Capitalism and Colonialism – Settler and First Nation: An Uneasy History

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The making of Canada has been told as the history of two grand founding peoples – French and English – coming to a new world and building something of it and of themselves. While this may not be the progressive, reflexive, revisionist, intersectionalist history of the contemporary academy, it is the history that still informs many Canadian sentimentalities. It is still the Canadian history taught in grade school social studies (despite many current revisions that bring First Nations' history into view). Bryan Palmer's paper (and the book it is based upon) takes a very different view of Canada's history than does what one might call the Tory History of Canada.[1]

Palmer's intervention is about the intersections and alliances (actual and potential) between the struggle for national liberation and working-class emancipation. It forces us to consider the dynamics of class within Indigenous societies as much as we examine the dynamics of class within the capitalist social formation. Despite Palmer stepping over critical theory and saying he isn't participating in that kind of Frankfurt School Marxism, his work is "critical," but not in the campus theory seminar sense. Palmer's work is critical in the sense of being important, as in providing clarity for social change action. Palmer delves deep into the empirical details of the history that makes Canada what it is. Even in the short version, this is an extensive, detailed, and thorough reading of the past. It is not just a compendium of historical details; it is organized clearly within a framework of Marxist class analysis informed by Marx's own detailed and thorough ethnographic-like writings.[2]

1. This paper was originally a set of comments prepared for the 2022 Canadian Labour History conference in Calgary. Subsequently it has been transformed from oral presentation to written academic paper.

2. I'm thinking here of works by Marx like *The Class Struggles in France*, or the *Eighteenth*

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Non-Indigenous intellectuals claiming pro-Indigenous credentials often do so today by attaching themselves to fragments of the Indigenous ruling class. They do so as allies in struggle, claiming that their "partner" is the embodiment of Indigenous righteousness while ignoring or denying other voices and confounding facts that highlight internal Indigenous class conflicts.[3] I should pause here and state that I welcome all manner of supportive actions; any such overture is a welcome change from past scholarly approaches within which Indigenous peoples were simply data and laboratories for other people's curiosity. That said, much of the university-centred research enterprise, despite good intentions, remains in a data extraction mode in which universities make efforts to ensure the continued access of their researchers to Indigenous communities and in Indigenous issues. The emerging comprador class within Indigenous nations often facilitates continued data extraction by post-secondary institutions at the same time as they are negotiating impact benefit agreements.[4] The national liberation struggle in Indigenous communities has become a rush toward alliances with business, with corporate NGOs, and with academics willing to submit to a kind of allyship that requires wilful blindness.[5] This results in a stepping away from critical capacity and insight and produces silences in which uncomfortable realities are overlooked and confounding facts ignored in order to maintain research access.

This is the context within which I read Palmer's work.

The long fragment of the much longer book that I read is a detailed tour de force of the entwined history of colonialism and capitalism in Canada. No place, no time, no struggle has been left behind. The sweep and range of Palmer's work is breathtaking. Trained as I am as a sociocultural anthropologist who might consider an area the size of a small island or a coastal archipelago more than enough ground to cover for a career of writing, the enormity of calling something "Canada" and then proceeding to analyze it raises so many questions for me. I am thus compelled to set such thoughts

Brumaire, or his extensive notes on pre-capitalist society; see also Bryan D. Palmer, "Approaching Working-Class History as Struggle: A Canadian Contemplation; A Marxist Meditation," *Dialectical Anthropology* 42 (December 2018): 443–456.

3. Charles R. Menzies, "Oil, Energy, and Anthropological Collaboration on the Northwest Coast of Canada," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 71, 1 (2015): 5–21; Menzies, "'All That Old Crap': Realizing Our Indigenous Utopian Potential – A Response to Palmer," *Dialectical Anthropology* 42 (December 2018): 457–465.

4. Ken J. Caine and Naomi T. Krognman, "Powerful or Just Plain Power-Full? A Power Analysis of Impact and Benefit Agreements in Canada's North," *Organization & Environment* 23, 1 (2010): 76–98.

5. R. S. Ratner, W. K. Carroll, and Andrew Woolford, "Wealth of Nations: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in the Era of Globalization," in John Torpey, ed., *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 217–247. See also Menzies, "'All That Old Crap.'"

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aside to consider instead the kind of meta-analytic vision provided by Palmer's work.

Palmer breaks Canada's history into four periods. Here they are in his own words: "The four periods I choose illuminate not only the material determinations of capitalism and colonialism but also the nature of resistance to them. They are roughly designated 1500 to 1790 [Capital Cravings and the Coming of Colonialism], 1790 to 1890 [Capitalism's Consolidation, Colonialism's Constrictions], 1890 to 1960 [Capitalism Ascendant, Colonialism Extended, and Resistance Restrained], and 1960 to the present [Anti-Capitalism and Anticolonialism – The Climacteric and Capitalist Crisis]."

I don't engage with each period. Nor do I engage equally with each period I consider. Nor is my comment a refutation, a deconstruction, or even a rehashing of what I like (and I like a lot of it). This comment is more a response and a reflection as a Marxist-influenced Indigenous scholar on the work of a fellow Marxist scholar whom I have learned from and appreciated for many years.

Situated Identities

We all stand in a particular place, all with slightly different histories, entering these places at different moments in time. This has an implication for how we might see and understand our worlds. I came from a working-class commercial fishing town.[6] My family stands at the interface of colonialism and capitalism – my paternal working-class white grandfather and Tsimshian grandmother married and raised three children in Prince Rupert, British Columbia.[7] My white grandfather's family had come from Scotland in the early 1800s to an area around Guelph in southern Ontario. Then members of that family made their way west to Victoria in the late 1800s. My white grandfather and one of his brothers settled in Prince Rupert, via Rivers Inlet, as Rupert was being created in the early 1900s. My Tsimshian grandmother's family – her father and mother both – had been part of the historic mid-1800s relocation that brought them, and many other Indigenous peoples, to Fort Simpson, known today as Lax Kw'alaams, on BC's north coast.

Part of my Tsimshian grandmother's mother's family came from Tongass Island, just across the colonial boundary between Alaska and British Columbia. I grew up hearing about this. Growing up working on my father's commercial fishing boat, I also had the opportunity to travel by the island many times

6. Charles R. Menzies, "Stories from Home: First Nations, Land Claims, and Euro-Canadians," *American Ethnologist* 21, 4 (1994): 776–791; Menzies, "All That Holds Us Together: Kinship and Resource Pooling in a Fishing Co-operative," *MAST: Maritime Anthropological Studies* 6, 1/2 (1993): 157–179; Menzies, "On Permanent Strike: Class and Ideology in a Producers' Co-operative," *Studies in Political Economy* 38 (1992): 85–108.

7. There was an elder fourth child raised separately who was born prior to my paternal grandparents' marriage.

during fishing season.[8] One time I tried to row from our anchorage over to the island to look at it myself during a lull in fishing. However, the tides were too strong for my teenage self, and I returned to the boat unsuccessful. Many years later as a professional researcher I learned that Tongass Island had been a stop on the journey of the Harriman expedition in the early 20th century. Those scientist explorers, funded by the industrialist Edward Harriman, had cleaned out anything left standing under their colonial assumption that the village was deserted.

In the mid to late 1800s, Lax Kw'alaams (then known as Port Simpson) was the metropolitan centre of north coastal British Columbia's colonial and Indigenous worlds. These histories don't start there; colonialism is an event in a long timeline, an event important to us and settlers, but not the start of history. Our Indigenous histories go way back to the time of the Tlingit incursions of a millennium and a half ago and further back to the time when the world was covered in ice ten millennia ago, back to the moment when Raven brought day and night into the world eons ago. Our historians have recorded these events. With each generation, new historians are trained, and the histories passed forward.

What we learn in these Indigenous histories is of a world being built. It is a history of world building and world maintaining. It is a history of names being placed on people, a legislative and legal history.[9] I need to pause here for a moment to explain that a name in Gitxaała is like a title or a role, but it is also an entity that persists through time.[10] To take on a name, one needs be connected socially to the lineage, but it is also an open question as to who takes on the name and thus becomes the rights holder carrying the name. Our history records conflicts, agreements, unusual events, and transformative movements. Names are history and historical; they connect us to the past and they act in their present.

One of our histories tells of the arrival of European (British, Spanish, and Russian) and American merchant capitalists. They started arriving on our shores in the late 1700s. Our first moment of encounter with Euro-American emissaries of capitalism occurred at the beginning of Palmer's second period. While Palmer's work details the large strokes of the encounters and entanglements of capitalism, on the ground each moment, each variance, carries interesting and important implications for the futures then possible but today known as our history.

8. Charles R. Menzies, "Sea Legs: Learning to Labor on the Water," *Anthropology of Work Review* 40, 2 (2019): 77–89.

9. Val Napoleon and Hadley Friedland, "An Inside Job: Engaging with Indigenous Legal Traditions through Stories," *McGill Law Journal* 61, 4 (2016): 725.

10. Christopher Roth, *Becoming Tsimshian: The Social Life of Names* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

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Analytically I find it helpful to follow Eric Wolf's model of three major modes of production, conceived at the level of social formation: kin-ordered, tributary, and capitalist.[11] Here I owe much to an old paper by Jairus Banaji that conceptualized a distinction between mode of production and form of production.[12] For the sake of clarity, allow me simply to say that Banaji's idea allows one to consider the specific form in which production occurs in real time and then consider which of the three larger modes operates at the level of the social totality driving the overarching logic of production. While there are problems with the concept of the articulation of modes of production, I also find that concept helpful in understanding what happened at the Euro-American/Indigenous interface.

Gitxaała has a story of Sabaan, a raven clan chief and my late uncle's namesake H:el/Tsibassa, meeting James Colnett, a British merchant capitalist, as he entered Gitxaała territory.[13] The encounter didn't really go well. Colnett assumed he could help himself to anything. Gitxaała had elaborate and precise notions of property. When these contending conceptions of property clashed, violence broke out, with Colnett's crew ambushing, killing, and taking hostage members of Gitxaała. These aren't simply stories in the past: they have currency in contemporary matters as well.

A Disparaging Comment

British Columbia invests a lot of effort to assess Aboriginal rights and title. Over the years, I have read many government assessments of Indigenous rights. These reports, briefing notes, and summaries tend toward narrow, highly critical assessments of the existence of Aboriginal rights. Such reports often rely upon "history," which, in these cases, means renderings of past events seen through the eyes of colonizers. While acknowledging rights and title in the abstract, such reports often diminish and deny Aboriginal rights and title in specific cases.

Occasionally I get an opportunity to meet an author of a government report. In one case, the government expert was a younger person with a graduate degree in comparative literature. They were part of a government team that included representatives of the Ministry of the Attorney General and officials from BC's office of environmental assessments. I was part of a First Nations

11. Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

12. Jairus Banaji, "Modes of Production in a Materialist Conception of History," *Capital & Class* 1, 3 (1977): 1–44.

13. Charles R. Menzies, "Standing on the Shore with Saaban: An Anthropological Rapprochement with an Indigenous Intellectual Tradition," *Collaborative Anthropologies* 6 (2013): 171–199.

team that included elected and hereditary leadership, legal counsel, and other technical consultants.

After the formalities of introductions were completed, the young government expert began their presentation by recounting their own version of the history of one of the hereditary leaders present at the meeting. The room was silent. When the expert finished, no one said anything. Then Gitxaała's legal counsel began, without acknowledging the government expert. In the back of our minds (the "our" here being the First Nations team) ran the question "How does one address such a breach of protocol except by walking out or ignoring it?" Our First Nations team opted to overlook the breach in protocol. But that opening gambit set the tone of the meeting.

Sometime later it was my turn to speak. I had prepared a set of briefing notes and comments on the government expert's report that was shared with the provincial government team. They pored over the document as I was speaking. I noticed that the government team were passing notes around, and a section of my report was being red-lined vigorously. Then the government expert interrupted and said that they took offence at my report. They took issue with how I described Colnett: "Your characterization of James Colnett is a disparaging assumption." They found it demeaning to Colnett, the government expert, and non-Indigenous peoples in general, we were told.

"How does one gloss abduction, rape, and killing?" I replied. "How can it be anything other than a violent criminal act?"

At which point the government expert and team decided they needed a coffee break.

For reference, here is the full account as transcribed by Robert Galois from Colnett's and his officers' logs:

> Supercargo & Self din'd onboard the Princes Royal, between four & five in the afternoon a smoke was observed thro' the Trees, guessed it proceeded from a little Cove abut three miles to the eastward where there was remains of old houses[14] Captain Duncan's boat was man'd & *arm'd with Six men & the Chief Mate, to go after the Indians*; I set to the Ship desiring the Whale Boat to follow with the second Mate we soon heard the fireing of Musketts & in less than an Hour from their setting out the Sloops Boat returned with a Canoe & one Women in, the Whale boat met them but went on. *They had taken the Indians by surprize*, the Chief Mate & four hands landed to get at the back of them & the other two proceeded with the Boat it being rainy weat. Matts were hung around them which served as and Excellent screen & the Vot was within two Yard before discover'd the surprize put them off their guard & landing getting close to them had render'd their long spears useless, there being four men & two women did not attempt to secure any of them appearing as unconcern'd as possible keeping on their guard to act when the others hove in sight but the Indians gaining confidence from their not acting on the Defensive two of them seiz'd their spears, *both men level'd their musketts, one snapt the other fortunately went of & shot a Man thro' the Head*; two of them fled & the musket that miss'd fire was cock'd & shot the

14. The location is likely the village site Ks'wan, where we have, since 2011, been engaged in archaeological research. The carbon-14 dates we have place the age of the village to be at least 4,000 years old. The site stratigraphy indicates continuous habitation into the 1800s. The site is not recorded in the provincial database as of January 2024.

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remaining one thro' the Breast, after that he snatched the Cutlass from his Opponent's side & struck at him several ties with it but the Man that first fired knocked him down with the But of his Piece, thinking they had dispatched those two, pursued the others. The five men by this time had reach'd the spot where the Action had happen'd seeing no one to give them information, the Man shot thro' head as suppos'd, the Ball had gone into his mouth & he hd recovered so as to get on his legs & seeing those men seiz'd a log of wood out of the fire to defend himself & was not got the better of till a cutlass was run thro' him, & muskets discharged the other that had been left for dead was fled; *a person that was crawling thro' the bushes was shot which proved to be a women the remaining one was taken prisoner in a few hours she became quite compos'd & satisfied with her situation, took great fancy to one of the men who had been at the Skirmish, & adopted him for her husband*.[15]

It is instructive to ask what exactly one should assume is the state of being of a woman who has just experienced the murder of two of her companions, the shooting of a third, and her own capture. Is it not conceivable that she would have been in fear of her life and felt the best approach was to co-operate with the men who had captured her, even if that meant she was to adopt one of her captors "as her husband"? And, by "adopt him for her husband," one can reasonably infer that this means she was placed in the position of being compelled to have intimate sexual relations with her captor.

Taylor, one of Colnett's officers, describes the event in somewhat different terms than does his captain:

on the 27th We saw some smoke in the Woods to the Northeast, and of course concluded some Indians were preparing a meal. Thoughts on *revenge* caused a general bustle, an Officer from the Princes Royal and five men armed went in the Boat to reconnoiter the Spot. They rowed round the point, near the place where the smoke was, and with the arms went into the Woods, to use their own words they did not intend hurting any one, providing they were peaceable, but if they found a small party to bring them Prisoners to the Ship, as they entered the woods they divided themselves into two parties, to prevent their escape if possible. Two of the Seamen first discovered the Indians at the foot of a large Tree, clearing away their utensils after a meal, when the Indians discovered our Seamen approaching, one of them instantly grasped his long Spear, and was in the act of throwing it towards one of them, when he was dispatched by a musket ball from one of them. He fell nstantly. By this time our two parties joined. *The Indians were only six in number, two of which were women. The Men all armed as much as the circumstances would allow, but seeing one of their party killed, two men and one women fled to the woods, one remained and defended himself gallantly. He received a musket shot through his Shoulder, and a Cutlass through some part of his body, yet he defended himself with a Stick on fire, till knocked down with the Butt end of a musquet, where he was left for Dead. He afterwards rose unobserved and ran into the woods, one of the women was Killed this was not intended, when she was shot our People supposed her to be a Man. The other women was brought away prisoner, and treated with great tenderness by the Man who took her with whom she remained for the present. She attempted to escape to the woods with the two Men but was caught.*[16]

Later in the text, the journal describes returning the "girl" who had been forcibly kidnapped to Smyogyet Seax: "Captain Duncan carried him the girl,

15. Robert Galois, ed., *A Voyage to the North West Side of America: The Journals of James Colnett, 1786–89* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 158–159, emphasis added.

16. Galois, *Voyage to the North West*, 161–162, emphasis added.

we had now clothed her [does this imply they had previously disrobed her?], with some of the best garments purchased from her own Countrymen, besides a pair of Trousers a Ring on each Finger and many beads he appeared to be a little surpris'd at seeing her."[17] Colnett's officer, Taylor, describes the return of the woman in somewhat different terms: "A Boat man'd and armed went out to Trade with the Chief, carrying the Female prisoner with them, to return her."[18]

However one might wish to characterize this event, the journals clearly describe an ambush of six Gitxaała people of which at least two, if not three, were killed in the encounter and one of the women taken onboard the vessel as a prisoner.

During one of my several field research trips to this place, I read the Colnett account to our crew, which was comprised of University of British Columbia (UBC) archaeology students and Gitxaała community members. We were gathered in the galley of the *Katrena Leslie*, a commercial fishboat owned by Gitxaała Nation. We had just come back from Taylor's Island (the island used by Colnett's crew to store materials as they repaired one of their two ships). After I finished reading, there was a momentary pause, and then one of the crew members said, "I've heard that story before. But the way I heard it was they raped those women." The crew member had not heard the Colnett account before, but he did recall hearing Elders in his family talk about the kidnapping and rape of Gitxaała women early in the period of encounter with Europeans. Clearly the perspective of the storyteller will shape the telling of a story. But even in the telling by Colnett and Taylor, the violence and intensity of the struggle should be clear to a reader. When read against the oral history of Gitxaała, its tone is chilling.

As I wrote in *People of the Saltwater*, "When Colnett's crew ambushed, raped, and kidnapped Gitxaała people in 1787 he was setting in play a pattern that has shaped Indigenous-K'amksiwah relations ever since."[19] Colonial agents still have a difficult time reconciling themselves to their own ancestors' criminal acts. Calling the attack a rape is not a disparaging comment – it is what one calls coercive sexual intercourse. Only a government expert charged with diminishing the humanity, history, and legal rights of Indigenous people could ever imagine such a description as disparaging to white settlers.

Even in the face of such violent early meetings, our history records how both Sabaan and Ts'bassa worked to form alliances through the exchange of names and through the protocols of the feast hall.[20] Right from this moment is laid bare some of the reasons that alliances between Euro-Americans and

17. Galois, *Voyage to the North West*, 163.

18. Galois, *Voyage to the North West*, 164.

19. Charles R. Menzies, *People of the Saltwater: An Ethnography of the Git lax m'oon* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016): 33–34, 27, quotation at 37.

20. Menzies, "Standing on the Shore."

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Indigenous peoples have not always gone well. Colnett, speaking for himself, with the backup of his working-class crew accepted Gitxaała's terms verbally but then acted materially against his own words. The crew were active participants in this, as documented in several journals that survive to this day in archives. It's nothing new that people do what their bosses tell them to – especially if one is working with twenty other people on a 60-foot boat thousands of miles from one's own home. Just the same, these events, repeated up and down the coast of BC, are well remembered in First Nations' histories.

Disparaging comments are often what settlers offer to First Nations peoples, especially when faced with Indigenous critiques. Settlers will call the critiques disparaging while overlooking the faults of their own actions. This colonial fact and legacy is, and has been, a major impediment to working-class alliances throughout Canada's collective history. Finding a way to understand that is important. Palmer's work goes a long way toward undermining the disparaging comments of settlers through a detailed empirical recounting of Canada's history as a colonial entity and how this implicates all settlers.

Natural Abundance?

In his discussion of First Nations societies, Palmer makes some comments I would suggest could be reframed in ways that would strengthen his own analysis. Some of the ideas are ones easily picked up and transmitted from the colonial orthodoxy. These ideas lurk behind many of the colonial actions Palmer is directly confronting in his writing – for example, notions of the ready "natural" abundance that made food production simple, or ideas that trade goods were attractive to Indigenous peoples in ways that ahistorically ignore the factors driving the necessity for trade.

Settler imaginaries are replete with notions that Indigenous worlds like my homeland were naturally bountiful; it was as though nature acted magically and autonomously and simply delivered. Much of my academic research has been into the very things my Indigenous ancestors did to ensure the resources were abundant.[21] In fact, I would argue, and the evidence is becoming clearer, that my Indigenous ancestors' interventions into the environment created the conditions of abundance. When Colnett roved up to shore and saw all the salmon in the creeks, was feasted with abalone, clams and cockles, and salmon, these were not food items that had simply given themselves up for easy picking. Abalone were possible because of the active management of sea otters. Clams and cockles were cultivated. Salmon ran in large numbers because the creeks were managed and shaped by Gitxaała for generations. Each of these foods appeared to the colonialists as some kind of naturally abundant richness.

21. Charles R. Menzies, "The Disturbed Environment: The Indigenous Cultivation of Salmon," in Benedict J. Colombi and James F. Brooks, eds., *Keystone Nations: Indigenous Peoples and Salmon across the North Pacific* (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2012), 161–182.

These European wayfarers couldn't conceive it possible that the bounty they witnessed was a product of purposeful, deliberate human action. It has taken nearly five centuries for colonialist researchers to start listening to Indigenous knowledge keepers.

Consider abalone, called bilhaa back home. Bilhaa are a precious food. I've written about them in more detail elsewhere.[22] Essentially, long-standing settler accounts place abalone as an Indigenous food firmly in the colonial period. Allied with merchant fur traders, coastal Indigenous communities drove sea otter to the brink of extinction. With sea otters out of the way, abalone started to travel higher up the water column, at which point my Indigenous ancestors were assumed to have discovered abalone and started to eat them. I have always had an issue with this story (which I have elsewhere called the kelp forest parable).[23] It wasn't the story I had heard growing up.

My first formal foray into abalone research came in response to a request to draft an expert opinion on behalf of a community member who had been charged with illegal harvest and possession of abalone.[24] The Crown conceded Gitxaała's right to harvest abalone but applied a legal decision that would allow the Crown to infringe those rights for conservation purposes. The community member was provided an opportunity for an alternate dispute resolution rather than face criminal charges (since violation of Canada's *Fisheries Act* is a criminal act). My research didn't end there.

I led an archaeology project that determined Gitxaała harvesters had consistently harvested abalone long prior to the maritime fur trade. I speculated, based on Gitxaała knowledge, that areas around Gitxaała villages were sea otter exclusion zones within which human predation kept otter populations depressed enough for abalones to thrive and be harvested by people. Subsequent archaeological research has substantiated these speculative thoughts. Research results from Erin Slade, Iain McKechnie, and Anne K. Salomon "provide further evidence supporting the hypothesis that sea otters existed below carrying capacity in proximity to human settlements during the late Holocene on the Northwest Coast of North America … [T]hese collective findings are indicative of human-mediated limitation of sea otters and their predatory effects on shellfish where humans persistently harvested large

22. Charles R. Menzies, "Dm sibilhaa'nm da laxyuubm Gitxaała: Picking Abalone in Gitxaała Territory," *Human Organization* 69, 3 (2010): 213–220; Menzies, "Revisiting 'Dm sibilhaa'nm da laxyuubm Gitxaała (Picking abalone in Gitxaała territory)': Vindication, Appropriation, and Archaeology," *BC Studies*, no. 187 (Autumn 2015): 129–153; hagwil hayetsk (Charles R. Menzies), "Grief, Extinction, and *Bilhaa* (Abalone)," in Valérie Bienvenue and Nicholas Chare, eds., *Animals, Plants, and Afterimages: The Art and Science of Representing Extinction* (New York: Berghan Books, 2022), 153–165.

23. Menzies, "Revisiting 'Dm sibilhaa'nm da laxyuubm Gitxaała.'"

24. That report became a published paper: see Menzies, "Dm sibilhaa'nm da laxyuubm Gitxaała."

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macroinvertebrates" like abalone and mussels.[25] In plain language, Gitxaała harvesters hunted sea otters in sufficient numbers to facilitate a human harvest of abalone for millennia prior to European arrival.

This is the case not just with abalone but with species of fish and other shellfish as well. Research into so-called clam gardens (human-engineered intertidal zones) has shown that such interventions have enhanced clam and cockle production in such areas, increasing the harvestable crop of clams significantly above "natural" ecological carrying capacities.[26] My own research into coastal salmon creeks has demonstrated the manifold tactics of enhancement deployed by Gitxaała harvesters to maintain and enhance salmon production.

Assuming, as Palmer has, that social complexity and wealth among Indigenous communities is a by-product of natural abundance fundamentally misunderstands the decisive ways in which Indigenous economies intervened in the so-called natural world to enhance the productive capacity of these same systems.

Disease and Desire

Colonial ships changed everything in Gitxaała's world – firstly by indifference, with disease; then by design, driven by the greed to accumulate. The power of disease is not a well-understood fact of the colonial economy. Disease is a powerful social force that can act with impunity and without human design. We have just lived through a major global pandemic. Back home, we have histories of the first global foreign pandemics – about the devastation of smallpox. Starting in the late 1700s, waves of disease swept up the coast. When George Vancouver arrived at what is now Burrard Inlet, he noted many empty villages and wondered about that. As the late geographer Cole Harris notes, it was smallpox from the Spanish that arrived in August of the preceding year.[27] The smallpox hit during the major salmon harvesting period and reduced the

25. Erin Slade, Iain McKechnie, and Anne K. Salomon, "Archaeological and Contemporary Evidence Indicates Low Sea Otter Prevalence on the Pacific Northwest Coast during the Late Holocene," *Ecosystems* 25 (2022): 548–566, 557. See also Paul Szpak, Trevor J. Orchard, Iain McKechnie, and Darren R. Gröcke, "Historical Ecology of Late Holocene Sea Otters (*Enhydra lutris*) from Northern British Columbia: Isotopic and Zooarchaeological Perspectives," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39, 5 (2012): 1553–1571.

26. Keith Holmes, Kieran Cox, Amy R. Cline, Marco B. A. Hatch, Morgan J. Black, Anne K. Salomon, Dana Lepofsky, Nicole F. Smith, and Sarah Dudas, "Ancient Ecology: The Quadra Island Clam Gardens," *Fisheries* 45 (2020): 151–156; Dana Lepofsky, Ginevra Toniello, Jacob Earnshaw, Christine Roberts, Louis Wilson, Kirsten Rowell, and Keith Holmes, "Ancient Anthropogenic Clam Gardens of the Northwest Coast Expand Clam Habitat," *Ecosystems* 24 (2021): 248–260.

27. Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997).

communities' ability to put up enough fish for winter. When winter came, people experienced malnutrition and further death. Harris suggests more people died from the secondary effects than from direct infection.

My point here is to argue against the idea that desire drove trade and exchange. I think what took place was less desire, more necessity. As disease destroyed labour power through death, labour-saving technologies were needed. The stone fish traps and wooden weirs that were a common technology of fish capture along BC's coast required a large, coordinated social group to operate. As merchant sailing ships arrived in the late 1700s on BC's coast, they brought foreign diseases and new tools. Among their tools were manufactured beach seines that cut fishing labour needs in half and iron knives that sped up fish processing times. The only desire propelling trade was a desire to survive and absorb labour-saving technologies in the face of massive death waves that followed European and American sailing ships.

Disease facilitated entry into the capitalist system as the traders brought with them life-saving labour-saving devices – iron knives and pots, flints for fire lighting, cheap energy-dense food (sugar, rice, flour), industrially produced twines and ropes, woven fabrics. These new commodities created the potential to survive the onslaught of genocidal diseases but in so doing swept the coastal communities even further into the capitalist orbit than they may well have been otherwise.

Palmer's Third and Fourth Periods

Let's ratchet forward to the early 1930s, when a major fish strike occurred at Rivers Inlet on BC's central coast. Rivers Inlet was then a large cannery zone with a significant fishing fleet. It is important to appreciate that the fish processing side of the industry was then primarily based on Indigenous labour. The fishing fleet was mixed and triracial – white, Asian, and Indigenous. This strike involved the white and Indigenous fishermen, who struck over fish prices. Most of these boats were larger seiners with five-to-seven-man crews. Because family kinship played a major role in crew recruitment, the boats were mostly segregated. The white boats were based in Vancouver, while the Indigenous boats were based either locally or a bit to the south in Port Hardy, Alert Bay, or Fort Rupert. The shore workers were Indigenous. When the strike happened, the southern white-operated boats packed up and headed home. The mostly Indigenous women and children working in the fish plant were kicked out of the company housing. This led the First Nations fishers and shore workers to start organizing separately. I've talked about this elsewhere, but this moment again reflects – as with Colnett – a way in which even at moments of alliance with Euro-Americans, the colonial complications intercede in ways that undermine effective interracial class solidarity.[28]

28. Charles R. Menzies, "Indian or White? Racial Identities in the British Columbian Fishery,"

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Palmer focuses on the rise of the Red Power movement and then its assimilation into recognition politics. This is counterposed to the rise in working-class militancy, with the subsequent retreat and retrenchment of labour militancy during the big downturn of the 1980s. Running alongside this in British Columbia is an intense period of automation, concentration, and rationalization in fishing and forestry – two sectors that employed high numbers of Indigenous workers. These were industries that, despite tensions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, created similar working-class and small capitalist experiences for both peoples. The rationalizations of capital during this period accentuated racial conflicts. Lumber firms downloaded their tree harvesting operations onto small "truck loggers" who tended to hire family, and most of them were white. In the fishing sector, the companies offloaded their rental fleet, which essentially removed most First Nations' fishing capacity, leaving only those fish boat owners who had amassed large capital investments and were economically alienated from their communities.

This is also the period of environmental activism, the so-called war in the woods in the 1980s, and then campaigns like the so-called Great Bear Rainforest in the 1990s. In these struggles, Indigenous partners became valuable as their community members became increasingly unemployed and further relegated to welfare lines. Large integrated environmental NGOs with sophisticated media strategies and significant funding envelopes started knocking on doors in First Nations communities. The resource companies, noting the environmentalists' growing success, started their own alliances; thus emerged the joint venture logging company, fronted by First Nations, funded by a settler company, and logging in the environmentally contested spaces. Since the 1990s, this tactic has developed and is now a primary point of alliance between Indigenous communities and Euro–North Americans. Even the academic sector mirrors the resource-extraction joint venture model, with talk of allies and collaborative community-based research.

This brings me back to my opening comments. The final, fourth period, as identified by Palmer, is one of accommodation and recognition; it is one in which a bureaucratic Indigenous strata linked to local administration and corporate accommodations has come to dominate in Indigenous communities. This is the group that academics generally opt to ally with. It is a contradictory stratum that is simultaneously an emerging comprador bourgeoise, state functionary, and social activist. Universities are taking note. UBC, for example, created an office attached to the vice-president of research to facilitate the continuity of university research (mostly non-Indigenous) in First Nations communities. This office works to retain access to critical data sources and research and training opportunities. The underlying principle is consistent with the ideals behind earlier logging joint ventures.

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in Charles R. Menzies and Anthony Marcus, eds., *Anthropology for a Small Planet*, 2nd ed. (1996; Vancouver: New Proposals, 2013), 59–72.

Understanding how recognition politics reinforce capitalism is critical. Palmer's empirical examination of the entwined history of Canadian colonialism and Canadian capitalism is a critical part of understanding the problematic aspect of recognition politics that essentially facilitates academic joint ventures in the same way the forest companies did against the environmental movement in the 1980s.

Class Alliances

Any alliance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous has to be a class alliance. The business class understands this. They have been very successful with this over the last two decades. While governments drag their feet on recognizing actual Indigenous rights and title, businesses step in and offer deals to joint venture, to data share, to co-manage programs with First Nations. I do not begrudge this; in fact, were I in a position of leadership back home, I would likely be entering the same agreements. Poverty and loss of dignity are real, and deals with business provide at least some modicum of relief in the absence of other opportunities.

There is a long history of Indigenous working-class activism. I know that in BC, and despite the various setbacks, there is a long history of trade union activism in the fisheries sector. This is the basis on which class emancipatory alliances have existed, do exist, and can be further developed. Palmer's intervention offers an analytic framework that helps us focus practice today and tomorrow. I will quibble over details here and there, but I find the analytic frame powerful, convincing, and necessary. The detailed empirical stories Palmer describes in his larger work effectively chart out an emancipatory history that is inspiring and offers hope for achieving a classless society in our future. This is a history that tells the story of the making of Canada in a way that makes clear the fundamental and critical reliance upon Indigenous peoples in the history, present, and future of Canada.

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