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The Smallpox Chiefs: Bioterrorism and the Exercise of Power in the Pacific Northwest

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Although there has been much writing and speculation on the deliberate use of smallpox as a tool of genocide, this article documents the use of the bluff threat of spreading smallpox as a tool of power and manipulation in the early days of European trade and settlement in the Pacific Northwest. By documenting ten cases when a bluff threat was used, the article argues that it was a common strategy of Europeans when they felt threatened or thwarted. Because it was compatible with existing Indigenous beliefs about the spread of disease, it was highly credible and was occasionally used by Indigenous people to manipulate others. While Europeans in this era did not actually have the power to control smallpox, the fact that outbreaks of the disease often occurred following a threat to spread it gave credence to the threat and to today's widespread belief that some or all of the epidemics were deliberate genocide. Recognizing bluff threat bioterrorism as a tool in the newcomer's arsenal is essential to understanding how the heavily outnumbered and out-gunned newcomers were so often able to manipulate Indigenous people and then establish the settlements that eventually evolved into full scale colonial occupations of Indigenous territory.

Between 1782 and 1862 at least five, and possibly as many as seven, waves of smallpox swept over various portions of the Pacific Northwest—Alaska, British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon. The earliest of these originated at a Spanish garrison in Mexico City and spread as far north as British Columbia via Indigenous trading routes, illustrating how dense and interconnected western North America's Indigenous populations were in the late eighteenth century.[1] Indigenous people did not necessarily understand that this epidemic originated with,

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[1] The literature on smallpox in the Pacific Northwest remains limited. The main studies are Robert T. Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline Among Northwest Coast Indians, 1774–1874* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); Robert T. Boyd, "Commentary on Early Contact-Era Smallpox in the Pacific Northwest," *Ethnohistory* 43 (Spring 1996): 307–28; George M. Guilmet, et al., "The Legacy of Introduced Disease: The Southern Coast Salish," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 15, no. 4 (1991): 1–32; R. Cole Harris, "Voices of Disaster: Smallpox around the Strait of Georgia in 1782," *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 4 (1994): 591–626; James R. Gibson, "Smallpox on the Northwest Coast, 1835–1838," *BC Studies* 56 (Winter 1982–1983); Keith Thor Carlson, "Precedent and the Aboriginal Response to Global Incursions: Smallpox and Identity Reformation Among the Coast Salish," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 18, no. 2 (2007): 165–201.

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and was intimately connected to, distant White metropoles. Many in the region had never yet met non-Indigenous outsiders. By the 1850s and 1860s, however, with Indigenous populations already significantly reduced and with regular ship commerce between San Francisco and the growing settler towns along the lower Columbia, in Puget Sound, and on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, smallpox was increasingly being spread from transient Whites directly into Indigenous communities. Indigenous people by then largely understood the association between smallpox and settler society.[2] Each outbreak killed between 30 percent and 90 percent of the non-immune Indigenous population. So extensive was the physical, social, psychological, and economic devastation associated with this lethal pathogen that Indigenous people everywhere lived in deathly fear of the next smallpox eruption. Our research reveals that British and American traders recognized this fear, and on at least eight occasions between 1811 and 1864 used the threat of releasing smallpox to coerce Indigenous people into doing things they would otherwise not have done. We have also identified two other occasions when it was Indigenous people who used the threat of releasing smallpox to manipulate.

Importantly, each of these threats was credible to the Indigenous audience and profoundly effective despite being hollow. Throughout the era under study, none of the people who threatened to release smallpox had either the technology or the means to follow through. Each practitioner of the bluff threat had his own motivation. For the White traders the deceit not only achieved specific situational aims (e.g. acquiring certain otherwise withheld commodities or forestalling an attack on a trading post), it also contributed to the overall weakening of Indigenous resolve and the undermining of Indigenous sovereignty during times, and in places, where British or American hegemony was still tenuous. Their bluff threats additionally created contexts in which Indigenous people came to attribute subsequent smallpox outbreaks to malicious actions by Whites. Bluff threats, in other words, constitute an overlooked feature of colonial power (as well as an innovative feature of spirit power for at least a few Indigenous people) that significantly shaped Indigenous behaviours, lives, and historical consciousness, while laying the groundwork for the establishment of formal settler colonialism in the years that followed.

While a longstanding body of scholarship has shown that, on the Pacific Slope between Oregon and northern British Columbia, interactions between Indigenous people and foreign explorers and traders were typically peaceful, and indeed could even be mutually enriching, they were nonetheless periodically punctuated by violence.[3] Indeed, some recent scholarship focusing on other regions of North America has argued that overt violence against Indigenous people has been underestimated vis à vis the widely accepted hypothesis that introduced European diseases were the principal cause of Indigenous depopulation.[4] Among the forms

[2] Regardless of how each smallpox outbreak initially reached individual Pacific Northwest Coast Indigenous communities the virus almost inevitably spread to more distant populations meaning that the majority of affected Indigenous people likely never saw or met the initial carrier who introduced the virus.

[3] For examples of seminal works that have articulated the largely peaceful relations interpretation of PNW Indigenous-white relations see Joyce A. Wike, *The Effect of the Maritime Fur Trade on Northwest Coast Indian Society* (New York: Columbia University, 1951); Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia, Volume 1: The Impact of the White Man* (1965; repr., Victoria, BC: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1969); Erna Gunther, *Indian life on the Northwest Coast of North America, as Seen by the Early Explorers and Fur Traders During the Last Decades of the Eighteenth Century, 1896–1982* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890,* (1977; repr., Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); and Victoria Wyatt, *Shapes of Their Thoughts: Reflections of Culture Contact in Northwest Coast Indian Art* (New Haven: Peabody Museum of Natural History, 1984); for examples of scholarship highlighting the sometimes violent relations during the fur trade and early settlement period see F.W. Howay, "Indian Attacks Upon the Maritime Traders of the North-West Coast, 1785–1805," *Canadian Historical Review* 6, no. 4 (1925): 287–309; Keith Thor Carlson and Colin Osmond, "Clash at Clayoquot: Manifestations of Colonial and Indigenous Power in Pre-settlement Colonial Canada (The Overlooked 1792 Journals of David Lamb and Jacob Herrick)," *Western Historical Quarterly* 48 (Summer 2017): 159–88; J.A. Eckrom, *Remembered Drums: A History of the Puget Sound Indian War* (Seattle: Pioneer Press Books, 1989).

[4] Catherine M. Cameron, Paul Kelton, and Alan C. Swedlund eds., *Beyond Germs: Native Depopulation in North America* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2016); The sequence of wars described in this volume in Eastern North American have no parallel in the Pacific Northwest where we are focussed and where germs were definitely more deadly than war.

the violence could take, the story of the spread of intentionally infected smallpox blankets is the one that has most settled into the popular historical consciousness.[5] Indeed, the purposeful spread of smallpox by blanket may be the only story most settler North Americans "know" about the collapse of Indigenous populations since contact with Europe.[6] Stories of intentionally spread infectious blankets are so widely accepted today that they are most often offered up as "condensed declarations of belief" that are used to attribute genocidal motivations while explaining the depopulation, displacement, and near elimination of Indigenous people across the Americas. Folklorist Adrienne Mayor has noted both the ubiquity of the story and its links to an ancient European trope of myths related to poisoned clothes. We recognize that within Pacific Northwest Coast Indigenous oral traditions, there are likewise ancient narratives relating to poisoned gifts. Whether or not the various smallpox blanket stories are based on historical fact, Mayor encourages us to recognize that their credibility among Whites (and we argue with Indigenous people as well) relies on both their plausibility and because they rest on "poison gift" stories that date back to time immemorial.[7]

Our research reveals that in the Pacific Northwest some early colonists did, on at least one occasion, deploy "smallpox blankets" in an effort to kill Indigenous people and break their resistance to colonial authority (we discuss this in more detail below), and on other occasions acted in ways that showed blatant disregard for Indigenous people's well-being as they prioritized the health of the settler society.[8] Much more frequent, however, and the focus of this paper, was the traders' reliance on the coercive bluff threat that they could and would release smallpox upon Indigenous people. Vulnerable traders learned that access to territory and resources could be effectively facilitated by terrorizing Indigenous communities even when their own numbers were small. Bluffing was a tactic of the weak.

Given how ubiquitous the contemporary stories of the intentional spread of smallpox to Indigenous people is in North America, there are relatively few specific historical examples. Almost every scholarly examination points to the 1763 case when British Captain William Trent and fort commander Captain Simeon Ecuyer sent blankets from smallpox victims to Indigenous people at Fort Pitt near present-day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; an act senior officers including the British general Jeffrey Amherst had already discussed and approved.[9]

[5] See for example: Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1997), 97, 151, 155; Tom Swanky, *The true story of Canada's "war" of extermination on the Pacific plus the Tsilhqot'in and other First Nations resistance* (British Columbia: Dragon Heart Enterprises, 2012); Joanne Drake Terry, *The Same as Yesterday* (Lillooet, BC: Lillooet Tribal Council, 1989), 85. For a recent and nuanced view of the "genocide question" see Jeffrey Ostler, "Genocide and American Indian History," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias, American History,* https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.3 (accessed 28 June 2023).

[6] So widespread is the story that it has generated its own internet memes. Deliberately or inadvertently spread, there is a vast literature documenting smallpox's devasting impact depopulating Indigenous peoples in the Americas. For a few examples see: Alfred Crosby, *Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492,* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1972); Elizabeth Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775–1782* (New York: Holtzinck/Hill & Wagner, 2003); R.G. Robertson, *Rotting face: smallpox and the American Indian* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Press, 2001); James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life,* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013).

[7] Adrienne Mayor, "The Nessus Shirt in the New World: Smallpox Blankets in History and Legend," *Journal of American Folklore* 108 (Winter 1995): 55. See also Barbara Alice Mann, *The Tainted Gift: the Disease Method of Frontier Expansion* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009). For an example of an Indigenous oral tradition relating to a poison gift see Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, eds., *Indian Myths and Legends from the North Pacific Coast of America* [a translation of Franz Boas' 1895 edition of *Indianische Sagen von der Nord-Pacifischen Kuste Amerika]* (Vancouver, Talon Books, 2002), 96–7.

[8] In the summer of 1862 the editor of the Victoria newspaper seemed gleeful that by expelling the Indigenous people from camps around Victoria that they would be "proceeding northward, bearing with them the seeds of a loathsome disease that will take root and bring both a plentiful crop of ruin and destruction to the friends who have remained at home." "Good Bye to the Northerners," *British Colonist*, 12 June 1862.

[9] Trent received reimbursement for the expense of the blankets, an expense approved by Amherst's successor General Thomas Gage. Philip Ranlet, "The British, the Indians, and Smallpox: What Actually Happened at Fort Pitt in 1763?" *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 3 (2000): 427–41 accepts the attempt but casts doubt on their efficacy as biological warfare.

Historian Elizabeth Fenn has identified other likely cases of attempting to spread smallpox in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century United States, involving the British use of this tactic against American revolutionaries and then later Union armies against their Confederate foes.[10] Fenn rightly classifies these as "biological warfare." By way of contrast, the "bluff threats" that are the focus of this article we feel are better understood as examples of bioterrorism precisely because they occurred outside the context of open warfare. One of the definitions of terrorism is "the instilling of fear or terror; intimidation, coercion, bullying… in order to maintain control over a population."[11] Whereas most scholars use the term bioterrorism to describe instances where biological agents were indeed released into a population, we regard the perceived authenticity of bluff threats that were designed to modify Indigenous people's behavior as meeting the definition of biological terrorism.

This is not to say that actual biological warfare did not occur within the Pacific Northwest. John Lutz has identified evidence of two White traders who in 1864 sold blankets they believed to be from smallpox victims into the Tsilhqot'in population as a factor contributing to the origins of the 1864 Chilcotin War in the interior of British Columbia.[12] We may never have a good understanding of the impact of these deliberate attempts, partly because while the smallpox virus is transmissible on fabric it is much more transmissible person to person. Clouding the water, the documented 1864 Chilcotin example occurred a year after a devastating and geographically widespread epidemic that reduced Indigenous populations across almost all of British Columbia. The blankets were introduced to a surviving population that was largely immune, and the viruses on the blankets had almost certainly ceased to be infectious. As part of our larger ongoing research program, we are examining oral and documentary evidence of other cases of potentially deliberately spread smallpox in the Pacific Northwest.[13] Elsewhere in North America, there are other potential cases of deliberate spread for which there exists second-hand evidence.[14] What the documented examples of attempts to spread the disease reveal, however, is motive, attitude, and a willingness to stoop to biological warfare and similar heinous acts that even at the time would have been regarded by American and British settler societies as cruel and immoral, if not as crimes.

Even without someone working to spread it intentionally, the smallpox (variola) virus was highly contagious. Smallpox was a crowd disease that was typically transmitted via airborne

[10] Elizabeth Fenn, "Biological Warfare in Eighteenth-Century North America: Beyond Jeffery Amherst," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 4 (2000): 1552–80; A review of attempts at biological warfare before the modern era is available in Mark Wheelis, "Biological Warfare before 1914," in *Biological and Toxin Weapons: Research, Development, and Use from the Middle Ages to 1945*, ed. Erhard Geissler and John van Courtland Moon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 8–34.

[11] "Terrorism," Oxford English Dictionary online, accessed 24 January 2023, https://www.oed.com/dictionary/terrorism_n?tab=meaning_and_use&tl=true.

[12] John Lutz, "The Smallpox War," *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* https://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/klatsassin/context/smallpoxculture/269en.html, (accessed 25 January 2023). Verax, "To the Editor of 'The British Columbian'," *British Columbian*, 22 June 1864; Adrien Gabriel Morice, *History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia* (1906; repr., London: Lane, 1971), 317.

[13] In particular, as part of our current Social Science and Humanities Research Council funded research project we are heeding the call of retired lawyer Tom Swanky, who through a series of recently self-published books, has called on historians to revisit archival records that he believes an earlier generation of scholars deliberately overlooked. He posits that a cabal of senior Hudson Bay Company officers and colonial officials arranged for smallpox to have been intentionally spread among the Tsilhqot'in, the Nuxalk, and Haida communities in 1862 so as to depopulate vast regions of British Columbia. See Tom Swanky, *A Missing Genocide and the Demonization of The Great Darkening: The True Story of Canada's "War" of its Heroes* (2014); Swanky, *Extermination on the Pacific, plus the Tsilhqot'in and other First Nations Resistance* (2012); Swanky, *The Smallpox War in Nuxalk Territory* (2016); Swanky, *The Smallpox War Against the Haida* (2022).

[14] The Missionary Isaac McCoy claimed to have secured a written admission from a man who participated in deliberately spreading smallpox among the Pawnee in 1831, although the admission does not survive. In 1837 newspaper editor Annie Able reported that William May had been accused of deliberately spreading smallpox in the Knife River village in North Dakota. Although the admission has not survived. Isaac McCoy, *History of Baptist Indian Missions: Embracing Remarks on the Former and Present Condition of the Aboriginal Tribe: Their Settlement Within the Indian Territory, and Their Future Prospects* (Washington: William M. Morrison, 1840) 441; Annie Abel ed., *Francis Chardon, Chardon's Journal at Fort Clark, 1834–39*, (1932; repr., Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 274, 319. Able additionally reported that Francis Chardon cited conversations with the Gros Ventre telling him that it was their understanding that the whites had given them the disease in 1837.

droplets that entered a person's respiratory systems through close-proximity encounters such as coughing, speaking, and singing. Direct contact such as touching contaminated fingers to the mouth, nose, or eyes further increased the odds of infection. Once infected, victims were symptom-free for the seven to nineteen days that the virus incubated (an average incubation took thirteen days).[15] In virgin populations, it spread rapidly and impacted large populations across wide geographies. Using the common Basic Reproduction scale where R_0=1 (pronounced "R naught") means one infected person will, in the absence of pharmaceutical intervention or other prophylactics, infect on average one other person, smallpox had an R_0 of between 3 and 6. One smallpox-infected person, in other words, would, depending on the strain, infect up to 6 people.[16] This makes it considerably more contagious than influenza with an R_0 of 1.2, Ebola at R_0 2, tuberculosis at R_0 2.5, and is comparable to the original Wuhan variant of Covid-19 which had an R_0 of 3, and to mumps at R_0 5.5. By way of contrast, measles is one of the few viral diseases more infectious than smallpox, with an R_0 between 12 and 18 depending on the strain (which is about the same as the BA 4/5 strains of Covid-19 Omicron variety, with an R_0 of 18.6).[17]

Not only did smallpox not need malevolent actors to deliberately accelerate its spread, but, as was seen with the coronavirus epidemic of 2020, viruses with an R_0 of between 3 and 6, could spread widely despite massive, coordinated efforts to suppress it. Once expectorated outside its human host via droplets, the smallpox virus quickly lost its ability to infect others. Indeed, the virus in spittle could live on fomites like blankets for only one or two days. Similarly, dried fluids from the sores of patients who recovered from smallpox remained infectious for only a few days. The scabs and dried lymph found on blankets of patients who had died of haemorrhagic smallpox could remain infectious for up to several weeks. Importantly, however, even these were only dangerous if crushed into a powder or dust and inhaled directly into a person's respiratory system.[18]

Unlike most of the other viral crowd diseases which have low mortality (Ebola being the exception), the mortality rate for smallpox was typically in the 30 to 60 percent range.[19] The virulence of the virus, however, was not the only factor determining survival rates. Whether a person lived or died depended upon a variety of factors, some of which were cultural. Since neither its source nor its epidemiological features were initially understood by Indigenous communities in the region and era we examine, traditional healing practices (which prominently featured the

[15] "Smallpox," World Health Organization, 28 June 2016, https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/smallpox; "Smallpox," Center for Disease Control, 5 December 2016, https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/clinicians/clinical-disease.html.

[16] R. Gani and S. Leach, "Transmission potential of smallpox in contemporary populations," *Nature* 414 (2001): 748–51; Gabriel G. Katul Assad Mrad, Sara Bonetti, Gabriele Manoli, Anthony J. Parolari, "Global Convergence of Covid-19 Basic Reproduction Number and Estimation from Early-Time SIR Dynamics," *PLOS One*, https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0239800 (accessed 26 June 2023).

[17] Ying Liu and Joacim Rocklöv, "The Effective Reproductive Number of the Omicron Variant of SARS-CoV-2 is Several Times Relative to Delta," *Journal of Travel Medicine* 29, no. 3, (2022): 1–4. Anthony Matt, "A Reprieve from COVID-19, But the Threat Remains," *Essentia Health Newsroom*, 7 July 2022, https://www.essentiahealth.org/about/essentia-health-newsroom/a-reprieve-from-covid-19-but-the-threat-remains/; Matthew R. Francis, "Just How Contagious Is Covid-10?" Popular Science, 20 February 2020, https://www.popsci.com/story/health/how-diseases-spread/; Yao Fan, Xing Li, Lei Zhang, Shu Wan, Long Zhang, and Fangfang Zhou, "SARS-CoV-2 Omicron Variant: Recent Progress and Future Perspectives," *Signal Transduction and Targeted Therapy* 7, no. 141 (2022): 1–11.

[18] F. Fenner, D.A. Henderson, I. Arita, Z. Ježek, and I.D. Ladnyi, *Smallpox and its Eradication* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1988), 480. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that systematic, independent, field and laboratory tests were conducted to definitively answer the question of just how long the variola virus could remain infectious on fomites such as blankets. These experiments determined that "even under favourable conditions of low temperature and humidity the virus did not survive for more than a few days or weeks in a form which could induce infection, unless [introduced directly into the blood stream via] inoculated, as in variolation." And as Fenner notes, "Even in this case, variolators [of the early and mid-20th century in India and Africa] reported that they had difficulty in inducing infection with material retained for longer than a year." Fenner, et.al. *Smallpox and its Eradication*, 480, 1343.

[19] "Smallpox," World Health Organization, 28 June 2016, https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/smallpox; "Smallpox," Center for Disease Control, 5 December 2016, https://www.cdc.gov/smallpox/clinicians/clinical-disease.html.

gathering of kin, the collective singing of healing songs, and the plunging of patients with fever into cold water) accelerated smallpox's spread and increased death rates. If smallpox disrupted food gathering it created a secondary mortality from starvation or malnutrition. Applying several methodologies, Keith Carlson's estimates for the mortality rate of the 1782 smallpox epidemic among the Coast Salish ranged from 60 percent to 90 percent.[20]

Thus, to the Indigenous people living along the Pacific Slope between Oregon and Alaska, traders' threats to spread smallpox were terrifying. Knowledge of the impact of the disease from previous epidemics, coupled with an ever-increasing understanding that the novel sickness differed from earlier Indigenous maladies and was somehow associated with Whites, rendered these threats both plausible and convincing to Indigenous people. Though traders' understanding of Indigenous cosmology was not necessarily sophisticated, most traders appreciated that Indigenous framings of disease and illness (originating in the era before the introduction of infectious European crowd diseases) regarded sickness as harm or misfortune projected by someone with malevolent intentions onto an enemy or competitor.

The principal forms of illness among Indigenous people in the region were understood as various expressions of "spirit sickness"—conditions typically associated with the belief that someone with evil intent had unleashed an invisible force to cause physical illness and death. There were two principal ways that spirit sickness was triggered. First, a shaman with potent spiritual powers could rob an adversary of an aspect of their spiritual essence or one of their spirit helpers. Second, a shaman with potent spiritual powers could insert a malevolent spirit entity into their chosen victim. In either case a spiritual imbalance was created that, if left uncorrected, could result in death.[21]

In nineteenth-century Indigenous epistemology, spirit sickness could be carried, transported, or transmitted into people or objects. Hearing from newly arrived traders that they similarly carried an illness in a glass vial that could be released, no doubt initially reinforced the idea that, rather than being something entirely new, smallpox operated in a similar way to spirit sicknesses. Some insight into the way the traders could manipulate this early sense of commonality to their own advantage can be seen in the missionary Jason Lee's report that the Chinook understood his own medicine bag to contain the power to destroy all the Indigenous people.[22]

Oral histories and interviews with Elders from various regions of the Pacific Northwest are rich in examples of shamans unleashing invisible sicknesses on enemies. Yvonne Hajda, for example, worked with knowledge keepers among the Coast Salish who explained that "shamans could cause illness or death as well as cure, and a rich person might hire a shaman to kill someone. Magic which could be used by anyone, was often used for evil."[23] William Elmendorf similarly recorded several detailed accounts of the malevolent use of "hate magic" among the Twana, including the use of power to wipe out a whole village. A Knowledge Keeper he interviewed explained to him that:

[20] Keith Thor Carlson, "The Numbers Game: Interpreting Historical *Stó:lô* Demographics," in *A Stó:lô-Coast Salish Historical Atlas,* eds. Keith Thor Carlson, Albert McHalsie, and Dave Schaepe (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001), Plate 27, 76–83.

[21] See, for example, Phillip Drucker, who having worked with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, explained that "Throughout the [Pacific Northwest] area the people were firm believers in the efficacy of black magic. When convinced that they knew the identity of a witch who had caused a death, they sought to kill him or her, regardless of the relative rank of the victim and witch…. There was a widespread belief that persons who trafficked with supernatural powers sometimes came under a mysterious compulsion to use their powers to work evil, to the extent that they might become dangerous even to their own group." Philip Drucker, *Cultures of the North Pacific Coast*, (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co, 1965), 74–5.

[22] Jason Lee, Letter of 15 May 1841 printed in the *Christian Advocate*, Vol XVI, no. 2, 25 August 1841, 5–6. See also, Daniel Lee and Joseph Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon* (New York: J. Collard, 1844), 108–9.

[23] Yvonne Hajad, "Southwestern Coast Salish," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7 Northwest Coast,* ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1990), 513. See also G.M. Swan, *The Northwest Coast; Or, Three Year's Residence in Washington Territory* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, Franklin Square, 1857), 176–7.

> a medicine man can use ha’čted (hate) against any person he doesn’t like. That is a way of using his doctor-power to hurt people. It’s not the same a c’I’xax shooting his doctor-power into someone…. Mostly they used ha’čted against a whole family or a foreign tribe, a whole village. Then lots of people die one after another, and everything goes wrong with that family. This is called ‘pulling down the foundations’ of that family or tribe.[24]

Each Pacific Northwest Indigenous community had spiritual healers—men or women trained in ritual and possessing esoteric as well as herbal knowledge—who could be called upon to both diagnose and treat people who had fallen victim to an enemy shaman. Through prayer, song, and appeals to spirit helpers and ancestral spirits of their own, healers determined if their patient was suffering from spirit loss, or from someone having “placed something on them.” They then worked to either find and repatriate a spirit that had been wrongly removed or to capture and pull from the patient a spirit that had been wrongly attached.

Illness was typically attributed to malevolent intentions by human or spirit entities. As such, diagnosis almost always included retribution for the individual determined responsible for the illness. In the mid-1840s, for example, John Dunn observed that

> if a doctor owes them a grudge, he will, they think, charm away their life. I have been told by a doctor himself, that sometimes an Indian’s wife, sister, or daughter, may die; and the Indian, supposing the doctor to have charmed away her life, will avenge himself on the doctor. Amongst the southern tribes, murders have been committed by the Indians on the doctors.[25]

More recently, Lushootseed Knowledge Keepers similarly explained to anthropologist Sally Snyder that

> if an Indian doctor has been killed and has left a son, his family will bring up that boy to be a doctor in revenge (to revenge) of that family or doctor responsible for his father’s death. Anyone, or rather, nearly every family could raise a boy to become a doctor since nearly every family had a doctor. They just about had to for self-protection, and families were absolutely and definitely afraid of one another for that very reason.[26]

In this context, when fur traders and settlers threatened to send a deadly sickness upon a particular Pacific Northwest Indigenous community, the threat was all the more effective because it occurred within the context of Indigenous people believing that the newcomers came with spirit powers of their own.[27] The fact that, starting in 1782, several waves of smallpox had indeed spread through the region from origin points typically far to the south rendered such threats highly effective in shaping people’s behaviour.[28]

More evidence of the power of the newcomers to control the disease was their own relative immunity from it, and their insistence that they could make others immune through a ritual of cutting the skin and rubbing a sister of the disease into the wound (vaccination). In other words,

[24] William Elmendorf, *Twana Narratives: Native Historical Accounts of a Coast Salish Culture*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 224–6, 249–50.

[25] John Dunn, *History of the Oregon Country and British North American Fur Trade with an Account of the Habits and Customs of the Principal Native Tribes on the Northern Continent* (1845; repr., London: Edwards and Hughes, 1846), 280.

[26] Sally Snyder Fieldnotes, Sally Snyder Archives, Melville James Collection, University of Washington Special Collections, 580.

[27] John Sutton Lutz, “First Contact as a Spiritual Performance: Aboriginal – Non-Aboriginal Encounters on the North American West Coast,” in *Myth and Memory: Rethinking Stories of Indigenous-European Contact*, ed. Lutz (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007) 30–45.

[28] Robert Boyd is the main authority on the waves of epidemics, see his *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence;* and Harris, “Voices of Disaster.”

the belief that Europeans could and did deliberately spread smallpox and other diseases was entirely credible in the Indigenous worlds of the Pacific Northwest.

If the threatened disease did not manifest, it was possible for Indigenous people to assume they had been spared because they had complied with the terrorist's demands. And when sometimes these bluff threats coincided with, or were followed by, a coincidental non-intentional smallpox outbreak, it was logical for Indigenous people to assume that those who threatened to spread it had, in fact, done so. So, both an outbreak and a lack of an outbreak could be interpreted as confirming that those who made the threats had the power and the intention to release terrible smallpox epidemics.[29]

We argue that, in the first two thirds of the nineteenth century, the British and American traders to the Pacific Northwest were extremely vulnerable to attack and removal by Indigenous Peoples, especially so in the earlier part of the century and even later in districts remote from centers of colonial settlement. A few incidents, including the destruction of the ship *Tonquin* which we discuss below, and the so-called Whitman Massacre, reinforced this anxiety.[30] Numerically vulnerable, many of the fur traders and early settlers coupled their limited knowledge of both smallpox and Indigenous belief systems relating to illness and spirit power, to manipulate and control Indigenous people. Some Indigenous people were not above doing likewise toward their Indigenous enemies or competitors.

Each of these bluff threats to spread disease was motivated by a desire to intimidate and coerce. They were grotesquely horrible threats: to deliberately spread a disease associated with awful suffering, a horrifying mortality rate, and from which even survivors would be disfigured and possibly blinded for life. And the incredible physical suffering associated with smallpox does not even account for the horrific trauma that survivors would have experienced—the sort of trauma that we know from research in other contexts would have inevitably resulted in high incidents of post-traumatic stress syndrome and been compounded by widespread debilitating anxiety and/or depression.[31] These intentional threats were especially cruel because they implicated children, babies, the elderly, the vulnerable, and other innocents. And like other acts of terrorism from more recent histories, they spoke of a disregard for the humanity of Indigenous people on the part of those who could make such a threat, knowing the dread it caused.

Rather than walk through the ten instances of bluff threats in chronological order, we have chosen to group them into three types: to secure trader's security, to coerce Indigenous trade, and to punish Indigenous behavior. In this way, the motives behind the threats, as well as the Indigenous responses, can be more easily discerned. In terms of geography, these threats occurred within a space bounded by the Columbia River in the south, Puntzi Lake in the north (a third of way up British Columbia), and Pavilion (in central British Columbia) in the east (see Figure 1 based on research by John Lutz drawing on the sources indicated in the text and rendered by Ken Josephson).

First, let's examine bluff threats intended to secure a trader's physical safety and exert control over Indigenous land and people. The earliest example of such a threat comes from several

[29] Gregory Evans Dowd cites many examples from the eastern seaboard of Indigenous Peoples believing it was the bad magic of the Europeans that brought smallpox from the 1580s onward in *Groundless: Rumours, Legends and Hoaxes on the Early American Frontier* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2014), 38–50.

[30] In November 1847 a group of Cayuse men surprised and killed two missionaries, Marcus Whitman and his wife, and eleven others associated with their mission apparently as retaliation for deliberately spreading measles into, or poisoning, the Indigenous population. See *Cassandra Tate,* Unsettled ground: the Whitman Massacre and its shifting legacy in the American West *(Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2020).*

[31] In the Indigenous medical treatment context, see for example, Lori Haskell, "Disrupted Attachments: A Social Context Complex Trauma Framework and the Lives of Aboriginal People in Canada," *Journal of Aboriginal Health* 5, no. 3 (2009): 48–9. More historically, George Guilmet, Robert Boyd, David Whited, and Nile Thompson have argued that the arrival of smallpox in 1782 in Coast Salish territory resulted in profound trauma and a cultural re-orientation towards grief and grief-coping-related ritual and ceremony. See Guilmet et.al., "The Legacy of Introduced Disease: The Southern Coast Salish," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 15, no. 4 (1991): 1–32.

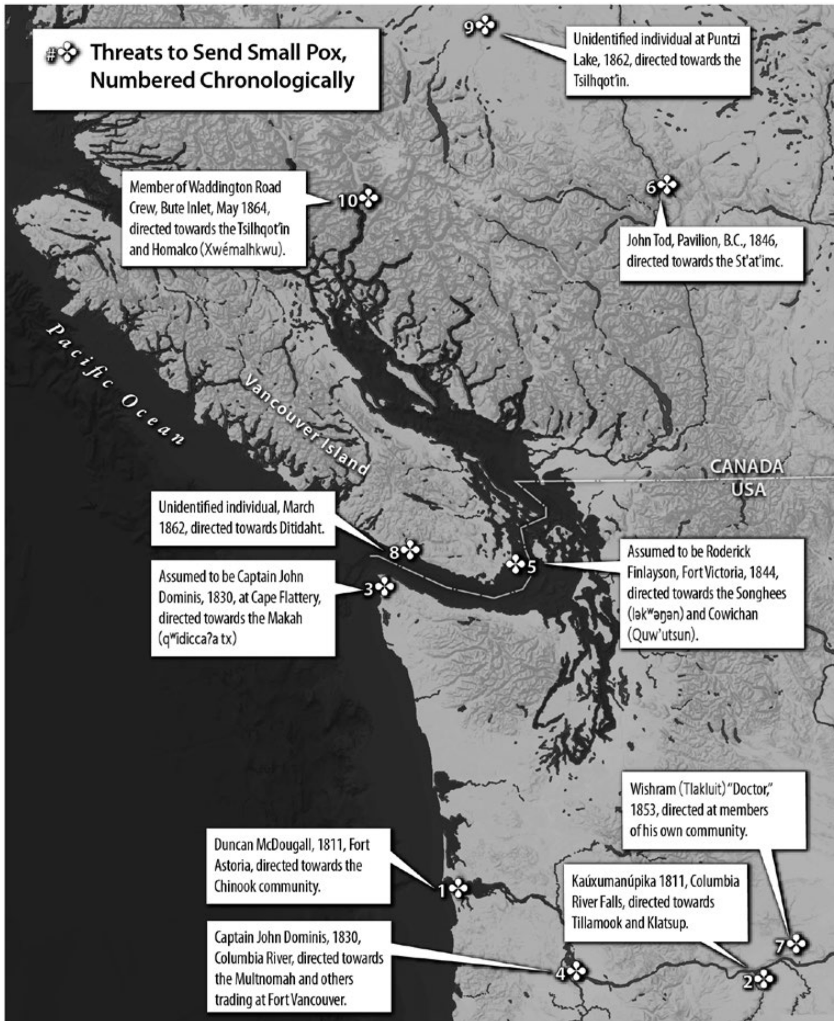

Figure 1. Map of Smallpox Threats

Threats to Send Smallpox Referenced in Map and Text Numbered Chronologically. Map by Ken Josephson :
1. Duncan McDougall, 1811, Fort Astoria, directed towards the Chinook community.
2. Kaúxumanúpika 1811, Columbia River Falls, directed towards Tillamook and Klatsup.
3. Assumed to be Captain John Dominis, 1830, at Cape Flattery, directed towards the Makah.
4. Captain John Dominis, 1830, Columbia River, directed towards the Multnomah and others trading at Fort Vancouver.
5. Assumed to be Roderick Finlayson, Fort Victoria, 1844, directed towards the Songhees and Cowichan.
6. John Tod, Pavilion, B.C., 1846, directed towards the St'at'imc.7. Wishram "Doctor," 1853, directed at members of his own community.
8. Unidentified individual, March 1862, directed towards Ditidaht.
9. Unidentified individual at Puntzi Lake, 1862, directed towards the Tsilhqot'in.
10. Member of Waddington Road Crew, Bute Inlet, May 1864, directed towards the Tsilhqot'in and Homalco.

sources, the most authoritative being Ross Cox who was an employee of the first fur trading post on the Pacific Coast, Astoria, founded in 1811 by the Pacific Fur Company of John Jacob Astor at the mouth of the Columbia River. After learning that the company ship, the *Tonquin*, had been attacked and the crew killed by Indigenous people in Clayoquot Sound, some 300 kilometres (200 miles) farther north, Cox explained:

> About thirty years before this period [1811, so referring to the 1782 epidemic] the smallpox had committed dreadful ravages among these Indians, the vestiges of which were still visible on the countenances of the elderly men and women. The western tribes still remember it with a superstitious dread, of which [Chief Trader] Mr. [Duncan] McDougall took advantage when he learned that the *Tonquin* had been cut off. He assembled several chieftains and, showing them a small bottle, declared that it contained the smallpox. Mr McDougall promised that if the white people were not attacked or robbed in the future, the fatal bottle should not be uncorked. He was greatly dreaded by the Indians, who were fully impressed with the idea that he held their fate in his hands. They called him by way of pre-eminence "the great smallpox chief."[32]

Historian H.H. Bancroft, in recounting this story has McDougall explicitly expressing the threat as the power of the weak: "'You imagine,' said he, 'that because we are few you can easily kill us, but it is not so; or if you do you only bring the greater evils upon yourselves. The medicine of the white man dead is mightier than the red man living.'" Subsequent reports likewise corroborate accounts of McDougall's use of bluff threat biological terrorism, and his small fur trade post was never attacked.[33]

Another example of the defensive use of the threat to spread smallpox comes from the Hudson's Bay Company's (HBC) Fort Victoria, which was established on the southern tip of Vancouver Island in 1843. According to the reminiscences of the clerk in charge, Roderick Finlayson, the fort was attacked by the host Songhees people and their Cowichan allies in 1844 after the HBC insisted that the Songhees compensate them for cattle that the Songhees had harvested. The Songhees refused and with their allies attacked the fort. Finlayson wrote that he used military intimidation to end the siege without bloodshed. First, he sent his translator out to ensure no one was in a nearby longhouse, and then he demonstrated the power of his cannon by blowing the cedar structure into splinters. Their home destroyed, and fearing further reprisals, the Songhees relented and paid compensation, thus cementing European control of territory in what became the capital of a new colony and later a province.[34] Another source, however, suggests that Finlayson used more than cannons to intimidate and assert control over Indigenous lands and people. A decade later, a British naval officer visiting Fort Victoria heard an account from people at the fort of what was likely this same incident, suggesting the bluff threat of unleashing smallpox was a key to protecting the small fort:

[32] Ross Cox, *Adventures on the Columbia River: including the narrative of a residence of six years on the western side of the Rocky Mountains among various tribes of Indians hitherto unknown: together with a journey across the American continent* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832), 151.

[33] Two missionaries working on the Columbia in the 1830s heard and retold this story. See Daniel Lee and Joseph Frost, *Ten Years in Oregon,* 24–5. Washington Irving in his history of the Pacific Fur Company also tells a version of this story but his sources are not clear and he may be drawing on Cox. Washington Irving, *Astoria: Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (New York: Putnam, Hurd & Houghton, 1867), 117–8. Bancroft's' version in Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft. Volume XXVIII History of The Northwest Coast. Vol. II. 1800–1846* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, Publishers, 1884), 176.

[34] There are three versions of this event from Finlayson; they vary among themselves and seem to make it a larger event than tangential routine correspondence would indicate. See Roderick Finlayson, "Biography of Roderick Finlayson," British Columbia Archives (BCA) A/B/30/F49A; Roderick Finlayson, "History of Vancouver Island and the Northwest Coast," BCA A/B/30/F49B (recorded by H.H. Bancroft in 1878–1879); W.W. Walkem, "An Early Trouble at Fort Camosun" in *Stories of Early British Columbia* (Vancouver: News Advertiser, 1914), 63–74.

> At one time they [the Songhees people] were very troublesome—and a story is told of their coming to take the Fort but the Small Pox had been amongst them a little before & many had died from its effects. One of the HB officers thought of a stratagem—he took a bottle carefully sealed up & went out to the Chief & said I have in my hand a bottle of Small Pox and I should be sorry to have to use it but if you are not all gone in 24 hours I will break it and send the disease amongst you for then it will escape & you all know the dreadful consequences of such a thing. A great meeting was called amongst the Natives & before the time specified they had all gone back to their proper districts.[35]

We cannot draw any cause and effect, but the 1844 attack was the first and last Indigenous assault on the fort.

A second, related-but-different type of the smallpox bluff threat was to coerce Indigenous people to trade something they did not want to exchange, or to trade it at an unfavorable price. One such example comes via HBC fur trader William Fraser Tolmie who heard a story from *Pensilkimum*, a "Sinnamish [Swinomish] hunter and chief" in September 1833 at Fort Nisqually in Puget Sound. *Pensilkimum* "tells a long story of the arrival of two American ships at Cape Flattery that the Chiefs [ships' captains] threaten to send disease amongst them if they do not trade beaver."[36] A potential confirmation of this threat comes from George Hills, aboard the British naval vessel *HMS Virago*, who, passing by Cape Flattery seven years later, heard from the Makah what may have been an account of the same event:

> A few years ago the Captain of a fur trading vessel, finding a tribe refractory assembled the chiefs and producing an empty bottle corked up, told them that it was full of 'skin sick' and unless his terms were agreed to he would uncork it and destroy them all; which so frightened them that he had his own way without further trouble.[37]

In his research into this case, anthropologist Robert Boyd concluded that both of these independent stories from divergent sources, one contemporary and one from seven years later, likely refer to Captain John Dominis of the American ship *Owyhee* and its consort the *Convoy,* about whom there are several similar, well-documented stories of bluff threat bioterrorism occurring during his time on the Columbia River before he headed to Cape Flattery.[38] We say more about Captain Dominis below.

Yet another case of the bluff threat combines both the defensive and the coercive elements of smallpox bioterrorism. According to his own recollections, John Tod, HBC post manager at Fort Kamloops on the Thompson River, was faced with two problems in 1846. The nearby St'at'imc (Lillooet) people were refusing to trade wind-dried salmon—essential as a winter food source for the fort's men—and they were assembling with a plan to attack the fort. In his somewhat self-aggrandizing memoirs, recorded by a scribe of Bancroft, Tod, after riding over seventy miles to St'at'imc fish camp at "Papayon" (likely Pavilion north of today's Lillooet) on

[35] Journal of George Hastings Inskip of the *HMS Virago*, April 1853, BCA, MS-00936. We acknowledge two other less likely possibilities: the naval officer's account sounds very much like the Astoria story of 1811, which had been published several times by the late 1840s in Ross' and Lee and Young's books and so might have become a legend mistakenly linked to Fort Victoria. Second, it differs from the account by Finlayson, raising the possibility that it may refer to an additional, separate event.

[36] William Tolmie, *The Journals of William Fraser Tolmie: Physician and Fur Trader* (Vancouver, BC: Mitchell Press, 1963), 238. The name of the trader is given in Clarence B. Bagley, "Journal of Occurrences at Nisqually House," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1915): 197.

[37] George Hills, "Journal on Board H.M.S. Portland and H.M.S. Virago," 28 May 1853, Mitchell Library, Australia. MSS 1436/1, 225–6. This, of course, could refer to a separate instance as well.

[38] Boyd, *Coming Spirit of Pestilence*, 112–4; Dominis was on the Columbia and at Cape Flattery in 1827, 1829, and 1830. See F.W. Howay, "The Brig *Owhyhee* in The Columbia, 1829–30," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1934): 10–21.

the Fraser River, told his men to make camp nearby. He then rode alone into the camp of 1,500 armed warriors saying to them:

> "Haven't you heard… that the smallpox has broken out at Walla Walla [over 500 miles to the southeast] and other places?" Oh! This struck them with terror. They were now perfectly dumb with horror of the smallpox, of which they had a perfect dread. And it was true; the smallpox was raging on the Columbia River.[39]

According to Tod they responded by asking:

> "Have you come to give us some medicine?" now the frightened savages enquired of me. "I don't like to see you all lying around on the ground dead like your fish there," pointing to the large quantity of salmon that they had out drying along the river bank. "Oh! Oh!" they replied, still more frightened.

Next, in an attempt to distract the Indigenous men while his own men worked to trade dried salmon from the women, Tod manipulated the warriors into first felling a giant tree and then cutting off its butt end to create a special chair for the HBC trader to sit upon. Then he began the process of vaccination, but with the particularly cruel addition of cutting especially deep cuts into the arms of those men he deemed "rascals."

> They commenced to strip & called the women and children out of the forest where they had been concealed. My men had a fire in the woods & I pointing to the smoke of the camp directed the women, who had lots of salmon, to take the salmon to my men, that I didn't want any of it. Off they went only too gladly.

Finally, after he exhausted his supply of vaccine, Tod told the warriors to keep their arm uncovered all day and not to touch anyone. This fulfilled his second goal, that of preventing any violent action against him on the part of the warriors: "Of course I knew that by attending to my orders there was no chance of any fighting or going on among them."

> When they had seen that all my matter had been exhausted, I said I should leave them the lancet,[40] and that so soon as the scabs were formed, on those who had been cured that they could follow the same process until all had been vaccinated stating about the time that they should have to wait before resuming the lancing.
>
> By this time they would have got down to worship me almost instead of as before committing murder on myself and party.
>
> It was a strange site to witness the Indians going about with their arms upheld and uncovered. I took good care that they could harm no one in thus giving such orders….
>
> Anyway we got back to Kamloops safely, and all the excitement and trouble passed over.[41]

[39] John Tod, "History of New Caledonia and the Northwest Coast, Victoria, 1878," Bancroft Library, P-C, 27 (emphasis added). Tod dates this event as 1846 but also says the event took place the same year as the "Whitman Massacre" which was in fall 1847. In fact, there does not appear to be evidence for smallpox on the Columbia in 1846–1847, but measles, which can look similar to smallpox, especially in its early stages, was causing high mortalities. The estimate of 1,500 warriors is mostly likely a significant exaggeration.

[40] A lancet is a specially made double edged knife with a small hollow to hold the vaccine that was used to create an incision in the skin and bring the vaccine into contact with the patient's blood stream.

[41] Tod, "History of New Caledonia," Bancroft Library, P-C, 27.

What we learn from Tod's reminiscence is that through subterfuge he was able to get the St'at'imc women to trade ten thousand dried salmon, thereby saving his men at Fort Kamloops from winter starvation, and by telling the Indigenous people that they faced an imminent smallpox epidemic from which he alone possessed the medicine that could protect them, he ingratiated himself to the warriors who had earlier wanted to kill him. In Bancroft's assessment, the lesson Tod brought to this encounter, after years of working in the fur trade, was that "Fear must be kept alive, the threatening wrath of a mysterious unseen power must be before them."[42]

The third and final category of bluff threats to spread disease was intended as punishment for particular Indigenous behaviors that had angered the bluffer. In 1840 the Chinook People of the lower Columbia told missionary Jason Lee that the smallpox "had carried off nearly all their people, many years ago and the 'cold-sick' had killed the rest so they were '*halo tilicum ulta*' meaning 'no people now.'" They told him:

> The cold sick (they said) was brought by Capt. Dominis; that the King George people [British] told them to give them all the large beaver and salmon and to give Capt. Dominis the small ones; and that he became very angry, and told them that they would see by and by, and that they would all be dead before long. Accordingly, when he was about to leave, he opened his phial and let out the "cold-sick."[43]

Jason Lee understood the "cold sick" to have been ague (i.e. influenza) which is often accompanied by chills and fever.

Scholars now believe that the "cold sick" was not influenza but rather malaria with its fevers and chills which broke out on the Columbia River in 1830. Unlike smallpox, which was spread person to person, malaria is spread by certain species of mosquito from infected people. Given the timing and the fact that the Owhyee's mate, a Mr. Jones, was too sick to work and was cared for at Fort Vancouver for four months, it is likely that the *Owyhee* and *Convoy* did inadvertently bring the malaria virus to the Columbia.[44] Dominis's threat to spread sickness, most likely smallpox, was linked to this malaria outbreak.[45] In 1841, Charles Wilkes, commander of the U.S. Exploration Expedition, independently recorded that, "The Indians fully believe, to this day, that Captain Dominis introduced the disease in 1830. Since that time it has committed frightful ravages among them." William Fraser Tolmie at Fort Nisqually is the fourth of the independent recorders who heard from Indigenous people that Dominis deliberately unleashed a deadly disease among the Chinook Columbia River as punishment for their trade practices.[46]

Variants of the punitive bluff threat were used again in British Columbia in the 1860s which was then in the throes of a gold rush. In March of 1862 smallpox was carried to Victoria on ships from San Francisco to Victoria where it quickly spread into the Indigenous population in and around the town.[47] From Victoria, a major seasonal gathering place for Indigenous people from all along the

[42] There is an embellished version of this account in Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft. Volume XXXII. History of British Columbia. 1792–1887* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Company, Publishers, 1887), 149.

[43] Jason Lee, Letter of 15 May 1841 printed in the *Christian Advocate* XVI, no. 2, 25 August 1841, 5–6.

[44] Only the anopheline variety of mosquito can transmit malaria, and these exist on the Northwest Coast only as far north as the lower Columbia. It appears that Jones had been infected by an anopheline mosquito and others in turn bit him and infected Chinook Indigenous people. Malaria raged along the lower Columbia River region for four years following the Dominis visit. Estimates place the mortality rate among the Chinook at roughly 90%. See Robert Boyd, "Another Look at the 'Fever and Ague' of Western Europe," *Ethnohistory* 22 (Spring 1975): 135.

[45] Dominis' crew would have been equally susceptible to malaria as the Chinook. Symptoms can appear between 7 and 30 days after infection and often begin with chills. See Howay, "The Brig Owhyhee," 15–6.

[46] It is also possible that the HBC employees may have put the blame for the illness on Dominis to render his ships, which were competition, unwelcome on the Columbia. Robert Boyd, "Demographic History, 1774–1874" in *Northwest Coast, Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 7,* ed. Wayne Suttles (Washington: Smithsonian, 1990), 139; Boyd, *Coming Spirit of Pestilence*, 112–4; Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition, During the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, Volume V* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman, 1849), 140; Tolmie, *Physician and Fur Trader*, 238, 288–9.

[47] Boyd, *Coming of Pestilence*, 172–201.

British Columbia coast, the virus spread and rapidly devastated First Nations in most of what is now British Columbia in a massive epidemic. In April, just as the virus was taking hold, the local Victoria newspaper reported: a delegation of “Nittinat” [Ditidaht] from the west coast of Vancouver Island called on Governor James Douglas in Victoria and said “that they had been deputized by their tribe to ascertain whether there was any truth in a story told them by some white scamps that Gov. Douglas was about to send the smallpox among them for the purpose of killing off the tribe and getting their land. They were assured [by Douglas] that they had been hoaxed and [they] left the next day for their home.”[48] The public nature of the article and a lack of motive to dissemble lends credence to this account of some “white scamps” who threatened to use smallpox to eliminate the Ditidaht. It is not clear what the specific motive of the scamps was.

A better documented example is a punitive bluff threat in 1864 that sparked a coordinated Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism in the central plateau region of British Columbia. In May 1864, an unidentified man connected to a construction crew that was attempting to build a road from the outlet of the Homathco River in Bute Inlet to the goldfields of the Cariboo, assembled the Indigenous people working on the road. Responding to the fact that the road crew’s storehouse had been looted over the preceding winter, he asked them their names, wrote them down, and then told them that as punishment for stealing their supplies, he would unleash smallpox among them. “So when those Chilcoatens saw their names taken down and heard themselves threatened with disease, they were only too ready to believe the threat.”[49]

In this instance, the bluff threat backfired. A few days later, some twenty-five Tsilhqot’in led by a war-chief named Klatsassin attacked the road crew. The threat to spread smallpox, we learned from transcripts associated with the subsequent trial of Klatsassin, was the main reason why he led the Tsilhqot’in to attack the roadbuilders. This attack ultimately triggered what is known in British Columbia history as the Chilcotin War and the death of nineteen settlers.[50] Three sources tell us about the smallpox threats: Klatsassin’s account told both to the missionary Rev. Lundin Brown, and to the judge who presided over his murder trial, Matthew Baillie Begbie. A third is the testimony of Ach-pic-er-mous, a Tsilqoht’in who was present at one of Klatsassin’s attacks and reported that:

> Klattassin said that… they [the road crew] were angry at Klatsassin’s men for stealing and that one of them said that to punish them next “warm” [summer] he would send the smallpox amongst them. Klattassin said that in consequence he had killed the whitemen at Bute Inlet and that he was resolved to kill all the whitemen he could find.[51]

Judge Begbie remarked that “The threat acquired substance and force from the circumstance that the same threat is said to have been made to them previous to the small pox of/62-/63 when half their numbers (on a moderate computation) perished.” The missionary, Brown, also heard this from Klatsassin: “They recollected that something of the same sort had been said by another white man two years before, at a place called Puntzeen [Puntzi Lake], in the interior; he had said small-pox was coming, and in the winter of 1862–63 it had come.”[52] We do not know the precise nature of this threat but the Tsilhqot’in believed it had been carried out.

48 *British Colonist*, 26 April 1862.

49 R. C. Lundin Brown, *Klatsassan, and Other Reminiscences of Missionary Life in British Columbia* (London: Gilbert and Rivington, Printers, 1873), 10–1, 111.

50 See “Nobody Knows Him: Lhatŝ’aŝʔin and the Chilcotin War,” Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History, 2003, https://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/klatsassin/home/indexen.html; E.S. Hewlett, “The Chilcotin Uprising of 1864,” *BC Studies* 19 (Autumn 1973): 50–72.

51 BCA, H.P.P. Crease: Legal Papers 1853–1895, Add. Mss. 54 box 3, file 12, Supreme Court of New Westminster, Testimony of Ach-pic-er-mous, 31 May 1865, 1604–1605–1600. https://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/klatsassin/aftermath/thetrials/ahanandlutas/226en.html.

52 None of the sources record the motivation behind the Puntzi Lake threat. Henry Solomon, “A Tsilhqot’in Account of Smallpox,” in *Nemiah: The Unconquered Country*, ed. Terry Glavin (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1992), 85–6; R. C. Lundin Brown, *Klatsassan*, 10–1, 111; BC Archives, Colonial Correspondence, GR-1372, F142f/16, Mflm B1308, Matthew Baillie Begbie to the Governor of British Columbia Including Notes Taken by the Court at the Trial of 6 Indians, 30 September 1864.

Interestingly, the bluff threat of smallpox was not exclusively a tactic of White traders and settlers. On at least two occasions the bluff threat was used by Indigenous individuals to gain power over others. The best documented case comes from the Columbia River, in 1811 when a Cree or Kootenay [Ktunaxa] prophet Kaúxumanúpika claimed to have the power to spread smallpox.

Robert Stuart of John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company at Fort Astoria in 1811 remembered that:

> A man and a woman arrived at Fort Astoria speaking the language of the Kristeva's [Cree] which raised suspicion that he was a half breed of the nations of the northwest and a spy of the [Canadian] NW Co. If we had not taken him under our protection the instant he arrived, he would have been victim of their dread that he would give them smallpox. He had the imprudence to boast of the power to do it [spread smallpox]. The chiefs of the Thinouks and the Clatsops frequently came begging that we surrender him to them as well as his squaw.[53]

The couple Stuart described, however, were not as they first appeared. They travelled back up the Columbia River with the Northwest Company trader and explorer David Thompson. In his journal entry of July 26, 1811, Thompson explained:

> A fine morning; to my surprise, very early, apparently a young man, well dressed in leather, carrying a Bow and Quiver of Arrows, with his Wife, a young woman in good clothing, came to my tent door and requested me to give them my protection; somewhat at a loss what answer to give, on looking at them, in the Man I recognized the Woman who three years ago was the wife of Boisverd, a Canadian and my servant; her conduct was then so loose that I had to request him to send her away to her friends, but the Kootenays were also displeased with her; she left them, and found her way from Tribe to Tribe to the Sea. She became a prophetess, declared her sex changed, that she was now a Man, dressed, and armed herself as such, and also took a young woman to Wife.[54]

The couple sought protection because Kaúxumanúpika claimed to have the power to spread smallpox. Kaúxumanúpika told the people at the falls of the Columbia that "the White men… have brought with them the Small Pox to destroy [the Indigenous People of the Columbia]; and two men of enormous size, who are on their way …to us, overturning the Ground, and burying all the Villages and Lodges underneath it;

The people at the Columbia falls asked Thompson:

> is this true, and are we all soon to die? I told them not to be alarmed, for the white Men who had arrived had not brought the Small Pox, and the Natives were strong to live, and every evening were dancing and singing; and pointing to the skies, said, you ought to know that the Great Spirit is the only Master of the ground, and such as it was in the day of your grandfathers it is now, and will continue the same for your grandsons: At all which they appeared much

[53] Robert Stuart, "An Account of the Tonquin's Voyage and of the Events at Fort Astoria in 1811–1812," in *The Discovery of the Oregon Trail: Robert Stuart's Narratives of His Overland Trip Eastward from Astoria in 1812–13,* ed. Phillip Aston Rollins (New York: Edward Eberstadt and Sons, 1935), Appendix A, 273.

[54] David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of his Explorations in Western America 1884–1812,* ed. J.B. Tyrrell (Toronto: Champlain Society, Toronto, 1916), 512–513; there is considerable variation on how the name of this remarkable transsexual figure has been recorded and they are discussed in Suzanne Crawford O'Brien, "Gone to the Spirits: A Transgender Prophet on the Columbia Plateau," *Theology and Sexuality* 12, no. 2 (2015): 125–43; Claude Schaeffer, "The Kutenai Female Berdache: Courier, Guide, Prophetess and Warrior," *Ethnohistory* 12 (Summer 1965): 193–236; O. B. Sperlin, "Two Kootenay Women Masquerading as Men? Or Were They One?," *The Washington Historical Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1930): 120–30; J. Neilson Barry, "Ko-Come-Ne Pe-Ka, the Letter Carrier," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 20, no. 3 (1929): 201–3; see also Evelyn Blackwood, "Sexuality and Gender in Certain Native American Tribes: The Case of Cross-Gender Females," *Signs* 10 (Autumn 1984), 27–42.

> pleased, and thanked me for the good words I had told them; but I saw plainly that if the man woman had not been sitting behind us they would have plunged a dagger in her.[55]

Thompson added, "had not the Kootanaes [Kaúxumanúpika] been under our immediate care she would have been killed for the lies she told on her way to the Sea."[56]

The other example of an Indigenous person claiming to have the power to unleash smallpox also comes from near the famous Dalles fishery on the lower Columbia River in 1853. The Indian Agent reported:

> In a recent case, a doctor of the Wishrans [Wishram—central Columbia River], when the smallpox was raging, was foolish: enough to threaten, openly, what havoc he would spread among them, making use of the pestilence to magnify his office; and, to surround his person with greater elements of power, boasting that he held the fearful quiver in his own hands, ready to hurl the arrows of death in any direction.[57]

As in the case of Kaúxumanúpika's threat, the Wishram's doctor's also backfired. Shortly after making his threat "The people rose in a body and hung him in the most barbarous mode."[58]

The lessons from the two Indigenous examples and from the Chilcotin War demonstrate that in the face of bioterror threats Indigenous people were not always cowed and sometimes saw an opportunity for action. Killing those who threatened to spread the disease before they could do the dirty work was a logical response.

These ten documented cases over six decades in different parts of the Pacific Northwest must be only a fraction of the number of times this strategy was used.[59] Given that there were many reasons for the perpetrators of biological terrorism not to record their actions, the existence of these documented cases is not only highly illustrative of the techniques of terror employed against Indigenous people, it also means there are likely more instances that remain undocumented.[60] Most such threats would have escaped the memorialization so the fact that a record survives of these attempts is what is rare, and what makes them so valuable. Moreover, we know news travelled effectively through Indigenous networks; stories of smallpox threats were undoubtedly transmitted over space and time and would have had influenced their dealings not only with contemporary fur traders but subsequent generations of settler arrivants.[61]

American sea captains, American fur traders, British fur traders, a British Columbian road crew, and Indigenous doctors all used the strategy of bluff threats to spread a deadly disease in order to exercise power over more than a dozen Indigenous groups within a span of sixty years. The individual motivations varied depending on the situation, but the technique was the same. Each claimed to have the power to release disease into Indigenous communities, and each used

[55] Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative*, 512–3.

[56] David Thompson, *Columbia Journals*, ed. Barbara Belyea, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1993), 160.

[57] Winfield Scott, Steilacoom Barracks, Washington Territory, 1 September 1853. 4th Congress, 3rd Session, House of Representatives, Ex. Doc. No. 76, Indian Affairs on the Pacific. Message From the President of the United States, Transmitting Report in Regard to Indian Affairs on the Pacific, 16.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Assuming that the Hills and Tolmie accounts about the coercive threats at Cape Flattery refer to a single event, but they may in fact describe different instances.

[60] At least four officers of HMS *Virago* were in Victoria in 1853 keeping diaries of the significant events and stories they learned about. Only one recorded the threat to use smallpox suggesting that either it was not a common thing to talk about or to record.

[61] News travelled in ways that now seem surprisingly fast in an era when canoe was the swiftest form of transport. Within 4–6 weeks stories of the destruction of the Tonquin 300 km (190 miles) north were brought to the Columbia River. Irving reports that six months later the Indigenous people at the Dalles, 320 km (200 miles) inland had the news. He says, "It is surprising to notice how well this remote tribe…had learnt through intermediate gossips, the private feelings of the colonists at Astoria." Washington Irving, *Astoria: Anecdotes of an Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains* (New York, Putnam, Hurd & Houghton, 1867), 117–8; Gabriel Franchere, *Journal of a Voyage on The North West Coast of North America During The Years 1811, 1812, 1813, and 1814*, ed and trans. J.V. Huntington (1820; repr. New York: Redfield, 1854), 89, 129.

the fear the threat engendered to attempt to gain power. Whether or not the person making the threat had the capacity to follow through did not matter. The same features of Pacific Northwest Indigenous cosmology that regarded illness as something that people with malicious intent could supernaturally inflict upon an enemy may have also led Kaúxumanúpika and the Wishram doctor to have genuinely believed themselves to possess the power to disseminate smallpox.

While not as egregious as deliberately spreading smallpox, the bluff threat was nonetheless powerful as a weapon of manipulation. One need only reflect upon how the periodic burning of a cross in a Black neighbourhood by the Ku Klux Klan during the Jim Crow era was sufficiently terrorizing to shape African American behavior and help sustain the asymmetrical power relations upon which southern Whites depended. And ironically, the bioterrorist tactic of threatening smallpox likely resulted in Indigenous communities blaming fur traders and early settlers for subsequent smallpox outbreaks which inevitably arrived, whether or not they were intentionally introduced and spread—tainting Indigenous and settler relations to this day.

Each of the bluff threats discussed had a specific situational and tactical aim, whether extorting furs or salmon, or deterring potential attacks, or punishing certain behavior. But, despite being employed by at least two Indigenous people, they also need to be understood as part of a larger strategic goal of controlling the people and resources of territories that nascent settler colonists ultimately alienated from Indigenous governance and control. Except in the case of the Wishram doctor who was killed to prevent him following through with his threat, the case of Kaúxumanúpika who was discredited by their White comrades as not having the power they claimed, and the White road builder on the Homalthko river whose threat motivated Klatsassin to launch a war against Whites, these threats worked to soften Indigenous resolve and caused some people to question their own power and future in a rapidly changing world. The bluff threat, both in its immediate use and in the lingering fear it instilled that Whites might at any time in the future release "a sickness that no medicine could cure, and no one escape," inevitably helped to pave the way for settler American and British/Canadian settler colonialism.[62] For, if Indigenous people had been reluctant to press any issue because they believed that the small numbers of White traders on their ships down the river, or across the bay, or over at the fort, had the power to unleash a devastating disease, they were all the more threatened when these small number of traders were replaced by floods of settlers throughout the 1840s through 1860s. The increasingly frequent unintentional outbreaks of smallpox associated with the growing trade and communication between emerging settler urban centers only served to reinforce the notion that settlers who wanted Indigenous lands had tools beyond raw military physical power to enforce their will. Under such conditions, it is not surprising to find that Indigenous people in the Pacific Northwest, despite long delayed or broken treaty promises, were often reluctant to take up arms to defend their land, and typically hesitant to launch reprisals for offenses. Many lived in fear that either out of revenge or mere capriciousness, the strangers arriving in their territory might at any moment release smallpox.

Bioterrorist bluffs were easy to do and cost nothing. And because Indigenous people had no comparable weapon of their own that they could credibly threaten to unleash upon the newcomers, the power imbalance increasingly favored the traders and newly arriving settlers. Indigenous people might on occasion murder individual newcomers, and they might even on occasion launch successful military actions. But in the larger scheme of things, and within the context of asymmetrical power, these held little potential to halt the juggernaut of imperial dispossession and colonial control.

[62] Old Pierre, quoted in Diamond Jenness, *Faith of a Coast Salish Indian (Anthropology in British Columbia* (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum), 34.

Despite our earlier success in working with Indigenous partners to identify oral histories describing the effects and consequences of particular smallpox outbreaks on certain Indigenous communities, we lack recordings of Indigenous voices that give us direct evidence of how the bluff threat of the intentional spread of disease affected Indigenous people.[63] Yet, even from these examples we are offered glimpses into a variety of responses. Clearly, such threats did not mark an end to Indigenous resistance or a collapse of Indigenous belief systems. In fact, as in the case of Klatsassin, they sometimes provoked a violent response suggesting that historians need finer-grained studies of particular communities at specific times.

Ultimately, among the most lasting consequence of the bluff threat was that it formed a credible basis for the stories that emerged when smallpox did arrive, i.e. that it must have been deliberately spread. Originating more than two centuries ago, the bluff threats to spread smallpox facilitated the dispossession of Indigenous people from their lands and, to this day, the smallpox blanket stories continue to color Indigenous-settler relations. Recognizing that bioterrorism was a common strategy of early traders which laid the foundation for future settler strategies of dispossession and oppression, offers an opportunity to begin the process of making amends.

[63] For example, Keith Thor Carlson, *Power of Place, The Problem of Time: Aboriginal Collective Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 79–112; Keith Thor Carlson, "We Could Not Help Noticing the Fact that Many of them Were Cross-eyed: Historical Evidence and Coast Salish Leadership," in *Roots of Entanglement: Essays in the History of Native-Newcomer Relations,* eds. Myra Rutherdale, Kerry Abel, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 359–62; Keith Thor Carlson, "Towards an Indigenous Historiography: Events, Migrations, and the Formation of 'Post-Contact' Coast Salish Collective Identity," in *"Be of Good Mind": Essays on the Coast Salish*, ed. Bruce G. Miller ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), 138–81.