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DECOLONIZING "PREHISTORY"

Deep Time and Indigenous Knowledges in North America

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To the memory of
Annette Kolodny (1941–2019)

Und meine Seele spannte
Weit ihre Flügel aus,
Flog durch die stillen Lande,
Als flöge sie nach Haus.

(And my soul extended
far its wings
and flew across the silent land
as if returning home.)

—JOSEPH FREIHERR VON EICHENDORFF,
"MONDNACHT" (*Moonlit night*)

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Myth Making and Unmaking

INDIGENOUS SACRED SITES, SETTLER COLONIAL MOBILITY, AND ONTOLOGICAL OPPRESSION

Keith Thor Carlson with Naxaxalhts'i (Sonny McHalsie)

Setting the Scene

IN 1858 FRENCH SOCIETY BECAME transfixed with a small natural cave in the Pyrenees, not because it contained valuable minerals or because humans had earlier invested their labor in the site to somehow render it special. Rather, it was valued because people believed the accounts of a young Occitan girl who claimed to have been visited there by an apparition of the Virgin Mary. Over the following decades, millions of the faithful made pilgrimages to Lourdes in the belief that they could receive from the site miraculous healing and insights. Lourdes, few would have felt the need to argue, was, and is, deeply deserving of preservation (Evans; Jansen and Notermans). At the same time, across the English Channel, Sir John Lubbock was working through academic and parliamentary circles arguing that the British government had an obligation to preserve for posterity what today would be called cultural heritage resources. In Lubbock's opinion, this obligation transcended the rights of the private and corporate property owners who controlled the land where such sites existed, regardless of the owner's own economic vision or aspirations (Sax).[1] In Canada, meanwhile, Governor General Lord Dufferin was the most high-profile public figure calling for historical sites such as the original fortifications of Quebec City to be preserved from urban development (Todhunter).

Whereas nineteenth-century British, European, and Canadian societies were awakening to the merits of preserving both tangible and intangible heritage sites that were linked to their own histories and spiritualities, they

were unconcerned over settler actions destroying Indigenous tangible and intangible heritage sites throughout their global empires. In the wake of the 1858 Fraser River gold rush in Britain's newly proclaimed colony of British Columbia, for example, Royal Engineers were using explosives to build road, steamboat, and railway transportation routes along the Fraser River, blasting away many of the sacred transformer sites that the Stó:lõ Coast Salish understood to have been created by Xe:Xá:ls (the myth-age transformer siblings).

Xe:Xá:ls were understood by the Stó:lõ as having changed the previously chaotic world into its current permanent and predictable form. Certain large stones, from the Stó:lõ perspective, were ancestors who had been transformed by Xe:Xá:ls and whose spirits remained sentient. Moreover, these boulders and rock formations were mnemonic features that properly trained Indigenous people could read like words in a book in order to recall ancient stories explaining the origins of tribal leaders and providing moral and philosophical lessons to the living (Carlson, "Orality About Literacy"). These sites were central not only to Stó:lõ heritage but to Stó:lõ community health, for in the right circumstances, the sentient spirits in the landscape could share memories with people and in so doing invest new historical understandings and knowledge into human society. Such knowledge helped people chart courses into the future.

For the purpose of this chapter, the important fact is not that the settler colonists who arrived in Stó:lõ territory were incapable of coming to know and value Indigenous lands in terms beyond those that could either be aesthetically appreciated or commercially quantified. Rather, settler colonialism required its practitioners to be ontologically blind to values that would have disrupted or challenged the colonial incumbency to displace Indigenous people from their lands and resources (Spivak 90–91). And indeed, while the miners and then farmers who arrived in Stó:lõ territory in the wake of the gold rush were driven by capitalist economic aspirations, they were also motivated and animated by a series of their own mythical and philosophical narratives and understandings—key among them the American concept of Manifest Destiny and its Canadian counterpart, Dominion. Thus, whereas British/European and settler heritage sites that reflected deep history and mysterious intangible meaning were being recognized in Europe and North America as worthy of societal protection in the face of rapid private and corporate developments, no such considerations were extended to Indigenous sacred spaces and historical places. Under settler logic, such consideration could not exist lest settler colonialism itself be compromised.

Settler Colonial Myths, Sacredness, and Movement over the Land

Scholarship led by Patrick Wolfe and more recently given theoretical sophistication by Lorenzo Veracini has established North American settler colonialism as a structure of ongoing domination that operates in a host of complicated ways to separate Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands (see also Barker and Battell). But to an extent that has not yet been fully explored, settler colonialism has been built upon an intellectual foundation that defined Britain, Europe, and North American settler spaces not merely as sites of economic and political power and modernity but as geographies that were made knowable through history and religion—that is, in ways that went beyond Western aesthetics and that were other than purely mercantile and economic.

In the mid-nineteenth century, settler society had conveniently determined that North American Indigenous people resembled what they believed their own European ancestors had been like at some point in the distant past. But, from the westward-looking perspective of colonists and settlers, unlike their own ancestors, the continent's Indigenous people had become trapped in a state where the passage of history was not marked by pivotal moments of documented (let alone documentable) temporal change, and where superstition and spirituality had failed to be challenged by the light of rational science and/or legitimated and given shape by organized religion.[2] During the era when concepts such as "extinction" and "evolution" had not yet been fully defined but were nonetheless shaping and giving form to settler colonial public discourse and government policy, colonists' understandings of Indigenous people as *ni foi, ni roi, ni loi* and as being mere *occupants* of a *terra nullius* rather than *citizens* of a *homeland* had profound implications (A. Pratt; Richardson).

It is no coincidence that by the mid-nineteenth century, Indigenous people had become a minority in settler colonial states. North American Indigenous peoples' susceptibility to infectious Eurasian crowd diseases such as smallpox, measles, and influenza meant that not only did Indigenous people quickly find themselves in a militarily compromised position vis-à-vis early colonists and settlers but that colonists could come to increasingly rationalize their policies aimed at dispossessing Indigenous people of their lands through the myth that Indigenous people were a dying or vanishing race. The Stó:lõ had been hit by a devastating smallpox epidemic in 1782 that killed between 60 percent and 90 percent of their population (Carlson, "Numbers Game"). A series of subsequent outbreaks of diseases previously unknown to the Stó:lõ such as tuberculosis and venereal diseases, coupled with alcoholism and the

periodic return of smallpox, mumps, and measles over the coming generations, had left the Stó:lō, like other Indigenous communities, a demographic shadow of their former self (Boyd, chapter 2; Carlson, *Power of Place* 91–111; C. Harris, "Voices of Disaster" 591). If Indigenous people were dying out, settler colonial rhetoric ran, there would soon come a time when they would no longer require land. As historian Brian D. Dippie has demonstrated, Indian policy in North America emerged accordingly.

Thus, a key differentiation between classic extraction colonialism (as occurred under the British and French in India and Indochina and under the Japanese in Korea) and settler colonialism in North America is that over time, settler colonial societies develop a habitus that multigenerational residence bestows territorial and democratic rights of self-determination. In their view, the settlers' territorial and political dissociation from the former mother country endows them with allodial rights to the land they now inhabit.

Rhetorically, the principles of Western democracy hold that citizens within a defined political region have a right to self-determination. A closely related Western principle was, and remains, that citizens have a right to mobility. Indeed, settler colonial nations in particular sustain themselves through the coupling of the logic of democracy and the pragmatics of mobility. To create North American settler colonial states, early immigrants from Britain and Europe (and then later Asia and elsewhere) necessarily secured for themselves the right to relocate. In Canada, mobility rights are constitutionally protected in Section 6 of the Canadian Charter of Rights. In the United States, similar mobility rights derive from the Constitution's Privileges and Immunities clause. Thus, while the colonial process is rhetorically about settlement, in practice it is about mobility.

Once established, settler colonies embraced a philosophy that regarded ongoing and sustained immigration as not only positive but necessary. Along the lower reaches of the Fraser River in 1857, there were fewer than one hundred non-Indigenous residents, most of whom worked for the Hudson's Bay Company. But over the course of four short months in the spring of 1858, more than thirty thousand mostly American miners flooded into the region searching for gold—a population influx that to this day remains the largest in British Columbia's history. While racism curbed certain historical expressions of immigration (e.g., settlers of British descent in British Columbia sought at various times to restrict Chinese, Eastern European, South Asian, and African immigration), it also worked to accelerate immigration from racially and culturally "desirable" countries. Following the 1858 gold rush, the British government pursued an aggressive policy aimed at attracting loyal British farmers to British Columbia to displace the American miners, whom they hoped would be transient (C. Harris, *Resettlement*).

Over time, settler colonialism worked to promote a culture bent on assimilating less racially valued immigrants into the dominant settler body politic. Immigration increased demand for Indigenous territory, causing both land and commodity prices to rise, which further entrenched settlers' ideas of Indigenous peoples' lifeways as a barrier to settler progress and modernity. In Stó:lō territory, Britain created the crown colony of British Columbia in 1858 as a direct response to the arrival of the American gold miners. British Columbia merged with the adjacent colony of Vancouver Island in 1867 and was integrated into the Canadian Dominion in 1871. At each stage, Indigenous people were disenfranchised and uninformed about, let alone involved with, the negotiations. Throughout, settler society consolidated its identity as a permanent community of citizens.

Settler colonies, therefore, are ideologically disposed to facilitate the displacement of Indigenous people from their ancestral lands by declaring, somewhat paradoxically, that mobility is essential to progress and economic growth. Corporations and laborers relocate to be near the resources they commodify and extract, and then relocate again when the resources (such as minerals and trees) have been depleted. Along the Fraser River, the thirty thousand miners who had arrived in the spring of 1858 had by 1862 largely moved on to other gold fields farther into British Columbia's interior. Stó:lō resources and transformer sites were impacted by the initial influx of miners and then even more significantly by the creation of transportation infrastructure designed to facilitate the movement of people not only *into* their territory (as in the case of loyal British farmers) but *through* it (in the case of miners).

As a consequence, while relocative mobility has been prized by settler colonists, it has necessarily been viewed with ambivalence and apprehension by Indigenous people such as the Stó:lō who are "Indigenous" precisely because of the historically deep and intimate relationship they have with the lands of their ancestors. Whereas the term *Aboriginal* simply means the original or first people, the word *Indigenous* refers to people who originated in a particular place. The difference is subtle but important. To be the "Aboriginal first people" in a place does not necessarily equate with having originated there, and indeed some settler nationalists have consistently argued that Aboriginal people in North America are simply the descendants of an earlier wave of pre-Columbian immigrants, and as such their rights are not fundamentally different from subsequent settler colonial immigrants who came later. Assimilation policies, in this light, have been regarded by successive generations

of settlers as justifiable because they equate Native populations with other ethnic minorities who arrived as part of subsequent migrations. Regarded from this perspective, the assimilation of Indigenous people is, and was, just as justifiable and desirable to the dominant British Canadian settlers as the assimilation of early Irish and Ukrainian immigrants in Montreal and in the Canadian prairies.

"Indigenous," by way of contrast, explicitly defines people as having emerged from, within, and upon a particular land and waterscape. It positions them as autochthonous. This definition sits more comfortably with Stó:lō and other Indigenous people's own historical understandings of themselves as revealed through their epic oral narratives explaining the creation of the world and the establishment of their communities. In Canada, this distinction has been powerfully illustrated by Indigenous knowledge keepers who, confronted by settler government spokespersons asserting the right to regulate and control Indigenous lands by virtue of legislation, have posed the simple and powerful question, "If this is your land, where are your stories?" (Chamberlin). As Stó:lō historian and contributor to this chapter Naxaxalhts'i (aka Sonny McHalsie) regularly explains to settler colonists who participate in the culture tours he offers, "archaeologists have found evidence that we've been here for 9,000 years; our Elders share stories that show that we have always been here."

What this means, in one sense, is that Indigenous people struggle within settler colonial societies in large part because they cannot fully engage mobility the way settler Canadians do. Consider, for example, how the *potential* of relocating that every Canadian has enjoyed (and has seen as an opportunity) has meant that, as individuals, settler Canadians have been absolved from having to concern themselves with the long-term vitality and viability of their local environments. Indigenous people, by way of contrast, can never afford such an itinerant attitude. Settler colonists tend to move into a location, deplete its resources, and even destroy its local economy and ecosystems (as first the gold miners, then the builders of the roads and railroads, then the forestry loggers, and more recently farmers did in Stó:lō territory), secure in the knowledge that they can relocate without compromising either their Canadian citizenship or their Canadian identity.

This is not to imply that settlers do not, and have not, grown attached to and fond of local environs, or that environmental sustainability is not a growing and important concern for many Canadians. Rather, it is to insist that such attachments are by definition profoundly different than those carried by Indigenous people such as the Stó:lō who are guided by the concept of *tómiyeqw*. Tómiyeqw translates as both great-great-great-great-grandparent and great-great-great-great-grandchild. Tómiyeqw culturally obliges Stó:lō people to consider the health of a region seven generations into the future, and to do so in a manner that would be intelligible and acceptable to people who had lived seven generations earlier. Thus to Indigenous people, "*where* they are is *who* they are" (Wolfe 388). To settlers, by way of contrast, *who* Indigenous people are is too often *what* they are—and, in settler eyes, what they have most often been is an obstacle to accessing land as well as reminders of their own transient settler identity.

Mobility and migration are, therefore, at the heart of the perpetual process of colonial resettlement, or rather colonial *re*settlement practice. Every domestic shift in settler populations from one region of a settler colonial state to another signals for Indigenous people either increased competition for resources within a populating area or a struggle to deal with the lands transformed by the depletion of resources in a depopulating area. The impact of the historical efforts to disconnect Indigenous people from their ancestral territory is inherently more than the sum of economic losses associated with exploitable land and resources.

In the United States, the centrality of settler mobility can be traced back to the still potent myth of "Manifest Destiny" and its tarnished scholarly counterpart, the "Frontier Thesis." Manifest Destiny is the belief that God intended for Anglo-Protestant Americans to dominate the entire continent (O'Sullivan 430; J. Pratt 795–98). The Frontier Thesis was expounded by historian Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893. Turner posited that American history is best understood as a series of waves of westward settler expansion. On each successive frontier, Americans encountered and conquered a wilderness that included Indigenous people. It was this process of conquest and domestication that created the quintessential American character—muscular, manly, and democratic. The domestication of the wilderness and the relocation of its "wild" inhabitants to reservations and the subsequent reaping of their lands was, to Turner, also the result of divine providence.

Certain academics and public intellectuals have at various times argued that the Frontier Thesis also explains Canadian history (the most prominent of these being University of British Columbia historian Walter Sage in the 1930s). Indeed, the biblically inspired name chosen by Canada's founders, "Dominion of Canada," literally embodies the idea that the Canadian settler state assumed God's "dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth" (*King James Bible*, Psalm 72:8). To this were added the Roman understanding of sovereignty and absolute ownership of a territory.

Thus, while the United States and Canada asserted sovereignty over vast territories, they reduced the Indigenous people to the role of mere occupants and wards of the colonial governments. Sustained through the hegemony of

translatio imperii (the medieval concept that defined history as a geographical east-west movement of empire and knowledge), Manifest Destiny and Dominion were, and remain, political myths that are impossible to measure, prove, or disprove; they rest on acceptance through belief. In North America, these mythical constructs of settler colonialism routinely serve to dismiss Indigenous mythical ways of knowing about the land and the deep past.

Settler Colonialism's Ontological Challenge to Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Central to the Stó:lō Coast Salish Indigenous community's efforts to self-identify are the ancient stories that explain the origins and transformation of an earlier chaotic myth-age world into the largely stable and predictable one Stó:lō people recognize today. In the Stó:lō language, these narratives are called sxwoxwiyá:m and they principally describe the actions of the transformer siblings, Xe:Xá:ls. Sometimes the transformations discussed in sxwoxwiyá:m were consensual; sometimes not. Sometimes the transformations were morally guided by a desire to reward or punish; sometimes not.

Sxwoxwiyá:m provide the Coast Salish peoples with a raison d'être. One especially detailed early recording of a sxwoxwiyá:m was shared by Chief George Chehalis (from the Sts'ailes First Nation) with anthropologist Franz Boas in 1884 (92–101). Chief Chehalis's sxwoxwiyá:m articulated an ontology that was incompatible with the early miners' and settlers' understanding of Indigenous spaces as a *terra nullius* as well as with the stark contrast the newcomers drew between an earthy physical realm and an heavenly spiritual one. Though the European immigrants were familiar with the notion of specific sites that had spiritual value, from their perspective, they had left these sites behind in Europe.

Over the past three decades, both authors of this chapter have had the privilege of working closely with Coast Salish knowledge keepers who have shared accounts of ancient transformations. They have explained that Xe:Xá:ls transformed a variety of people into plants, animals, and stones that continue to exist today. They have further elucidated the ways in which these original people's sentient life force (shxweli) continues to exist within transformer stones, plants, and animals. As such, the Stó:lō recognize ongoing kin ties between themselves and the environment (Carlson, "Orality About Literacy;" Carlson, *Power of Place*, chapter 3; McHalsie). Tribal founders were among the most prominent characters in the sxwoxwiyá:m of Xe:Xá:ls. For example, Xe:Xá:ls transformed the ancestor of the Lėq'á:mel tribe into a sturgeon, and as a result, to this day members of the Leq'á:mel First Nations regard sturgeons to be their relatives (their ancestor's spirit still resides in all sturgeon). Likewise, Xe:Xá:ls transformed the ancestor of the Matsqui tribe into a beaver, the ancestor of the Yale tribe into a mountain goat, and the ancestor of the Chehalis tribe into an otter, and so on all along the lower Fraser River.

Not everyone whom the Xe:Xá:ls siblings transformed was the founder of a tribal community, however. A great elk hunter was transformed into a stone that can be seen in the Fraser River near the town of Yale to this day, as was a great seal hunter who was turned into a rock located on a lower stretch of the Harrison River. A dangerous hag with a toothed vagina was likewise transformed into stone at another site along the edge of the Harrison River.

Through transformations, Xe:Xá:ls created a distinctly local Indigenous landscape that remains today populated with attentive and potentially responsive rocks, creatures, plants, and animals. Associated with each transformer figure is a narrative and spiritual energy that intersects, cuts across, and informs other transformer stories in complicated ways. Geographically fixed transformer stones, for example, are associated with particular places and likewise associate certain people with those particular places. Both the Elk and the Seal Hunter stones, Elder Matilda Gutierrez has explained, need to be visited in situ for their anchored stories to be properly and fully appreciated. Elder Rosaleen George, meanwhile, has explicated the ways in which the tribal origin transformer stories associated with various animals and plants that are found throughout the broader region serve to remind people from all Stó:lō tribes that seasonal visits and familial interconnections are fundamental to the health of Stó:lō interpersonal relations as well as the ways Stó:lō people relate to space. A living beaver, regardless of where it is located throughout the broader Stó:lō territory, can serve as a mnemonic to people of all Stó:lō tribes of the origin story of the Matsqui tribe and how that animal once embarked on an epic journey to bring back fire to the Stó:lō people so they would have light to see by and heat to cook with. Such tribal origin stories simultaneously tie one group of Stó:lō people to a particular subregion of the broader Stó:lō landscape (e.g., the Matsqui to their core territory in the central Fraser Valley) while emphasizing ancient tribal cooperation, interconnectedness, and shared authority. Many of the transformer stories, therefore, serve to reinforce the economic and ceremonial interconnectivity that inspired anthropologist Wayne Suttles to describe "the whole Coast Salish region as a kind of social continuum" (15). The story of the mother mountain, Lhílheqey, is an especially well-known such narrative that fosters a sense of unity among members of all Stó:lō tribes, if for no other reason than that on clear days, Lhílheqey can be seen from almost anywhere in Stó:lō territory. But beyond this, elders from

different generations, such as Dan Milo and Andy Commodore, have each independently situated Lhílheqey within a transformer narrative that depicts her as having been placed in that prominent position by Xe:Xá:ls for the explicit purpose of watching over the Stó:lō people and the annually returning salmon of the Fraser River. Lhílheqey the mother mountain therefore serves as an attentive caring mother of all Stó:lō people and their salmon relatives. Her presence and her visibility remain constant sources of comfort.

The systematic and nonconsultative destruction and/or structural compromising of specific transformer stones by settler colonists thus has had profound impacts on Coast Salish people's sense of self and of place. Damaging and destroying transformer sites is not only seen by Stó:lō people as harming the ancestors (something they regard as inherently dangerous to all the living) but is also interpreted as compromising the delicate balance between the forces contributing to social and economic cohesion among and between Stó:lō tribal communities (Carlson, *Power of Place* 37–78).

In the wake of the 1858 Fraser River gold rush, a host of transformer sites were demolished to facilitate the extraction of precious metal or to make way for industrial transportation corridors. In the sxwoxwiyá:m of the Elk Hunter (Tewit), we learn that he was accompanied by his hunting dog (Sqwemay) when they were both transformed by Xe:Xá:ls into large stones located in, and protruding from, the waters of the Fraser River. The hunter and the elk stones are still there today. Before her death a decade ago, Elder Matilda Gutierrez explained that this cluster of large rocks constituted a special place that knowledge keepers of the past referred to when they taught children that Xe:Xá:ls was real, and that belief in the legitimacy of the stories was an important way of honoring their ancestors. The Hunting Dog stone, however, was blasted by engineers in 1860 to make steamboat navigation safer. As such, the overall integrity of the story is now compromised by Sqwemay's absence.

A separate transformer stone with its own story was also blasted a few years later near the junction of the Harrison and Fraser Rivers to make way for steamboats. So too was the "chamber pot" that Xe:Xá:ls had made blown to pieces by an early British farmer to turn meadows and scrublands into agricultural fields. Railway expansion in the mid-twentieth century similarly caused the Skwōwech (sturgeon) stone to be buried in riprap, rendering it no longer visible or visitable. Axétel (Canada Goose) was another transformer stone that early settlers obliterated with dynamite more than a century ago to make room for fields of hops to supply Canada's beer industry. Kwiyaxtel, a man whom Xe:Xá:ls changed into stone after he challenged their authority, was blasted with dynamite during railroad construction in 1913. Sqayexi ya (the Mink) and his Sx'eles (penis) likewise were stones formerly located

near the settler town of Chilliwack until they too were demolished to make way for the railroad. Stó:lō people were never consulted prior to any of these destructive acts, nor were they ever compensated (if compensation for such action is indeed even possible).

The large smooth transformer stone located near where Harrison Lake flows into the Harrison River is described in a sxwoxwiyá:m as having formerly been a whale that followed the salmon and seals up the Fraser River system more than eighty kilometers from the ocean and into fresh water. Knowledge keepers emphasize that the whale spirit in this stone, and its story, were used by elders of an earlier generation to emphasize to youth the importance of being brave and sufficiently bold to venture beyond the places that one knows to be safe and familiar in order to try new things, to be tenacious in the pursuit of one's goal, to be innovative in the face of tradition, and to recognize the importance of ecological diversity in a Coast Salish world where certain food resources are only available at certain times within any particular tribal homeland, etcetera. Today the whale stone is inaccessible to Stó:lō people due to a settler having built his house on top of it. Elders carry stories of many more sites that have been destroyed or alienated throughout the region.

Finding, documenting, and preserving the memory of these and other sites has become the passion and life mission of Naxaxalhts'i (Sonny McHalsie). In 1983, when first working for his community as an archaeology assistant, he helped document fourteen separate destroyed transformer sites (Mohs). Since then, he has worked with additional elders and knowledge keepers to identify nearly double that many. As an employee of the Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre, part of Naxaxalhts'i's job involves communicating information with settler Canadians about Stó:lō culture. During guided tours of his ancestral homeland, Naxaxalhts'i shares accounts of the importance of the remaining transformer sites and the depth of the cultural and spiritual loss associated with those that have been alienated. He explains, for example, how in the year 2000, officials for the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) determined that a rock outcropping on a mountain high above the railway posed a hazard, and so without consulting Stó:lō officials, they destroyed it. The sxwoxwiyá:m about the once massive mountain-top rock explained that it was a pointing index finger known as Mometes that had been put there by Xe:Xá:ls to remind Stó:lō people to "be good" and to heed the teachings of their elders. Its destruction erased a chapter from the Stó:lō people's epic account of how the world came to be and how people are to behave. In sharing stories of ancient creation and transformation alongside descriptions of the past and present threats posed to transformer sites, Naxaxalhts'i is making clear that settler

colonialism needs to be understood as a structure of ongoing oppression and not merely as past historical events and occurrences.

Science, Courts, and Sacredness

While the destruction of these transformer stones was and remains profoundly distressing to Stó:lō people, it is important to bear in mind that the early colonists responsible for initiating their physical destruction were largely ignorant of the cultural harm and spiritual violence that their actions were causing to Indigenous peoples and ontologies. To my knowledge, none of these early settlers purposefully and maliciously set out to destroy a Stó:lō transformer site simply because it was a transformer site. But of course neither did the settlers make any efforts to learn how and why these sites were important to the Stó:lō people in order to facilitate their preservation. The appropriation, exploitation, and ultimate obliteration of these sacred landscape features was, in other words, functional to the settler colonial strategy of displacement and not necessarily intentional.

In these early years, when settler colonialism was finding its footing and entrenching itself, the alienation of transformer sites was a by-product of a pervasive, and convenient, ignorance of Indigenous ways of valuing land and its features. By the twentieth century, however, voices of Indigenous protest, coupled with published anthropological scholarship, made it increasingly difficult for settler society to sustain any claim to being unaware of the ontological implications of their actions. Any continuing dismissal of Indigenous ways of knowing as irrelevant vis-à-vis settler land rights points toward a recognition that to respect officially Indigenous ways of being and ways of knowing would fundamentally threaten the logic of the settler colonial episteme. In this way, the critique of Indigenous mythology and spirituality implicit in the alleged objective and unprejudiced scientific discourse of settler ideology indicates the untrammeled hegemony of that ideology.

Just over thirty years ago, when expanding global trade motivated the Canadian National Railroad (CNR) to try to "twin-track" its railway through the delicate Fraser canyon ecosystem and spiritual landscape, the Stó:lō and other Indigenous communities had the capacity to mobilize themselves in ways that had simply not been possible when the original road and rail corridors were pushed through in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing on archaeological and environmental evidence, they made abundantly clear to the railroad corporation and to the federal and provincial governments that they opposed the expansion due to the way it would impact and

destroy fishing habitat, ancient settlement sites, *and* their sacred transformer sites. Through video documentaries and widespread media campaigns, Indigenous people along the Fraser River corridor tried to educate settlers about their lands and their worldviews (Coqualeetza). These efforts, however, failed to resonate with either the corporation or the federal and provincial governments. It was only after Indigenous people filed a court injunction that a halt was brought to the railway expansion project. Significantly, the part of the plea that the courts found compelling was not that relating to Indigenous sacred sites but rather that pertaining to environmental impacts. To this day, the Stó:lō and their Indigenous neighbors rest uneasy, worrying that at some point, with ever-increasing demands for rail cargo in and out of Canada's port of Vancouver, the proposed expansion project may proceed again. Indeed, Indigenous interests in protecting specific lands have only secured traction in settler colonial legal and political institutions when they could be linked to ecological or environmental issues that find support within ecologically minded groups of settler Canadian society.[3]

Such battles are ongoing. At the time of the writing of this text, the Stó:lō and other Indigenous people are clashing with settler society over the proposed creation of a $7.6 billion pipeline through their territory to carry bitumen oil more than 1,500 kilometers from the province of Alberta to the port of Vancouver. It is important to note that not all Stó:lō people and communities are necessarily opposed to the creation of a pipeline, though most certainly are (Rabson); and of course, not all of Canadian settler society necessarily supports the pipeline development, though many who are employed in the oil industry and in construction certainly do.

During the federal government's National Energy Board (NEB) hearings, Stó:lō and other Indigenous communities raised a host of concerns over the threat the pipeline posed to the local ecology (should there be a spill) as well as to sacred and heritage sites due to its construction.[4] The Stó:lō made eighty-nine recommendations outlining how their concerns could be mitigated. These included a guarantee that they would have input on future fishing management plans, an assurance that they would be involved in determining the location of water-testing facilities, and a commitment that there would be river-bank restoration wherever negative impacts were anticipated. Condition 77 required a detailed archaeological and cultural heritage study to guide the creation of a mitigation plan to protect intangible heritage transformer sites along with tangible archaeological and physical heritage sites. When neither the NEB nor the federal cabinet adopted a single one of the conditions, the Indigenous leaders and their allies chose to go to court to try to block the development.

The federal court proved sympathetic to the Stó:lō concerns. In her 2018 ruling, Justice Eleanor Dawson stated, "For the most part, Canada's representatives limited their mandate to listening to and recording the concerns of the Indigenous applicants and then transmitting those concerns to the [corporate] decision-makers. . . . The law requires Canada to do more than receive and record concerns and complaints." The judge was particularly disappointed by the federal government's disregard for the Stó:lō's recommendations. "These measures," Dawson wrote, "are specific, brief and generally measured and reasonable." In failing to acknowledge them, let alone meet them, the Canadian government "fell well short of the minimum requirements imposed by the case law of the Supreme Court of Canada" in its efforts to consult. As a result, pipeline construction was put on hold pending the government's revision of its consultation process and a commitment to consider Indigenous concerns (Dawson). Additionally, in 2018, in an attempt to soften international corporate power and to reassure Canadians that the government's principal objective was to ensure that any pipeline development was in the public interest, the federal government purchased the pipeline project from the Texas-based Kinder Morgan Corporation and created the TransMountain Corporation. TransMountain is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Canadian Development Investment Corporation, which in turn is directly accountable to the Canadian Parliament.

But these changes have not allayed the Stó:lō people's worries nor addressed their concerns. As of October 2020, pipeline construction is underway despite the fact that the eighty-nine recommendations the Stó:lō made have not been met to the Stó:lō leaders' satisfaction. Chief Dalton Silver of the Sumas First Nation is especially exasperated that the TransMountain Corporation is proceeding with plans to build the pipeline adjacent to a transformer stone known as Lightning Rock (and an associated archaeological site that elders have described as the site of a mass burial created following the smallpox epidemic of 1782) (Barrera). Silver and other Stó:lō have not ruled out direct action if the pipeline project is not either canceled or at a minimum adjusted to respect their eighty-nine conditions—including small-scale rerouting to avoid sacred sites.

Similar contemporary developments elsewhere in western Canada suggest that, as with corporations and governments, the Canadian courts are only listening selectively to those Indigenous peoples' concerns that can be "validated" or "authenticated" by Western science. A few short weeks before the federal court issued its 2019 injunction against the pipeline construction, the Supreme Court of Canada rejected an effort by the Ktunaxa people of British Columbia's interior region to block the $1 billion development of the massive "Jumbo Glacier" ski resort on a mountain they understand to be the sacred place where the Grizzly Bear Spirit resides. The Supreme Court ruled that while the community's concerns over environmental impacts were worthy of further investigation, they could not agree to support the Ktunaxa assertion that construction of the resort facilities would irreparably damage the Indigenous spiritual landscape and therefore constitute an infringement on the community's religious freedom.

Put another way, the court determined that under settler Canadian law, the right to worship was protected for Indigenous people as it was for all groups, but that did not include a fiduciary obligation on the part of the Canadian state to protect against the development of particular sites on the land that Indigenous people regarded as integral to their ancestral identity and contemporary collective spiritual health. While tangible heritage sites could be justification for such protections (i.e., sites associated with verifiable archaeological remains or those that science could validate were ecologically vulnerable), ones that could only be known and measured by means outside Western scientific epistemology could not (K. Harris; MacCharles). A journalist covering the proceedings noted, "The B.C. government, in its brief to the top court, said that giving protection to the meaning of a subjective belief could end up affecting laws on abortion and same-sex marriage," thus effectively equating an ancient collective belief system with arbitrary individual beliefs (MacKinnon). This reasoning has a tradition in the United States, too.[5]

What all this suggests is that despite the protection of preexisting Aboriginal rights in the Canadian Constitution, the various arms of the settler colonial government continue to situate collective Indigenous rights within the context of the protection of individual rights as would be applied to members of settler minority groups more generally. By extension, the perceived necessity for government and the courts is in balancing such interests against those that elected officials regard as being in the broader societal interest.

Conclusion

Settler colonialism has been facilitated by a specific way of seeing the landscape that is imperviously insensitive to Indigenous cultural and historical hermeneutics and epistemologies. Thus, in addition to what it has represented in terms of land alienation, settler colonialism in the lower Fraser River watershed includes a process of ontological oppression through both the incidental as well as the intentional destruction of Indigenous spiritual places. It is not to suggest, however, that settler colonial cultures were culturally or

historically incapable of identifying and valuing intangible spiritual sites, as their protection of such sites in their colonial homelands, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, so vividly illustrates. While Judeo-Christian (or indeed pre-Christian, "pagan") sacred places in the "Old World" were in no need of scientific confirmation to deserve protection, a similar practice of inscribing the land with spiritual meaning was ignored in Indigenous North American cultures. As Roderick Nash has pervasively argued, European settlers transported their understandings of a nature inscribed with meaning to North America; but other than that, North America was a topological tabula rasa, ready to be inscribed by Canadian and American society with political myths such as Dominion and Manifest Destiny. The British and European landscapes, in this view, metaphorically remained North American settler colonialists' natural *and* supernatural archives and museums—places where both great things and miraculously local things had happened that were worthy of preserving. To this day, the descendants of the European settlers travel to Europe to visit the great ancient sites of religion, spirituality, and history. They rest easy knowing that European governments and societies protect sites such as Lourdes, Stonehenge, the Irish fairy homes, and Fatima, regardless of whether archaeological or environmental science can prove their religious validity. Meanwhile, Indigenous people such as the Stó:lō continue to be denied even approximations of a similar security and comfort for the sites that they regard as inherently, if intangibly, valuable for their own individual and collective spiritual well-being. Ongoing efforts by the Stó:lō and other Indigenous communities to protect their lands and their rights are therefore as much about challenging settler society to open itself to alternative ontologies and belief systems (and all this implies) as they are about restoring destroyed environments, returning alienated lands, and building genuinely respectful cooperative systems of co-management and governance.

Notes

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1. Owing some debt of gratitude to Lubbock's legislation are recent efforts by both Christians and neo-pagans in the British Isles working to preserve sites they believe to be associated with the apparition of the Virgin Mary (as Walsingham) or with fairies and other ethereal beings (Cheallaigh).
2. North American salvage ethnography, led first by social Darwinists such as Lewis Henry Morgan and later by adherents of historical particularism such as Franz Boas and his students, regarded Indigenous cultures as ahistorical and frozen in time. Change, it was believed, was by definition a result of external pressures rather than internal innovations. In this view, change in Indigenous societies resulted from contact with Western European/British society and could only be reactionary and degenerative.
3. Indigenous people in Canada sometimes also find allies among the non-Indigenous population when the endangered geographical feature is regarded as geologically unique and distinctive, and therefore scientifically verifiable as deserving of natural heritage status. For a discussion of similar processes in Europe as related to Fin McCool's causeway in Ireland, see Cohen and Cohen.
4. In 2018 the Canadian government replaced the NEB with the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (IAAC) and the Canadian Energy Regulator (CER). The IAAC was described as an attempt to make the processs of assessing development impacts more responsive to Indigenous people and other noncorporate interests. The CER, meanwhile, has the mandate of "keep[ing] energy moving safely and efficiently through our country's pipelines and powerlines." CER home page, cer-rec.gc.ca/en/index.html, accessed 2 Nov. 2020.
5. See the infamous U.S. Supreme Court decision on a sacred area in northern California, *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery Protective Association* (U.S. Supreme Court 1988) (discussed in Echo-Hawk, chapter 12).

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—ALICE BECK KEHOE, author of *Traveling Prehistoric Seas: Critical Thinking on Ancient Transoceanic Voyages*

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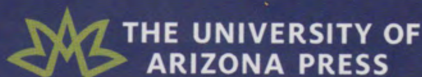

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