git lax m'oon speak of the risks to their foods and their continued consumption of them it is not just about their diet, it is a reflection of a fear about the ways in which such projects could alter their way of life, strike at the heart of what it means to be Gitxaala.

Eating their own food and being able to feed people their own food is a source of pride among Git lax m'oon. Most Gitxaala foods are not unique to the laxyuup but their flavours and methods of processing are Gitxaala specific. Many of these same types of foods can and are

harvested elsewhere. For instance the same species of seaweed as ła'ask is widely available in supermarkets; Japanese nori is not harvested in Laxyuup Gitxaala and is processed in a way that not only alters the taste but also its use. It is not enough for Git lax m'oon to have ła'ask, salmon, or any other type of Gitxaala food. It is food harvested from particular places within Laxyuup Gitxaala and processed in particular Gitxaala ways that are desired not only for taste preferences but also are necessary for the continuation of culture. That is, the Gitxaala food system is an embodiment of Gitxaala culture; its sustained practice provides cultural security for Gitxaala Nation.

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