



Ashaammaliaxxia, the Apsaalooke Clan System : a foundation for learning
by Lanny Real Bird

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
Montana State University

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Abstract:

The Apsaalooke or the Crow Indians of Montana are faced with a loss of their cultural practices, values, and language because of threats in the mainstream society. This study is about "Ashaammaliaxxia", the Apsaalooke Clan System and the application of learning in this social religious institution. Using the formal background of adult education in this qualitative study, the researcher collected data based on oral tradition and history from the nativist elders among the Apsaalooke and created a study to bridge an understanding of the Apsaalooke culture and adult education through the formal system of the Apsaalooke learning process in the Apsaalooke Clan System. Although, learning occurs in informal settings, the process is very much formal. The research and interviews were conducted with nativist Apsaalooke elders and, also during ceremonies and the preparation process for religious rituals like Sweat Lodge Ceremonies and Peyote Ceremonials, where learning is occurring for the Apsaalooke.

By providing a background of the culture, the purpose of this study presents other interrelated customs, practices, and religions. It is important to present other topics such as the interview process, learning during preparation, women involvement, oral tradition, clan membership reduction, threats in the mainstream, the impact of disease and warfare, adoption, the clan functions, clan parents, maternal clan affiliation, the teasing clan, clan backgrounds, relationships and kinship, clan practices, and the meaning of being Apsaalooke because these aspects of the culture are integrated with the Apsaalooke Clan System. The functions and applicability of the Apsaalooke Clan System are important, because they are the primary application to the learning process.

In this study, there are several major conclusions.

They are: that there are reduction of nativist elders; ceremonial preparations are an important learning process; oral tradition is a facet of learning; the researcher's background contributes to this study; clan mergers have been occurring; the Apsaalooke Clan functions are the foundation of learning; each clan has characteristics; kinship and relationships are viewed as the wealth for the Apsaalooke;. there are environments where clan practices and learning occur; and finally, the meaning of being an Apsaalooke is based on natural phenomena in the cosmos.

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ABSTRACT

The Apsaalooke or the Crow Indians of Montana are faced with a loss of their cultural practices, values, and language because of threats in the mainstream society. This study is about "Ashaammaliaxxia", the Apsaalooke Clan System and the application of learning in this social religious institution. Using the formal background of adult education in this qualitative study, the researcher collected data based on oral tradition and history from the nativist elders among the Apsaalooke and created a study to bridge an understanding of the Apsaalooke culture and adult education through the formal system of the Apsaalooke learning process in the Apsaalooke Clan System. Although, learning occurs in informal settings, the process is very much formal. The research and interviews were conducted with nativist Apsaalooke elders and, also during ceremonies and the preparation process for religious rituals like Sweat Lodge Ceremonies and Peyote Ceremonials, where learning is occurring for the Apsaalooke.

By providing a background of the culture, the purpose of this study presents other interrelated customs, practices, and religions. It is important to present other topics such as the interview process, learning during preparation, women involvement, oral tradition, clan membership reduction, threats in the mainstream, the impact of disease and warfare, adoption, the clan functions, clan parents, maternal clan affiliation, the teasing clan, clan backgrounds, relationships and kinship, clan practices, and the meaning of being Apsaalooke because these aspects of the culture are integrated with the Apsaalooke Clan System. The functions and applicability of the Apsaalooke Clan System are important, because they are the primary application to the learning process.

In this study, there are several major conclusions. They are: that there are reduction of nativist elders; ceremonial preparations are an important learning process; oral tradition is a facet of learning; the researcher's background contributes to this study; clan mergers have been occurring; the Apsaalooke Clan functions are the foundation of learning; each clan has characteristics; kinship and relationships are viewed as the wealth for the Apsaalooke; there are environments where clan practices and learning occur; and finally, the meaning of being an Apsaalooke is based on natural phenomena in the cosmos.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Apsaalooke

The Apsaalooke or Crow Indians of Southeastern Montana are a unique group of people. They are unique because they are one of a few Indian tribes in the United States that practices their traditional culture, language, and values. Today, the Apsaalooke are threatened. Over the years, they have survived many different migrations across America, starvation, war, disease, federal policy, Christianization, parochialism, exile to the reservation, and the termination efforts by their enemies, other hostile tribes, and the United States government.

Apsaalooke have great reverence for the land they occupy. It is just a small piece of the traditional homeland they once held which prior to United States treaties was over approximately 38 million acres (Old Coyote, 1993, p. 149). These government contracts were used to extort billions and trillions of dollars from many tribes in resources and land base from American Indians. The Apsaalooke are just one of many other tribes. Today, the Apsaalooke occupies a small part of the vast homelands that

were seized.

The reservation is approximately 2.5 million acres. The land is surrounded by the Big Horn, Pryor, and Wolf Mountain ranges. Streams such as the Little Big Horn River, Big Horn River, Pass Creek, Lodge Grass Creek, Pryor Creek, Soap Creek, Reno Creek, Arrow Creek, and others pass through the heartland of Apsaalooke Country. The people can be found in districts such as the Might Few, Big Horn, Black Lodge, Lodge Grass, No Water, and Reno.

A person can still drink from the streams that run through the reservation. Fishing and hunting can still be done year round by tribal members. The land is a variety of prairie, rolling hills, mountains, and valleys. Beautiful cottonwood trees, ash, willow, maple, aspen, box elder, pine, and other vegetation are abundant. Within an hour drive during the summer, a person can leave the arid prairie surrounded by sagebrush, yucca, and cactus and then find oneself listening to mountain streams feeling the cool breeze of fresh air among lodge pole pines.

At day break, while the morning star shines above, a traditional Apsaalooke will greet a new day. While traveling through the Little Big Horn valley near sundown, a person could see smoke from the fireplaces of where a Sweat Lodge Ceremony is being held. The Apsaalooke people love their horses, and in the rural areas plenty of them can be seen. Amidst the mystique, history could be found such as

the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Here Cheyennes, Lakota, and Arapaho laid to rest a man who massacred defenseless women and children of Cheyenne Chief Black Kettle for the sake of gold and land.

The Apsaalooke are a distinct and unique cultural group. However, Euro-western beliefs and specifically the cultural invasion (Freire, 1970) has influenced the learning institutions of the Apsaalooke such as the Apsaalooke Clan system or even the language. The Crow must validate and formalize their current learning structures such as the contributions from the Apsaalooke Clan System (Ashaammaliaxxa) and other systems of learning, teaching, knowledge, information, education, and scholarship among them in order to assure the survival of their flourishing and unique culture. A cultural invasion is a force that has affected the Apsaalooke. Paulo Freire (1970) described the threat to a culture,

A cultural invasion, which serves the ends of conquest and the preservation of oppression, always involves a parochial view of reality, a static perception of the world, and the imposition of one world view upon another. It implies the "superiority" of the invader and "inferiority" of those who are invaded, as well as the imposition of values by the former, who possess the latter and are afraid of losing them. (p. 141)

A cultural invasion is taking place against the Apsaalooke people in the area of education. The power of the current political/educational structures of the State of Montana are awesome. For example in the local public school

systems, the Apsaalooke are not allowed to contribute to the curricula of how their children are educated. Yet, there are Apsaalooke participants serving in roles as educators, teachers, administrators, and board members (Fact Finding Hearing on Indian Education in Montana, United States Commission on Civil Rights, December 10, 1996).

Unfortunately, many Apsaalooke are powerless or ignorant of the threats to this delicate culture.

There remain traditional learning and educational institutions in the Apsaalooke culture that have allowed this group of people to survive. These institutions are the social and religious practices among the Apsaalooke. "The Apsaalooke children learn by participation, mainly through the respect and honor they have for their elders. Places where activities are going on like dances, ceremonies, and even at play, they are the classrooms for traditional learning" (Reed, translated personal conversation, 1997). The language is a learning institution. Activities practiced among the Crows are also learning institutions. An example of this is the Crow Fair held every year during the third weekend of August. Many activities occur during this period (M. Old Coyote, 1992). Here Apsaalooke practice and conduct specific customs during this annual event. There are several kinds of cultural practices occurring such as the observation of the traditional parade, camp moving, teepee raising, horsemanship, clan feeds, public education,

dances, ceremonies, year round preparation, and other social activities (E. Little Light, Jr., translated personal conversation, 1997).

Ashaammaliaxxia, The Apsaalooke Clan System

The Apsaalooke Clan System is an institution for learning. The Apsaalooke Clan System is the organizational structure created by a supernatural figure named "Old Man Coyote." In an interview with Apsaalooke traditionalist Lawrence Flat Lip (translated personal conversation, 1997) he described Old Man Coyote as "an angel of Iichikbaalia (God or 'the First Doer'). Old Man Coyote created this system for the Apsaalooke for social control and religion" (personal translated conversation, 1997). "We are like a piece of driftwood that floats down stream, it has no choice" (B. Old Coyote, translated personal conversation, 1997). This comment by an Apsaalooke elder reflects the representation of Ashaammaliaxxia.

Ashaammaliaxxia, the Apsaalooke Clan System, is the foundation of learning. The clan system serves as a foundation for social control and religious protocol for honor and respect. This system is matrilineal affiliation where clan membership is passed by the mothers to the children. Female clan members perpetuate membership. The mothers and fathers exercise a distinct role in the clan system either as parents or children.

The Apsaalooke, being matrilineal, receive their clan affiliation from their mother. The mother's clan takes care of the physical and emotional needs of the individual. The relationship with the father's clan was also important, since this clan promoted the status of the individual through public announcements of their achievements, and, more important, by providing prayer-blessings for a long, happy, and successful life. Clan mothers and clan fathers are considered sacred. The Apsaalooke credit Old Man Coyote for saying, "No Matter how poor, no matter how pitiful, no matter how unaccomplished your clan father may be, whatever he says on your behalf to the spiritual realm will come true." The clan fathers, therefore, have two roles for their clan children; to speak on behalf of the clan children in the spiritual realm and speak on behalf of the clan children to people, so that the people would know about their clan children's accomplishments.

The father's clan also provides the individual with joking relations, or teasing cousins. Individuals whose fathers belong to the same clan regard each other as teasing cousins. The joking relations have free license to tease each other about public and private misconduct. (Old Horn & McCleary, 1995, p. 67)

Furthermore, the clan system is the primary means of conduct in all aspects of the Apsaalooke culture. In every facet of this culture the respect of clan roles are the precedent. These roles, whether by maternal or paternal connection, define the conduct of all Apsaalooke individuals.

An important aspect of the Apsaalooke Clan System is that it determines kinships. Relationships, like parents and children, are established by the clan system. "Even before a child is born, they have parents and children. The tiniest infant belonging to a clan has clan children. This child always has parents, no matter what. The clan system

also extends in the spirit world" (G. Reed, Jr., personal translated conversation, 1997).

Currently, the Apsaalooke recognize five clan groups which are the results of mergers that occurred with other clans. The number of clans differs through historic times. According to some accounts, there were 13 clans, and others indicate 10. The following listing represents the clans of the Apsaalooke.

13 Identified Clans of the Apsaalooke

<u>Translation</u>	<u>Apsaalooke Meaning</u>
Greasy Mouth	Uuwuutasshe
Sore Lips	Ashiiioshe
Wealthy Gophers (Whistling Water or Bilikooshe)	Akchihpawaaitché
Bad War Deeds	Ashakpkawiia
Ties in A Bundle	Xuhkaalaxche
Brings Home Game Without Shooting	Uussaawaachiia
Filth Eaters	Ashpeennuushe
Big Lodge	Ashshitchite
Newly Made Lodges	Ashhilaalio
Treacherous Lodge (Piegangs or Ashkamne)	Ashbatshua
*Crop Eared Domestic Animals	Isaashkahpaleete
*Tattered Lodges	Ashxahche
*Ferocious Guard Dogs	Iishkakaashexawiia
* Extinct	

Remaining 10 Clans Merge into 5 Clan Phratries

1. Greasy Mouth
Sore Lips
2. Whistling Water (Bilikooshe)
Bad War Deeds
3. Ties in A Bundle
Brings Home Game Without Shoot

Filth Eaters

4. Big Lodge
Newly Made Lodge
5. Piegans (Ashkaamne)

Source: (George Reed, Jr., personal conversation, 1997)

According to the late Mickey Old Coyote (1997), "Over the years clans have merged, with a number of names changes" (p. 39). Other Apsaalooke elders such as Francis Stewart stated, "At one time there were as many as twenty to thirty clans" (translated personal conversation, 1997). Also, Robert H. Lowie (1966) indicates there may be more than the 13 clans presented earlier. He also points out many of the different clan "names seem to be synonymous" (p. 341). Lowie also lists other clans not mentioned which he assumes are synonymous, such as the "Bad Leggings Clan", who are identified as the Greasy Mouth Clan or the "Not-Mixed Clan" (Lowie, 1935, 340).

Problem Statement

There are many social and religious practices that exist as the foundation of being Apsaalooke. By some mystic intervention, these institutions have survived, yet they are threatened by changes which seem to assimilate the Apsaalooke people into the mainstream world. "Apsaalooke share stories of how tribes attempted to annihilate us. Our heros like 'Rides A Paint Horse' (Moccasin, translated personal conversation, 1997) saved us through his gallantry

and supernatural power. Maybe he was Old Man Coyote. Today, we are threatened by the White man" (W. Moccasin, translated personal conversation, 1996). The nativist Apsaalooke realizes this subtle and nonphysical threat is just as destructive as a military force coming from the south or north. Yet, many contemporary Apsaalooke (non-traditional) do not realize the cultural extinction effect of continually accepting mainstream ideals.

Today, there is a greater threat facing the Apsaalooke than that which has even been compounded by all the other efforts. This is the threat of the loss of a unique and distinct culture. Throughout the years, the Apsaalooke have met every challenge with courage and valor. They have been diplomatic and tactful in dealing with adversity in situations such as starvation, disease, and war. The Crows have prevailed against every historic effort to annihilate the Apsaalooke from the face of this earth (Moccasin, translated personal conversation, 1996).

Today, that threat is very subtle. The threat to this culture is being furthered through contemporary educational means specifically in the public school environments.

The economy also has an impact of taking traditional teachers, such as mothers, out of the home and forcing them to work in order to survive. The woman exercises a vital role in promoting the culture. Without promoting the roles of traditional people interacting with the culture, it

becomes threatened.

The role of the elderly is being ignored by Apsaalooke society just as it is in the mainstream culture with more and more of the senior citizens that maintain traditional values are being institutionalized and separated from the practice of Apsaalooke culture (E. Little Light, Jr., translated personal conversation, 1996). Men are also effected. Their traditional roles have been abolished as primary providers of families. The lack of participation in the economy, of racism, and of statewide hostility toward native rights are contributing factors. The Apsaalooke do not view education as a solution to the problem. It is just another contribution to the mainstream adding to list of consolations by the Apsaalooke.

A need exists for traditional Apsaalooke people to find the value of their experiences and recognize the institutions that have facilitated their learning. This enlightenment is tied to realizing that language, customs, and values are a fundamental means of learning, understanding knowledge, and gaining experiences. When learning through a system determined by their own educators, the Apsaalooke can use the anchor of their own culture as an exercise in practice. In this way their educational practices can be based on their own efforts of research and can be implemented in a traditional Apsaalooke style based on the educational institutions of the culture. Such an

approach would use Apsaalooke thought and culture as the foundation and medium for teaching any topic applicable to an Apsaalooke educational system. For example, English could be taught using the Apsaalooke language and other cultural experiences as the reference point for learning. Through this, the Apsaalooke may find value in perpetuating the existing traditional customs or educational institutions in their culture.

Decline of Traditional Knowledge and Respect

The use of the Apsaalooke language is diminishing drastically. The conduct of respecting clan relationships is not being practiced as it was traditionally exercised in daily life. Today, some clan children do not observe their surroundings; they are not aware of the clan membership of whom they pass by in the public. Young people violate traditional teachings by laughing at their clan fathers and mothers. Some Crow people even go as far as teasing their clan parents. This is a breach of the respect of clan mores (L. White, personal translated conversation, 1997). People try to find risqué statements in someone's holistic delivery of Apsaalooke speech. This humor is generated by and consistent with the current mainstream society standards of morality. The Apsaalooke language has no nasty or dirty words in it. Those turning to the mainstream culture have only the attitudes influenced by the mainstream to determine

whether something is indisputably right or wrong (E. Little Light, Jr., translated personal conversation, 1997). There are some Apsaalooke that have fully committed to becoming fundamentally Christian by denouncing their tradition heritage and religions. They laugh at the traditional people. Their main concern on earth is to get to heaven when they die; this is a contradiction to the traditional Apsaalooke philosophy. It is forbidden to speak of death and of those that passed away, yet today our people are persuaded to condemn practicing nativists and pray to a dead man (G. Reed, Jr., translated personal conversation, 1997).

Apsaalooke learners, particularly children, are not being encouraged or reinforced by the principles of the traditional learning and educational institutions that have survived to this day. This is especially true of the language. Cultural surveys conducted over the years reflect a dramatic shift in Crow language usage. In 1970, 83% of the school age population spoke the Crow language as their primary language (Dracon, 1970). By 1978, this number had declined to 73% (Read, 1978). Currently, only 25% of the student population 3-years to 18-years old speak the Crow language as their primary language (Chesarek, Graczyk, & Peregoy, 1995).

Any interest and inquiry of the Apsaalooke traditions by learners are suppressed by the lack of awareness of their culture and lifestyle or curricula in schools serving

Apsaalooke people. Their inquiry in this area is also halted and desisted only to validate western educational systems. This is the view that they have been conditioned to interpret. The Apsaalooke do recognize their traditional learning institutions, such as the Tobacco Society or Sweat Lodge Ceremonies, as formal systems to educate learners about their traditional culture, values, and language. Like the oppressed in Third World countries (Freire, 1970), many Apsaalooke have not actualized the control of education. Thus, the Apsaalooke do not see education as a means for liberation and empowerment. So, there is a need to empower the reservation community through the use of contemporary applications of education and technology (Freire, 1970; Horton 1990).

Currently, the Apsaalooke are in a state of dependency. The political, education, and religious control are overwhelming. Like most other tribes, the Apsaalooke have accepted a subordinate role to the federal government. The plight of the Apsaalooke is similar to the Cheyenne.

Government and Christian authorities were tenacious in a policy to dismantle tribal cultures and supplant their system with their own during most of the Reservation Era. Indeed, from the experience of the elders, educational policies imposed by the reservation authorities have meant that at every pivotal juncture the Cheyenne have had to content with the domineering force of the non-Indian to change their ways in forcible conformation. (Rowland, 1994, pp. 135-6)

Since the treaty years, almost every aspect of native peoples' lives has been dictated by the government. There

is no resolve to question or challenge the governmental authority especially when it concerns the threat of the culture. The government is posed with all initiatives for development such as economic, political, educational, and even religious. Most Crow Indians believe that the power and authority dictating their lives lie in the control of the government. They have conceded to this authority and accept all consolations of government action as obligations. If given any opportunities to empower themselves as in self-determination, almost sadly they will still petition the government for direction.

Other people than the Apsaalooke are determining the role of education on the Crow Reservation. It is a shame that the Apsaalooke are being told by other people what to do and how to think in their own country and among their own people. The Apsaalooke must realize that they have been "invaded" just as Freire conveys. Why should the Apsaalooke be told what to do and how to think by people who are guests in their country of the Apsaalooke Reservation. Such control is analogous to going into someone's home and telling them how they should arrange their furniture or telling them to keep their pots outside rather than in the cupboard.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to describe the ways in

which Ashaammaliaxxia, the Apsaalooke Clan System, serves as the foundation of learning among the Apsaalooke people of Southeastern Montana. The cultural activities of the Apsaalooke take place in the informal setting of daily living but represent the formal learning process for the Apsaalooke. For the purpose of validating the education, knowledge, learning, teaching, and experiences of the cultural practices of the Apsaalooke, these activities need to be acknowledged and described. This can allow the Apsaalooke to examine their cultural activities as an educational environment in order to perpetuate their traditions.

Research Questions

In order to identify the role of Ashaammaliaxxia, the Apsaalooke Clan System, a key concept is to reflect on the social and religious purpose of the clan system. In order to understand the dynamics of this clan system, questions about its origin and significance must be answered. Individual roles must be identified in the context of belonging to Ashaammaliaxxia. This idea generates the questions related to what it means to be an Apsaalooke.

Understanding the Apsaalooke Clan System requires an awareness of all cultural activities and practices. For this the dynamics of the Apsaalooke Clan System had to be identified and discussed. By discussing these cultural

activities as learning and educational institutions, the role of the clans included comments about the knowledge and experiences occurring.

When addressing each particular clan, research required the inclusion of the characteristics of each clan. This included questions such as, "Why are you called the Whistling Waters?" This indication explored historic representations of how a clan came to be. After facilitating such knowledge, questions about specific roles and conduct of clan membership set the stage for an overview of this system. Therefore, the specific research questions for this study were:

1. What does it mean to be an Apsaalooke?
2. What are the characteristics of each clan?
3. How does the Apsaalooke Clan System relate to the practice of the culture and learning?

Definitions

Apsaalooke: This is the name given to themselves by the Crow Indians.

Ashaammaliaxxia: This is the Apsaalooke Clan System. It signifies the driftwood that is bound together along the rivers. The meaning indicates driftwood lodges.

Band: A division of a nomadic tribe; a group of individuals who move and camp together

(Stein, 1973, p. 116). In this study bands are describes like sub-tribes of a larger tribe. These bands could very well be considered separate tribes.

Brother: All male members of the same clan and male children of fathers who are clan brothers. This includes some relations through kinship and proclamation.

Clan: "A group of persons who are related through one of descent from a common ancestor. Some clans are matrilineal, (related through the female line) . . . Members of a clan feel a close relationship to each other and usually have a strong spirit of unity....They often share property or special privileges. Most clans are exogamous--that is, the members must marry outside of the clan (B. White Clay, 1978, p. 1).

Elder: These are the people that have acquired traditional knowledge and experiences within the culture. They are resources for nativist information. Elders are the practioneers of nativism. An elder can be a leader, teacher, mentor and parent of the learners in the Apsaalooke

culture.

Father: Any male member of the same clan as a biological father. This includes kinship ties through blood, like in the case of a biological father's male cousins and spouses of female cousins by marriage who are maternally related to the biological father.

Mother: A natural mother and all her clan sisters older than her, including her biological sisters. This includes clan father spouses and kinship ties of certain relatives. A similar relationship exists for female siblings of a child's father. In the Apsaalooke language, it is "isbaaxia", identifiable as a paternal aunt.

Nativist: This is the term used to identify Apsaalooke members, who in the traditional sense, participate in the native cultural practices such as recognition of and active participation in Ashammaliaxxiia (Apsaalooke Clan System), Alawusuua (Sweat Lodge Ceremony), Baasshussuua (Tobacco Society), and Iipche (Ceremony Pipe).

Other contemporary practices include activities associated with the Sun Dance, Hot Dance, Day Time Dance, Fasting, Medicine Bundles, and the Peyote Religion.

Religion: A specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects (Stein, 1973, p. 1212). In the mainstream, there is an assumption that a person has only one religion. For Apsaalooke nativists, they have many because their religions are interrelated.

Sister: Younger female members of the same maternal clan, and also all female children of the members of a father's clan. Older female members of the same clan of an individual are called, "isahkaate".

Limitations

This study was limited to Apsaalooke elders and nativists on the Crow Indian Reservation in southeastern Montana. The practice of recognizing the Apsaalooke Clan System goes beyond the physical borders of the Crow Country. Apsaalooke people recognize the dynamics of the clan system in every aspect of their life even if they are visiting or

reside elsewhere.

Delimitations

Participants in this study were chosen by their affiliation with either the Whistling Water and Bad War Deeds Clans. These two groups represent "aashke", the fathers, and "isbaaxia", the paternal aunts, of the researcher and fathers of the researcher's mother. Other associations for gathering data included maternal brothers and children of the Big Lodge Clan that are Whistling Water or Bad War Deeds children. Other data in the form of recorded interviews kept at the Little Big Horn College Archives were included. The format for selecting prerecorded interviews was also based on the informants' affiliation with either the Whistling Water, Bad War Deeds and Big Lodge Clans.

Assumptions

The people selected to participate in this study are closely related by clan or kinship. The reason for organizing the research from the perspective of the Whistling Waters, Bad War Deeds, and Big Lodges was because these clans are at the foundation of the education process for the researcher in the Apsaalooke culture.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Our people tell stories when there is snow on ground. According to my elders, This is the only time we share such stories. Today, there is snow on the ground and I will tell you what you want to hear. (D. Old Coyote, translated personal conversation, 1997)

Ashaammaliaxxia, the Apsaalooke Clan System, has been long established among the Apsaalooke, and it is also part of social structure of the Hidatsa people. "Even before the acquisition of the Sacred Tobacco Plant, Ihchihchiaee, in the Big Horn Mountain, and their split from the Hidatsas, we had clans. Old Man Coyote gave us the clan system" (F. Stewart, translated personal conversation, 1997).

The Apsaalooke Clan System is a way of life. It is the basis for respect, honor, and humility. The Apsaalooke recognize the clan system as a creed to abide by throughout life (see p. 7). There are relationships defined by Ashaammaliaxxia. The basis for acknowledging these relationships is through respect, "mut iichikichtu". "We conduct ourselves through this respect for one another. This respect that we maintain is an education. It is how we

learn and how we teach" (R. Real Bird, translated personal conversation, 1996).

One example of the relationships among the Apsaalooke is the conduct of not speaking to or being in the same room with one's mother-in-law. An Apsaalooke elder proclaimed,

The Apsaalooke Clan System is the best system in the world. When other cultures like the White Man and the Black Man ridicule and belittle their mothers-in-law, the Apsaalooke have a way of demonstrating this relationship through respect and honor. I know of no other culture in the world that exercises this conduct. We do not address our mothers-in-law. We don't speak to them, because we respect them. It took a genius to figure out a system like this. The credit goes to Old Man Coyote. (E. Little Light, Jr., Personal Translated Interview, 1997)

In order to understand how Ashaammaliaxxia, the Apsaalooke Clan System, fits within the organization of the Apsaalooke people, the origin and history, including prehistory of the tribe, must be presented. This part will introduce the different bands of the Apsaalooke and present the current reservation as a conglomeration of three different bands of Apsaalooke. Also in this scope, philosophical views defining an Apsaalooke person will be introduced. Furthermore it is also important to express the nature of how Apsaalooke people make their decisions. These include views and attitudes that determine action, just like the mother-in-law relationship.

In another example, an Apsaalooke nativist expressed that "we have great reverence for the life, and of the four directions. East represents life because this is the

direction in which the sun rises. We greet the sunrise as a new day in life. The West represents where our deceased go. We avoid speaking of morbidity, and of those who have gone on to the next camp" (G. Reed, Jr., translated personal conversation, 1997). Life and living are basic presumptions for Apsaalooke well-being and the Apsaalooke Clan System vastly contributes to this way of life.

Apsaalooke

The name Apsaalooke means "Children of the Large Beaked Bird." The word Crow came from the initial contact with early European groups. When the word Apsaalooke is analyzed in parts, "Ap" indicates a beak while "saa" is an abbreviated root meaning big, and "looke" is another root meaning child (S. Takes Horse, translated personal conversation, 1997). According to the late Mickey Old Coyote (1992), the word Crow was made by a translation error. He states this in his book that:

French trappers, hearing that we were children of a large-beaked bird, gave our tribe the nickname of Crow, something which we at first resented but in later years have accepted. In reality the large-beaked bird, now extinct, belonged to the raven family, a bird having a long split tail, although some white authors have mistakenly said that the bird was a sparrow hawk. The raven designating our nation. Large Beak was described as possessing courage, wisdom and the most resourceful way to survive. The raven being a shaman animal as the magpie is. (p. 34)

The term Crow was also translated differently by the use of other tribes when they referred to the Crow using

sign language. The hand gesture in referring to Crow "mimics the movement of a bird's wing" (Frey, 1950, p. 27). Over the years different groups chose to refer to the Apsaalooke as Crow. The name, Crow, has been formally accepted, and many Apsaalooke people will refer to themselves as Crow. In this dissertation, the terms are used interchangeably.

According to the elders and other nativists among the Apsaalooke, the name they refer to themselves has mystic and supernatural origins (Red Wolf, translated personal conversation, 1997). Apsaalooke is the name for the tribe and declares membership or belonging to the group. They use the term "biiluuke". "Biiluuke" stems from an older dialect of the Apsaalooke language which was "miikuuka". This means, "the one close to the Creator or unique among the rest" (S. Takes Horse, translated personal conversation, 1997). The word was first said by Iichihkbaalia, the Creator. "While his helpers were creating the world, Iichihkbaalia expressed his wish to place a group of people, he called 'Biiluuka', in the region of what was their traditional homeland. This is how this name came to be" (T. Red Wolf, translated personal conversation, 1997).

When White Men first encountered different tribes in the Great Plains region, they inquired about the Apsaalooke. They asked the different tribes to identify these people. The responses of names for the Apsaalooke included names

such as "Awaxaawe bilaxpaake" by the Hidatsa and sign language interpretation by themselves and others (T. Red Wolf, Sr., translated personal conversation, 1997). The Lakota have a name for the Apsaalooke, which is taken from the Apsaalooke word for greeting people. The Apsaalooke say "ka he" with an open hand, so when the Lakota were greeted by Apsaalooke, this is what they heard. The Lakota identifies the Apsaalooke with the word "kaxee", which stems from the greetings expressed by Apsaalooke people (T. Red Wolf, Sr., translated personal conversation, 1997). This word also is said to be the sound similar to the one made by the raven or crows, "ka ka" (Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997). The word "Crow" is a bastardized mistranslation by early French fur traders of the word "Apsaalooke", which means "Children of the Large Beaked Bird" (Medicine Crow, 1992, p. 2).

There historically were three different bands that made up what is now the Crow Reservation. Each band had its own name and could be identified by each other and by the Hidatsa and Mountain Crow (Red Wolf, personal conversation, 1996). In particular, the original people who left the main body of Hidatsa and went westward are identified as Apsaalooke or "Awaxaawe bilaxpaake" (Red Wolf, personal conversation, 1996). The word "Crow" is a general classification from the Hidatsa perspective that possibly could have included any satellite bands of Hidatsa,

including the more closely related to the River Crows. In retrospect, it seems any bands that left the main body of Hidatsa and moved westward were classified Apsaalooke, even if they were very closely related to the main body of Hidatsa like the River Crow.

The Apsaalooke have allowed themselves to be identified by the misnomer of "Crow". Even worst, early interpreters documented encounters with Apsaalooke in a general sense of them as Crows rather than specifically identifying them technically as either "Ashalaho", "Binnessiippeele," or "Eele alapio" (P. Real Bird, translated personal conversation, 1997). These are the names by which they identify themselves as. Thus, an error was committed by early historians and translators of categorically identifying all Apsaalooke's as Crows rather than the name by which they knew themselves. In an example of "self-depreciation" (Freire, 1970), the Apsaalooke first experience in the oppressive nature of western thinkers was at hand.

Different Bands of the Apsaalooke

There is an abundant amount of studies about the Apsaalooke from the social science perspective. A visit to the Little Big Horn College Library and Archives can confirm this. There are several different versions of many stories among the Apsaalooke like their split from the Hidatsa. All

these versions whether documented by transcript or described by oral account have some strong similarities. On the other hand, much of these histories and descriptions may be less similar and totally different from other versions of certain topics. For example, through early research efforts to document the introduction of the horse to the Apsaalooke people, there have been several contradicting stories of when the first horses were acquired by the Apsaalooke.

First, there was a version acquired through early childhood stories by the late Edison Real Bird, also supported and similar to a version by Wayne Moccasin (1997). There are other versions documented in texts that were similar to each other by process but technically different (Medicine Crow, 1994). Finally, there also is a non-Crow version described by a military officer through accounts of Apsaalooke scouts (Clark, 1967).

In order to describe and validate certain oral descriptions through the interviews of the traditionalists and elders, various versions, and accounts will be considered. Yet, many of these different versions may be just as valid as the other due to their source being either Mountain Crow, River Crow, Kick in the Belly, or Hidatsa.

The sources of these stories are critical in that not all Apsaalooke are the same. It is important to clarify the different Apsaalooke divisions. Since many stories may be different through familial interpretations, the main

contrast may be from the source of where the stories originated (G. Bulltail, translated personal conversation, 1997). The likelihood of the different versions can be attributed to the different bands of Apsaalooke such as the "Mountain Crow, River Crow, and Kicked in Belly Bands" (Old Coyote, 1992, p. 36). In conversations in various Sweat Lodge Ceremonies, elders and another doctoral researcher, who is Apsaalooke, agree that some stories such as the acquisition of the horse may be valid for Mountain Crow people, but it is different from the Kicked in Belly version as well as it is unique in the River Crow version (D. Yarlott, personal conversation, 1996).

There are no extended texts available or documented research depicting separate histories of the different bands of Apsaalooke. Historically and even today, the Crow Reservation is the melting pot of three different Apsaalooke cultures. These are the Mountain Crow, River Crow and the Kick in the Belly bands. The point is hardly discussed by most ethnological studies. This is an important point to discuss. Timothy McCleary (1993) discusses four documented bands of Apsaalooke in his master's thesis. These different bands could very well have had different origins or transitions into being identified as Apsaalooke. In comparison, these bands are like the relationships of the Blackfeet, Piegans, Bloods, and Sissika people. Their languages, culture, and values are primarily the same, yet

they are different bands of Pikuni people (R. LaDue, personal conversation, 1997).

The Mountain Crow people lived in the mountain ranges of the Apsarokee, Beartooths, Big Horns, Bridgers, Crazies, Gallatins, Pryors, Rockies, and Tetons. Their territory was vast. They identify their homelands and the association with the mountains, as "Awaxawaguusaawada" or extended mountains (Takes Horse, translated personal conversation, 1997). River Crows lived along the Big Horn, Little Big Horn, Missouri, Musselshell, Powder, and Yellowstone Rivers. Since the River Crows were more closely related to the Hidatsa, their territories were close to each other. The River Crows primarily lived along the upper Missouri River in northern Montana and all along the Yellowstone River. Apsaalooke territory covered most of Montana and Wyoming and extended into North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska (P. Real Bird, translated personal conversation, 1997).

Theoretically, the basis of identifying the four bands is (a) through the language; (b) by identification through the Hidatsa accounts; and by the original band of Apsaalooke, the "Ashalaho" (Mountain Crows); and also (3) by the Hidatsa reference, "Awaxaawe bilaxpaake" (Red Wolf, 1996), which means "mountain people". These four bands are identified by Hidatsas and the Ashalaho as the "Mountain Crow" (Ashalaho, Ashkuale, or Awaxaammilaxpaake), "River Crow" (Binnessiippeele), "Kick in the Bellies"

(Eelalapiio), and a less known group known as "Beaver Dries It's Fur" (Bilapiiutche) band. The Eelalapiio band is an extension of the original Ashalaho band or the Mountain Crows. The later group, "Bilappiuutche", is no longer associated with the main group of Apsaalooke because of their disappearance.

Some believe the Beaver Dries Its Fur group split off in Canada and remained there. Others say they turned east, ending up at Lake Michigan. Both of these beliefs stem from the claims of Crows who, after visiting in northern Canada or Michigan, say they have found a people who could converse within the Crow language. Others believe this group became part of the Kiowa, with whom the Crow were closely associated in the 1600 and early 1700's. Still, other traditions relate the Comanches located a group of massacred people in southern Colorado who were dressed like Crows. (McCleary, 1993, p. 35)

This group was last seen in the Spear Sighting area of the Crow Reservation (B. Old Coyote, translated personal conversation, 1997). The Beaver Dries Its Fur Group was said to have camped west of Gillette, Wyoming. According to the Kiowa, their accounts describe their origin from the area of the tributaries of the Yellowstone River (B. Old Coyote, translated personal conversation, 1997).

Hidatsa also claim encounters with a group of people who spoke an "Apsaalooke/Hidatsa" language.

Our boys were singing over in Canada one time and took shelter in a tent to get out of the rain. Then one of them heard some people talking outside and asked if everyone came. When they looked out at the men speaking the "Apsaalooke/Hidatsa" language, they did not recognize them. They were sitting around a fire and boiling some coffee. (M. Wolf, personal conversation, 1996)

The languages of all these different bands along with the Hidatsa are very similar. Even today, a Hidatsa elder made a comment about how the different districts on the Crow Indian Reservation speak differently,

Even I notice the Crows speak differently. It seems I clearly understand the people of Pryor area, whereas the people in the Crow Agency and Lodge Grass area are harder to understand. I can understand the Pryor people just like my people. It seems the people in the Little Big Horn Valley have shortened their words or are not fully expressing statements. Some parts I can recognize though. I was amazed. (M. Wolf, personal conversation, 1996)

This distinction may be attributed to the different bands making up the Crow Reservation.

Elders among the contemporary Apsaalooke also have identified a group of people in the Red Springs area of Alberta near the mountains as Apsaalooke and Hidatsa speakers. The information about this group being like the Apsaalooke is common among elders although no documented information about them is available.

The different bands have a similar language. Even generations ago and today, Hidatsa and Apsaalooke conversed in their mother tongues with each other. Yet understandable, they are different just as those who speak the Romance languages are different from each other. Some words are very traceable and found in different cultures such as the word "four". The Apsaalooke and Hidatsa say "shobe" whereas the Mandan and Lakota say "tobe" (J. Tiona, personal conversation, 1996). The root of these two

indications for the number four is "obe". If said by any of the tribal members mentioned, it can be understood. Many of the first seven counting numbers of these people mentioned are very similar and distinguishable. Somewhere, there is a connection just like the Latin language groups in Europe.

There is a distinction among Apsaalooke speakers today. This distinction is also attributed to the separate bands of the Mountain Crow and the River Crow (L. Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997). Mountain Crow people pronounce some words with the "m" sound while the River Crow people begin the same word with a "b" sound. For example, the Apsaalooke word for "work" is pronounced by the Mountain Crow as "maahile," and this same word is said by the River Crow as "baahile" (L. Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997). The Mountain Crow, including the people in the Pryor district, use a form of the Apsaalooke language that is an older dialect and is much closer to the pronunciation of the Hidatsa language. Between the Apsaalooke and Hidatsa, there are many such cases. For instance, one difference is the "sh" sound of the Apsaalooke that replaces the "d" sound among the Hidatsa. In the Apsaalooke word for "home", it is referred to as "ashe" while the Hidatsa will say "ade" (M. Wolf, personal conversation, 1996).

The main considerations of this discussion are the four distinct divisions of Apsaalooke people. Each of these

divisions are closely related by the language from the sister tribe of Hidatsa. The theory is each of these divisions have and had unique stories depicting their band's history prior to the merging of all bands with the development of the reservation. Even in recent times, the different bands distinguished themselves and at times did not get along (S. Takes Horse, translated personal conversation, 1997).

The people identified historically as Apsaalooke were a conglomeration of three different divisions or groups of Hidatsas that split from the main group of Hidatsas and the original Mountain Crow at different times and "occupied regions near the headwaters of the Missouri to the mouth of the Yellowstone extending to foot hills of the Black Hills to the Platte River onto the Teton Mountains and into the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming" (E. Real Bird, 1969). This was the border of the Apsaalooke Country according to the late Edison Real Bird.

Reflections on the different bands of Apsaalooke, language similarities, and populations reveals that the current Crow memberships have historical differences. Theoretically, the historic Crow Reservation consists of a conglomeration of three different divisions identified as Apsaalooke. Through the years, the three bands have embraced their identities through their own stories and history. However, through the establishment of the

reservation, each of the bands was forced to become a conglomeration or melting pot of Apsaalooke, where stories and histories changed.

It is highly possible that some research may have different origins according to the different bands and through the reinforcement of familial educators. Each individual family passes different accounts of Apsaalooke history. The reservation established by U.S. policy has merged all the separate bands together and categorized all these bands the same through "self-depreciation" (Freire, 1970). Technically, they are not the same although they have a similar language. Their origins are chronologically different, and their cultures were distinct. Historically, these bands distinguished themselves from each other. At times, they disagreed or fought with each other, even with their Hidatsa relatives, and between clans.

Origin of the Apsaalooke

The word "Apsaalooke" means the tribal name while "biiluke" is a mystic and supernatural description by Iichihkbaalia, the Creator or God, about the people who he chose to occupy the historic lands of the Apsaalooke people (G. Bulltail, translated personal conversation, 1997). Iichihkbaalia told this word to his helpers when they created this land. These supernatural beings are like angels. One of these is also identified as the Creator. He

is Old Man Coyote. The helpers are (a) Isaahkawuatte, (b) Old Man Coyote (Old Coyote, 1993, p. 29); (c) Shilubay, the Fox (Real Bird, 1990, p.3); and (d) Hissishetwia, Red Woman (Reed, translated personal conversation, 1997).

Old Man Coyote was a trickster. There are enough legendary stories about Old Man Coyote to fill volumes. Some people, down through the history of our culture, have called him both the trickster and the creator of everything while others call him First Maker's helper. He is sent to us to teach morality. (Old Coyote, 1993, p. 29)

The role of Old Man Coyote as the Creator or as a helper differs from family to family as well as between clans. Among the Hidatsa, he is "Old Man," and coyote is not distinguished (R. Wood, 1986, p. 99). The link also may be associated with the different bands. One elder among the Apsaalooke states clearly, "There are many stories out there, and this is what they told me. They are all good, and all deserve credit because they have significant meaning to our people. I do not intend to criticize the other stories out there" (Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997).

For this reason, Old Man Coyote is either God, or he is a helper. He is also the sun. All these roles are respected because he was able to transform himself to whatever he intended to do. Thus, there are ample publications and oral accounts shared by the Apsaalooke relating to the following creation story (e.g., Hatheway, 1970; Lowie, 1918; Real Bird, 1990; Simms, 1903).

The Creator, Iichihkbaalia, is responsible for the different versions of the creation stories. There is a good purpose for this.

He made many different versions, so the people will know where they came from. There are many because if we had only one, there would be a chance of losing just this one as we lived. With many stories, there is a greater chance of these stories to exist and live on for our people. (S. Takes Horse, translated personal conversation, 1997).

All the creation stories are appropriate. There are ample versions among the Apsaalooke people of how they were created.

Interestingly, the Hidatsa also share many similar creation stories (Wood, 1986, p. 97-104) such as the Whistling Water version, and these may differ from family to family. Basically, they all involve Old Man Coyote and some ducks, who helped him create land (Frey; Hatheway; Lowie; Nabokov; Real Bird; and et.al.) The following account of how the world was created was shared during the researcher's childhood years by Edison Real Bird and later was reiterated by Floyd Real Bird. Many of the other accounts are similar. This was presented through oral tradition.

Long ago there was nothing but water in the world we know now. The only person around was Old Man Coyote. He was swimming around in the water. This was the way life for him then. While he was swimming around, he came upon some ducks. Each was a different species. They began to converse, and Old Man Coyote expressed his wish for land because he was tired of swimming in the world that was all water. The ducks shared his concern. Old Man Coyotes convinced one of the ducks which was a mallard to swim deep into the water and see if he

could bring something up. This duck obliged and was unsuccessful. He asked another duck, a teal one, to do likewise. This one also did not have any results. Another was asked. This one was a pintail. This duck also failed.

There was one duck who was kind of small and dark, kind of pitiful. This one was a mud duck. Old Man Coyote did not really take this duck seriously, but he expressed his wish to give the duck a chance to swim below and see if he could bring up any earth. The mud duck dove deep and after some time below the water, he surfaced with some mud. Old Man Coyote was happy. He proceeded to convince the mud duck to bring more earth to the surface and continue piling and piling the mud until the land is above the surface of the water. This is how the earth was created.

The mud duck is held in high regard among the Apsaalooke. When most ducks fly south for the winter, sometimes the mud duck will remain. We avoid eating the mud duck because he is part of many medicine bundles.

This story continues to describe the creation of rivers and other aspects of life such as the animals, birds, and people. Hissishetwia, Red Woman, was called upon to carve out the stream beds for rivers. This action was the gift of Iichihkbaalia to the ducks that helped Old Man Coyote so they could have a home (G. Reed, Sr., translated personal conversation, 1997). Shilubay another supernatural assistant, is also given much credit for helping create things on the earth as a helper to Old Man Coyote. (Real Bird, 1990)

There are many other attributes given to Old Man Coyote (Lowie, 1918). During the time when Old Man Coyote created land, he also created people by the instructions of Iichihkbaalia. These were the people the Creator wanted to

call "biiluuke" or the Apsaalooke people (T. Red Wolf, translated personal conversation, 1997).

Old Man Coyote Creates Ashaammaliaxxia

Ashaammaliaxxia, the Apsaalooke Clan System, was created during the creation of the earth's surface (G. Bulltail, personal translated conversation, 1997). While the earth was being created, Old Man Coyote, Shilubay, and Red Woman took obligations to create the different aspect of what is now life on earth. Shilubay also came into existence and is Old Man Coyote's little brother. He was made of mud and red clay. He is a fox. Red Woman was Old Man Coyote's wife (H. Real Bird, 1990, p. 36). The Sun also was credited for his contributions because he is also Old Man Coyote.

Before the earth was created, one star out of the heavens approached earth and came to be our sun (H. Real Bird, 1990). Another star came from the heavens as a person. When Old Man Coyote approached this person, the person transformed himself into a plant. This is the tobacco plant. Even before the creation of people, Old Man Coyote said that this plant would be the "mainstay" of the Apsaalooke people; "it shall be everything to them" (Lowie, 1918, p. 16). Basically humans were created out of pre-existing elements as in the following example: "Human beings were created by Old Man Coyote from water, ground, and wind"

(H. Real Bird, 1990).

The following is another version of the creation of man. During the various periods during earth's creation, Shilubay and Old Man Coyote competed against each other. They each created their own people. Old Man Coyote created his people in the form of arrows while Shilubay's people were made of earth or mud. They taught these people to utilize the buffalo and other means of subsistence on earth. These people also fought each other. While Shilubay and Old Man Coyote competed, Shilubay took advantage of Old Man Coyote many times. The people of Old Man Coyote were defeated during a war and annihilated by the people of Shilubay. Those people became the Apsaalooke (G. Bulltail, translated personal conversation, 1997).

While among these people, Old Man Coyote assigned names to the different groups. Among these people, he was a person at one time; he was the Sun, Isaahkaxaalia. He proclaimed himself as "Uuwuutashe" (G. Bulltail, translated personal conversation, 1997). Old Man Coyote, also the Sun, was responsible for creating the concept of Ashammaliaxxia among the Apsaalooke people. Old Man Coyote belonged to the "spirit keepers of the Sun". Since he was the sun, his people were the Uuwuutasha (Old Horn & McCleary, 1995, p. 69).

The tradition relates that there was a time when the Apsaalooke people were gathered together in groups and Old Man Coyote said, "I am a member of this ashammaliaxxia." The people replied, "What

is an ashammaliaxxia?" And he explained, "An ashammaliaxxia, is when people are related, you are not to marry within your ashammaliaxxia." (1995, p. 69)

Shilubay, little brother to Old Man Coyote, also had a clan. He was the first member of the Whistling Water Clan, Bilikooshe. Hissishetwia, Red Woman, is a Big Lodge Clan member or Ashshitchite (F. Real Bird, translated personal conversation, 1997). The moon is known by the Apsaalooke as an old woman or Kaaleexaalia, she was a Ties in a Bundle Clan member (G. Bulltail, translated personal conversation, 1997). Other groups of people were proclaimed as Ashiiooshe, Xuhkaalaxche, Bilikooshe, Ashbatshua, Uusaawaachiia, Ashshitchite, Ashxahche, and Ashhhilaalio. Many of these are no longer in existence (G. Bulltail, translated personal conversation, 1997).

Many Lodges

The term Ashaammaliaxxia has a traditional translation; "asha" means lodges, and "ammaliaxxio" means where they come together" (Bulltail, translated personal conversation, 1997). Another interpretation holds that "the Apsaalooke call clans, ashammaliaxxia, which literally means the lodge where the wood intertwines, but is in reference to a driftwood pile and therefore, a metaphorical reference to the unity of a clan" (Old Horn & McCleary, 1995, p. 68). A late, well-known Whistling Water clansman wrote the meaning Ashammaliaxxiia represented "driftwood lodges or symbolic of

driftwood in a river, tightly bound, all clinging together in a turbulent stream, as in life" (Old Coyote, 1993, p. 37).

The Apsaalooke Clan System at one time had many more clans than the ones identified as active or extinct (see p. 7). According to one elder, "at one time, there were more than 20 to 30 clans among the Apsaalooke. Many of them are no longer around" (F. Stewart, translated personal conversation, 1997). Many elders have indicated that many clans are no longer in existence (Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997; Reed, translated personal conversation, 1997). These clans that have become extinct were either annihilated or perished because of disease such as small pox (Medicine Crow, 1977, p. 1).

Another factor contributing to the decline of a clan is the lack of women born to perpetuate the clan. This is one reason why some clans disappeared. Even today, an elder indicated,

If you look around, there are very few Whistling Water women. These are the ones that pass on the membership of a clan. Look at this family. They have only one or two daughters. There are not too many of us. We need more female members. (W. Moccasin, translated personal conversation, 1997)

When the numbers of the clan memberships dwindled, the members merged with other clans. These mergers have occurred to where 13 identifiable clans are now represented by 5 clans phratries (P. Crooked Arm, translated personal conversation, 1997).

During the early 1800's, Joe Medicine Crow (1992, p. 12) estimates the Apsaalooke population at approximately 8,000. Other elders such as Flat Lip, Little Light, Reed, Stewart, and the late Edison Real Bird state other information. Some elders indicated that Medicine Crow's estimations may have been appropriate for a specific band like the River Crow or Kick in the Bellies. However, according to many elders among the Apsaalooke, Medicine Crow's population figures are inaccurate (Flat Lip, Translated Personal, 1997). Also, other information presented by other elders indicated the small pox epidemic was worse than reported by Medicine Crow. According to oral accounts, there were three periods when small pox took the lives of thousands of Apsaalooke people (Reed, translated personal conversation, 1997).

An interesting consideration arises from the reflection on childhood stories shared by the late Edison Real Bird. According to the stories he received from elders during his childhood, "all the Apsaalooke numbered about 35,000 or more." He indicated that there were a lot more Apsaalooke before the time of all the epidemics. This is supported by the Mandans and how many people they lost. There were tens of thousands lost to disease. Today, they are extinct. There are no full blooded Mandans because most of them have mixed with the Hidatsas.

The Apsaalooke lived in this vast area and were

distinct as Mountain Crows, River Crows, and Kick in the Bellies. This population estimation is contrary to accounts of Crow Historian Joe Medicine Crow. It is highly possible that Medicine Crow's research only identifies either a population count of Mountain Crow or River Crow. There are no specifications or no indications of the distinction of separate groups. Other informants have indicated that there were 22,000 Apsaalooke (Bad Bear, translated personal conversation, 1997). Another estimation reported 30,000 Apsaalooke people (Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997). However, when identifying themselves, the Mountain Crow, River Crow, and Kick in the Belly bands consider themselves unique and distinct.

Apsaalooke and Hidatsa Split

The Apsaalooke were once part of the Hidatsa Tribe. According to Hidatsa accounts, the River Crows are identified (Wood, 1986). "In the mid-sixteen century, the ancestral tribe of the present-day Hidatsa and Apsaalooke lived in a land known as the 'tree country' or 'land of the lakes', the Winnipeg country of southeastern Manitoba" (Frey, 1950, p. 8). This has been also verified by accounts among the current Hidatsa people of the Three Affiliated Tribes in North Dakota. Two traditional elders among the Hidatsa recently stated that "the Apsaalooke (River Crows) left the Hidatsa while they were living near Devil's Lake in

North Dakota" (Wolf & Driver, personal conversation, 1996).

The identity of the Apsaalooke is based on a personal account of stories shared by the late Edison Real Bird. His explanations of Apsaalooke stories and teachings are reflected by personal memory during childhood years of the late 1960's and early 1970's. His account is as follows:

The Crow were once part of the Hidatsa people. The tribes are like sisters. We are called sister tribes because our languages are similar. There was a man who raised a set of twin brothers. This man was the twin's grandfather. He taught them throughout their early years. At a time in their youth, when the twins were about 15, the old man had prepared them to seek a vision. He had prepared them to fast. The purpose of this fast was to prepare them for their life's journey. Each of the boys fasted at location determined by their grandfather. They had fasted for four days and nights. After completing their commitment to fasting and praying, the grandfather built a Sweat Lodge and instructed each of the boys to enter. While preparing to initiate the Sweat Lodge ritual, the grandfather asked each boy what they had seen during their fast. The first child to relate his story was Red Scout. He stated in his vision he saw a lot of gold hair or the silk of the corn plant waving in the wind. The other child, No Vitals, indicated that he saw a sacred plant and that he and his relatives were taking care of this plant. The grandfather allowed the twins to smudge themselves with the smoke from burning cedar and asked the Creator, Iichikbaalee, for guidance. He began praying for his grandsons and conducting the proper ritual required for Apsaalooke Sweat Lodge ceremonies. While preparing for them to exit the Sweat Lodge and see the new day, the old man told each twin the significance of their visions. He told each that they would go on and become great leaders of their people. However, the only thing is that each of you will have your own people. Red Scout will take his people, and they will hold the corn plant sacred. They will commit their lives to planting and caring for corn. These people will be the "Among the Willows" or Hidatsa. The old man told No Vitals that he will be given seven seeds of a

tobacco plant and wherever this plant grows and flourishes will be the home of your people. You will travel with your people to various parts of this land until you find a place where your plant will grow. This is the origin of the Apsaalooke.

When the Apsaalooke split from the Hidatsa, research indicates during the No Vitals migration, he took the seven singers who were part of the tobacco medicine. This left no singers with the rites to accompany the tobacco rituals of the Hidatsa, thus ended this ceremony for them (Nabokov, 1988, p. 246).

Traditional Apsaalooke learners receive an education passed on by stories. These oral traditions can be interpreted differently throughout the years. For this reason, this account may differ slightly from other texts, publications, and translations of the story relating to the origin of the Apsaalooke. It is likely most families have a different account, delivery, or indication of the relationships of the boys and the old man. This is oral tradition. Some stories indicate the old man was the father while some tellers say the boys were actually cousins.

This origin story of the Apsaalooke also coincides with the story of the split among the Hidatsas. One Hidatsa elder, while sitting around a fire in a lodge where a Peyote Ceremony was conducted and while speaking to young Crow Indian men indicated that "our story is the same as yours. Those boys were cousins, though. They were Red Scout and No Vitals. At about the time of this split, they were in

between the lake regions of southern Manitoba and the Devil's Lake in North Dakota" (Red Wolf, personal conversation, 1996).

In discussing the split of the Hidatsa and Apsaalooke in a contemporary perspective, the young Crow men and the Hidatsa elders conveyed and concluded that this split was not abrupt. It occurred while different camps of the original Hidatsa ventured to new territories for economic reasons. As they began to spend more winters apart from the main camp, they gradually began to separate from each other through the generations. It is reasonable that the new group of Hidatsa, those that became the Apsaalooke, would not dissociate themselves with the main groups because of religious, social, festive, clan, and familial relationships. As the groups that ventured away from the main group, they began to identify themselves as a distinct group (Conversation after a Peyote Ceremony, 1996). According to the Hidatsa elders, this group was called, "Those in the Mountains or Mountain People" (Red Wolf, personal conversation, 1996).

The River Crow and the Hidatsa share another version of the split. The story behind this split is about a political misunderstanding in the hierarchy of chieftain authority concerning the distribution of buffalo meat; this specifically was the paunch (Nabokov, 1988). This is the story shared by the late Whistling Water Clan member Edison

Real Bird.

There is one story some people tell about how the River Crow and Hidatsa split. The Hidatsa blame us, and we blame them. We tease each other about it. At one time when we were all camped together, buffalo were scarce. That year, the hunters did not have very good luck. One day, one of the hunters came across an old buffalo bull and killed it. Upon hearing the news of the harvest, many people in camp were happy. The women were instructed to prepare the meat. As they separated different delicacies while butchering, women prepared the most highly regarded delicacy that of the buffalo stomach or tripe. When the meat was ready, elder men and decorated chiefs lined up according to their merits and hierarchy for the tripe. There was one war leader who disagreed with this procedure because he was hungry for tripe and felt he would not get any since he did not have such decorated merits except for his age. This man moved to a higher position in the line where the tripe was being served, and many of the higher chiefs disapproved of this move. This disagreement turned into a scuffle, and the man's relatives took his side. Other relatives took the side of the leaders who ranked higher than the man who was hungry for tripe. The man said to his relatives, "Let's go and find our own buffalo so we can have as much tripe as we want." So they left and separated from the main band of Hidatsas. This is one story which we tease one another for pouting over tripe.

It is quite common in conversations between the Apsaalooke and the Hidatsas to hear a version of this story. When this story is brought up, most often it is in the form of teasing each other. One elder's comments indicated that this story was about the Hidatsa and River Crow split. In younger days, while living among the Hidatsa and Arikara people of Fort Berthold, it was usual for some of the people to refer to the researcher as belonging to the people who pouted over tripe. Apsaalooke people will also tactfully

set a dialogue that eventually leads to humorously antagonizing the Hidatsas about pouting over tripe.

The different versions describing when the Apsaalooke split from the Hidatsa concern two different occasions. The first split involves the people of No Vitals who are known as "Awaxaawe bilaxpaake", the Mountain Crows and his mission to find where "Itchihchiaee", the sacred tobacco, grows (Takes Horse, translated personal conversation, 1997). The other split where tripe was the issue of disagreement involved the "Binneessippeele", commonly known as the River Crows.

The split between the Mountain Crow and Hidatsa was established by supernatural means. The visions of No Vitals and Red Scout indicate that mystic forces in the cosmos were involved by some economic and religious utility related to a new existence for the two groups. Change was imminent. No Vitals led his people through the west and Midwest to fulfill the prophecy of his vision. Red Scout led his people to the Knife River and Missouri River regions and allowed his people to evolve (Smells, translated personal conversation, 1997).

Another perspective of the Mountain Crow split concerns the issue of the Apsaalooke people being in their present region long before the plight of No Vitals. In this version, the migration of No Vitals' people is only a confirmation that his followers belong with the Apsaalooke

people already established in this region.

The Apsaalooke were here long before the story of No Vitals. When White Men first encountered tribes of this region, they came from the east going westward. In this case, when they were asked about the Apsaalooke, the White Men heard what the Hidatsa people shared first. With that, there was little concern to attain an Apsaalooke version. We were here long before No Vitals led his people to the Big Horn Mountain region. In his vision quest, he was posed with the mystery of finding where they belonged. He took the sacred tobacco seeds and planted them, hoping he would find the place for his people. All along their place was with the Apsaalooke who were already established here. (Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997)

This account provides another variation of the story because the people here originated from the Shoshone (Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997). Furthermore, a group of people described as the Sheep Eaters of the Yellowstone were also described as Mountain Crows (Flat Lip, translated personal conversation, 1997).

An interesting point is made here. While researching documentation of the Apsaalooke and Hidatsa split, a reference is made of the three different bands of Hidatsa. Each of whom have a different origin. Two of the versions relate to the Apsaalooke (Wood, 1986). The River Crows are tied to one migration of Hidatsa from the Devil's Lake region of North Dakota. Another band of Hidatsa are said to have once been Apsaalooke or Mountain Crows as documented by George Catlin and migrated to the east to become a band of Hidatsa (Wood, 1986). These three bands also have distinct dialects. This account may substantiate that the Apsaalooke

occupied their historic homelands prior to the reference of No Vitals (Wood, 1986, p. 88).

Sacred Tobacco, Ihchihchiaee

The Awaxaammilaxpaake or Mountain Crows were led by No Vitals to find a home, a place where they belong. In this journey, they migrated across the country to find a place that was part of a vision. No Vitals possessed the seeds of a tobacco plant, Ichihchiaee. The brother of No Vitals, Red Scout, later became the leader of the more sedentary Hidatsa. The Sacred Corn plant became their shrine and reverence.

The Apsaalooke traveled great distances for the purpose of finding a place appointed to them by Iichihkbaalia. This distance was very far considering this was prior to the acquisition of the horse. This migration went into Canada, as far south as Texas, to Utah, and to the west coast. This story is reflected from accounts told during the researcher's childhood. The source of the story was a Whistling Water Clan member and leader of Apsaalooke people for many years.

No Vitals received a pouch of seven tobacco seeds from his grandfather. His brother, Red Scout was given kernels of corn with the instructions of leading his people. No Vitals was instructed to take his relatives, clan members, and the relatives of their spouses. He was told, he would find a place that would be their home. The winters there were mild, the game was plentiful, and there were lots of streams. No Vitals set out to seek his vision. His instructions were to

cherish the tobacco seeds; they are sacred and are very important to the people. In his journey, the vision showed him a place near the mountains had a specific feature. This was a ridge shaped like a saddle. When his people came upon a country that was hospitable to them, they were to plant a seed. No Vitals and his trusted companions planted one of the seven seeds. If this seed grew to maturity, this would be the place that they were seeking. They traveled into Canada and attempted to plant a seed, but it did not grow. It was too cold there. So they went westward into the coastal regions of Washington or Oregon. Here, they planted a seed. It nearly blossomed, but it died. The Apsaalooke did not like this place anyway. The people of this region had teeth they did not like. They traveled southeast near the Salt Lake area. Again, they attempted to plant, but the wind was too harsh and the water was too salty for the plant; and it did not survive. There were only four seeds left. Next, they went eastward to the "Red River of the South", which is located in Texas and Oklahoma. They planted a seed and it sprouted. But the heat was too much here, and it did not mature. With two seeds remaining, No Vitals decided to lead his people northward. Eventually, they came upon the Big Horn Mountains and the feature described by the vision. They went to the area of the saddle, and there they planted a seed. This seed germinated and reached maturity and produced more seeds. This is how No Vitals found this place.

There are numerous documentations about this migration.

One account indicated that while in Canada, these early Apsaalooke were in the Cardston country (Medicine Crow, 1977). In Calgary, the Glenbow Museum has a collection of Blood Indian artifacts. Stories are documented on buffalo hides as drawings. They are similar to the Lakota winter counts. In several Piegan and Blood accounts, Apsaalooke camps are described in areas near Calgary. Several elders indicate that while in this region, a group of these Apsaalooke stayed and now reside in the Red Springs Area of

