

# **“Recentering Cheam - Researching for Our Mirrors”**

by

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A Community Governance Project Report  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN INDIGENOUS GOVERNANCE  
in the Faculty of Human and Social Development

University of Victoria  
2010

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## **Towards An Indigenous Understanding of Research**

As we will see, this project emanates from and is written for the people of Cheam, a Pilalt village located in the heart of *S'olh Temexw*, that is, Sto:lo homelands. Having spent the past year working with the community, what follows is my attempt to “share back” that which was shared with me. The people of Cheam have brought me into their community, shared their concerns and experiences with me in the hope that, together, we may begin to find strategies and solutions to our most pressing problems. For this, I raise my hands to Cheam. The strength that I have gained as a young Indigenous person is an enduring gift from the community for which I will remain forever thankful. Before “giving back” what I have learned, I feel that it is important to share a little about my own journey and how I came to find myself in Cheam.

While this journey began long ago, I will begin with my own experiences as a student in the Indigenous Governance program (IGOV) at the University of Victoria. It is through the IGOV program that I have been able to begin to understand the political realities in which we, as Indigenous peoples, currently find ourselves. It is because of the program, its visionary professors, incredible support staff, and vibrant students that I have come to understand the responsibilities that I have to myself, my family, my nation, and to Indigenous peoples. It is also through the program that I was able to connect with June Quipp, an exceedingly respected leader from Cheam.

In September 2008, my wife and I relocated from Blackfoot territory, now occupied by the city of Calgary, to Lekwungen and Wsanec territories so that I could pursue my graduate studies in the Indigenous Governance program. Through the 2008-2009 school year, I pushed through two semesters of coursework at the University of Victoria.

Over this time, I have come to a much deeper understanding of what it means to be “Indigenous”. On one level, “Indigenous” is a term that “internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world’s colonized peoples”<sup>1</sup>. However, this formulation does not capture the essence of who we are, as Indigenous, outside of a colonial context. Hence, being Indigenous is also a way of expressing ourselves, in a colonial language, as the original peoples. Our indigeneity is directly connected to the ways of life that emanate from our relationship to our territories. More than being Indigenous, we are also “peoples”. This pluralization has been deliberately added in order to denote the diversity that exists among and between all original peoples. As such, the term *Indigenous peoples* will be employed in order to pay heed to the unique and heterogeneous nature of each of our peoples, while respecting what holds us together. At the end of the day, all Indigenous peoples come from specific territories. We all belong to a certain place that we call “home”. Our belonging is contingent upon our adherence to the original instructions that are handed down from generation to generation. These teachings tells us who we are and where we are from. They form our responsibilities as Indigenous peoples. As we will see, these connections run deep and are a product of our relationships, both within and between our nations.

While our program was focused on a variety of issues and topics, our concern was always for the resurgence of our peoples, as Indigenous nations. The reality of today is that most Indigenous lands, particularly those in the colony of British Columbia, are being occupied by the very forces that dispossessed us in the first place. The colonial state, known as Canada, plays an active role in suppressing Indigenous forms of governance, instead choosing to impose its own

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Zed Books Ltd. p. 7.

form of corrosive rule. The truth is that the integrity of all Indigenous nations have been compromised. As such, the students in our program were thrust into an intense interrogation of the colonizing forces that have undermined the health of our nations. This examination was also coupled with a focus on strategies of resistance. Active confrontation against colonial forces is necessary to create the space needed to restore the integrity, the wholeness, that has allowed our peoples to thrive since time immemorial. In order to make meaning out of our academic experiences, our students were challenged to begin to understand what “research” is and how it applies to our own processes of decolonization. In this respect, it is important to delve into my own understanding of “research” and the perspective that I brought with me to Cheam.

To undertake this task, I would like to start with a quote from Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s Decolonizing Methodologies. I share these words because they have had such a profound impact on the ways in which I see, think, and interact with the rest of creation. She states: “To assume in advance that people will not be interested in, or will not understand, the deeper issues is arrogant. The challenge always is to demystify, to decolonize”<sup>2</sup>. Although only two sentences, her words shook me to my core. I read and reread this at least a dozen times. Having been in academia for years, I came to believe that my work was just too obscure for “normal” people to understand. I thought nobody would want to hear about capitalism, imperialism, much less colonialism. And then it was as if she was speaking to me. There is a common belief that academics and formal education offer a deeper, more meaningful understanding of issues such as imperialism and colonialism than the “layman”. As Smith notes, to believe this is arrogant. Such an approach totally ignores the actual experiences of peoples whose lives are shaped by imperial and colonial

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 16.

rule. These words humbled me in a way that I still cannot fully express and, as we will see, they have shaped how I now conceive of research.

Indigenous peoples have long felt the wrath of “research”, particularly in its formal, academic context. Native people have been studied as the “objects” and “subjects” of research. European society, since contact, has put forth representations of Indigenous peoples. These representations are designed to create a very specific imagery. As we will see, the spread of European imperialism and the subsequent colonization of Turtle Island required that the imposing, foreign ways of life be exalted at the cost of local, Indigenous traditions. Hence, research has played a significant and active role in separating Indigenous peoples from the very source of our identities, namely, our territories and the intricate web of relations that make us “who we are”. In this sense, research can be seen as “one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized”<sup>3</sup>. As my experiences in Cheam have shown, people in the community are keenly aware of how implicated academic research has been in fostering the spread of colonialism.

For instance, the history of British Columbia often starts with the arrival of Simon Fraser. As such, history seems to begin in and around 1808. Simon Fraser, an employee of the North West Company, came to Sto:lo territories in search of new source and markets for the European fur trade. One of Fraser’s most enduring contributions to the colony of British Columbia has been the intricate records that he kept, particularly his detailed diaries which depicted the peoples he encountered in his journey westward. These accounts present the Sto:lo people in a very particular way. Research, in this context, is about gathering and extracting information about

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 7.

Indigenous peoples, such as the Sto:lo. Over time, the images he presented have become fixed within the minds of European settlers. This generated varying degrees of interest in all things “Sto:lo”. In turn, there have been subsequent representations of the Indigenous “Other”. While this imagery is always changing, what remains constant is that these representations remain outside the control of Indigenous peoples themselves. The ability to control such representations remains a privilege from which we are excluded. While superficial, this example begins to illustrate the role “research” plays in relation to colonialism.

Upon joining the IGOV program, I believe that I had a similar understanding of research. It was my belief that research was a process wherein I could take information from textbooks, written by appropriately-accredited academics, and formulate arguments based upon some obscure topic or another. In fact, I was quite successful at this type of research. I could skim through literature, pulling out what I thought the professor would like to hear, before regurgitating it onto a page. As a political scientist, I had been trained to keep a distance between myself and the topic of my research. I was taught to be “objective”. However, it has been because of my experiences with IGOV that I have come to see research in a new light.

Right from the get-go, one of our professors, Waziyatawin, pushed us to question why we research and for whom our research is conducted. In Research as Resistance, Kathy Absolon and Cam Willett (2005) begin to offer an alternative perspective by looking at research as a process of “remembering”. They point out that to *remember* can have two meanings: “to recall from memory” and “to reconnect”<sup>4</sup>. In the first instance, remembering as a recollection from our memories, requires us to have a strong sense of who we are and where we are from, as

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<sup>4</sup> Absolon, Kathy and Cam Willett. “Putting Ourselves Forward: Location in Aboriginal Research.” *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*. Ed. Leslie Brown and Susan Strega. Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2005. 97-126. p. 115.

*Indigenous peoples.* In the latter, remembering as reconnection, entails re-membering ourselves within our nations. It is about coming to understand our place within our communities. For many of this, this is a journey in which we return home. From my opinion, this is the essence of decolonization. This is a process dedicated to restoring the wholeness and integrity of our nations, both within ourselves and within our communities.

Research, as such, is a journey of relating to, participating with, and coming to understand all of our relations<sup>5</sup>. It is an active reconnection with the forces of the universe that colonial rule has sought to separate us from. The world in which we live is undoubtedly filled with energy. Everything in creation is comprised of these energies, which we call *spirit*. Each of these entities, which are inherently spiritual, have the ability to “know”. Every living thing has the ability to experience this world, and we all do some in our own ways. Life exists as an interconnected web of relationships, each tied together in ways that nobody can fully comprehend. As such, we must understand that what we know depends upon our relationships to the rest of creation. For instance, we cannot expect to know how to live in a particular territory unless we seek to understand where we fit in relation to everyone else. In this light, to be Indigenous is to explore the energy inherent in everything with the intention of connecting these realities within and between ourselves.

This is the essence of research. Our ways of life have been compromised and it is our responsibility to *re*-search for the fragments of ourselves which were taken from us due to the imposition of colonialism on our territories. We must then use these pieces to foster the resurgence of our communities, as Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>5</sup> Bastien, Betty. 2004. *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing: The Worldview of the Siksikaitstapi*. Calgary: University of Calgary Press. p. 46.

To undertake such an endeavor requires a methodology that will guide the manner in which our research will be conducted. Since research will take place within Indigenous communities, our inquiries must consider the cultural protocols of our respective nations. Thus, a methodology must be employed so as to use our ways of thinking to gain knowledge about the realities of contemporary colonialism. These descriptions must help us to work towards a deeper understanding of how people think, feel, see, and interact in regards to reality. Admittedly, this is a lifelong process. It is a journey that I have only recently embarked upon. I cannot claim to completely understand how people, myself or others, interpret reality. However, this project is meant to share where I am at today.

To compliment this process, I have chosen “location” as my methodology. Absolon and Willett (2005) refer to location in research as, “identifying, at the outset, the location from which the voice of the researcher emanates”<sup>6</sup>. They aptly point out that “the only thing we can write about with authority is ourselves”<sup>7</sup>. This approach requires that we make clear the positions from which we write. Rather than elucidate from an academic standpoint, it is my contention that it will be much more meaningful to present this approach as my own exercise in “location”. To me, this is the first step in demystifying, in decolonizing. It is my belief that this approach will give my voice a position of strength.

In sum, scientific research remains a hotly contested concept, especially within Indigenous communities, where research has been used to legitimize many of the colonial policies that have intruded upon our ways of life. By re-conceiving research as a process of relating to, participating with, and coming to understand our place within creation, we are offered

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<sup>6</sup> Absolon and Willett, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

an avenue for research to become meaningful in the struggle for Indigenous resurgence. Whether as students in the academy or as member within our own communities, this type of research is dedicated to rebuilding ourselves as the strong individuals and nations that we once were. The rest of this chapter will be dedicated to how I became involved with Cheam, how I applied my notion of research, and how this approach allowed me to come to an understanding of what it means to be Sto:lo in the context of contemporary colonialism.

### **Coming to Cheam**

Upon completion of the required coursework for the Indigenous Governance program, I was presented with the choice of pursuing a thesis option or a community governance project. I originally intended to write a thesis so that I could begin to express all of the theories that I had accumulated over two decades of formal education. However, as I began to question “research”, I could not help but feel I needed to connect my efforts with an Indigenous community. I felt a thesis would merely collect dust on the shelves of the university’s archives. I wanted to begin to apply my education in a way that would affect meaningful change in the lives of Indigenous people, amongst First Nations in Canada, and especially within myself.

While this was my goal, I was faced with the reality that I grew up on Blackfoot territory, far from my ancestral homelands. As a person of Kwakwaka’wakw and Snuneymuxw descent, I lived in a form of exile. I always knew where I was from, but this identity flourished in the realm of belief, typically separated from experience. As I have mentioned, I have lived in the colony of British Columbia for just over a year. As such, I knew that the possibility of a community governance project was limited by a lack of relationships with much of my extended family. Just as I was beginning to reconsider the prospect of a thesis, the director of the Indigenous

Governance program, Taiaiake Alfred, introduced the possibility of a relationship with Cheam First Nation. Over the past decade, Dr. Alfred and then-Chief June Quipp had discussed the possibility having students enter into a partnership with the community in Cheam. On April 30th, 2009, our students were offered a chance to travel with the program to Cheam in order to discuss the possibility of fostering this relationship.

While I knew little about the community, I was excited by the prospect of working with Indigenous peoples outside of an academic context. At our initial meeting, Chief and Council offered an introduction into the work that the community has been struggling through. These battles covered the gamut, from educational agreements with the province, to active resistance against encroachments by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. It was quickly evident that there was a lot of work going on in the community, and that both levels of the colonial government have been ensuring that the community is constantly spread thin. Councilors were each bogged down with numerous portfolios, such as Rights and Title, Fishing, and Child and Youth Care, to name but a few. Moreover, each of these portfolios forced an engagement with multiple ministries in the government, each with their own administrations and bureaucracies. Ultimately, this meeting was meant to offer a glimpse into the struggles Cheam faces on a daily basis. It was clear that there were many areas in which our students could be of great help. Due to our focus upon the resurgence of Indigenous nationhood, our students were upfront with our positions. We know that “research” is a contested concept within our communities, but we also know that our own processes of decolonization require great amounts of work. In this respect, our students could act as tools for the community to help ease to burdens placed upon the community by different levels of the colonial government.

As the seeds of this relationship began to grow in the depths of my mind, I became intrigued. It was obvious that Cheam has been at the forefront in terms of resisting the impositions of colonialism in British Columbia, and I could not help but channel that spirit. I was filled with excitement, and I knew that this is where I wanted to be.

In the second week of May 2009, the IGOV program hosted to the Indigenous Leadership Forum (ILF), a weeklong conference aimed at discussing practical solutions to the problems faced by our respective nations. We were fortunate to have two councilors, June Quipp and Sandra Victor, from Cheam join us for part of the week. This definitely added an element of community that may have been otherwise absent. Beyond the conference, their trip allowed us to revisit the possibility of sending IGOV students to Cheam for our community governance projects.

At our final meeting, June Quipp stated that she would be willing to have each of the students come to Cheam so that we could begin to develop projects from and for the community. Given this opportunity, I immediately expressed interest, along with three others, and it was decided that we would, indeed, pursue this relationship. It was also determined that I would be the first student to make the trip to Cheam, living in the community for the summer. And on June 2nd, 2009, with bags and books in hand, I made the trip from my home in Victoria to the mainland in Vancouver, where I was greeted by June and her husband, Freddie, finally heading to Cheam.

## **Coming to Be in Cheam**

*“We have learnt, rather too late, that action comes not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility.”<sup>8</sup>*

Upon my arrival in Cheam, I stepped out of the family van and was immediately introduced to June’s daughter, Leanne, as well as a number of her grandchildren. It was not long before the young one’s began interrogating me. “Who are you?” “Did you come here to go fishing?” “Can you at least play hockey?” At last, I was in Cheam.

When I was young, my father would talk about “experiencing the experience”. It was not until I came to Cheam did I begin to understand what he was saying all those years. I knew right away that I was going to meet an entire community of people. This is something I took very seriously, and I knew I carried a number of responsibilities.

For instance, I was the first of four students from the Indigenous Governance program to come to the community. As such, I knew that I was responsible for projecting the first impression that the community would have of our students. As the first student from the IGOV program to come to Cheam, I showed up with no academic project. June nor I had any idea of what our community governance project would entail. All I brought with me was myself and a simple notion of research. My goal was to begin to build relationships with the people I met. Throughout our coursework, we were frequently reminded of our duties as Indigenous intellectuals. We have a responsibility to be critical. We have a responsibility to “stick our necks out” and say the things that need to be said. We have a responsibility to speak truths. In the initial flurry of my arrival, I could not help but remind myself of these obligations.

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<sup>8</sup> Jensen, Derrick. 2006. *Endgame, Vol. I.: The Problem of Civilization*. Toronto: Seven Stories Press. p. 1.

In addition, I was aware of my responsibility as an Indigenous person. I was here on Pilalt territory as an invited guest. In this sense, I was here to represent my family. From the lineage of my grandmother Rose Good, we are Snuneymuxw. Like Cheam, we are Salish. In fact, during my first couple of days in Cheam I began to share who I was, and where my family was from. During one conversation I spoke of my grandmother Rose and some of her work with Native inmates on Vancouver Island. Despite being well below five feet tall, she is one of the feistiest, powerful women I have ever known. After sharing a number of stories, June came to realize that my grandmother had stayed in Cheam years earlier, even sleeping in the same bed as me. Ultimately, I could not help but feel a responsibility to maintain the relationships set forth by those who came before me. In a very real way, I came to see my relationship with June as one of kinship. She became a grandmother to whom I feel both responsible and accountable.

In this respect, my community governance project in Cheam was an opportunity that served as an apprenticeship under an Indigenous leader, in June Quipp. June has done a phenomenal job in guide me as I tried to navigate my way into the community. She introduced me to countless people from Cheam, as well as many others from neighbouring communities. She has exposed me to innumerable experience, from Chief and Council meetings to Aboriginal symposia, all of which have contributed to my understanding of what it means to “be Indigenous” within the confines of colonialism in British Columbia. As an Indigenous leader, June is quick to remind people, such as myself, of their responsibilities to their nations. In fact, she leads by example.

Carrying a renewed faith in research and a number of responsibilities, I endeavoured to wade into and become immersed in the workings of the community. It was my belief that

through an interpenetration of experiences, I could begin to make meaning out of the world around me, as well as begin to form *an* understanding of what it means to be Cheam. As such, the rest of this chapter is dedicated to my experiences in the first couple of days in Cheam.

### **Navigating the River**

After being introduced to any family hanging around June's house, I was then taken for a tour around Cheam. The village sits at the base of Mount Cheam, just off the shores of the Fraser River. I was shown the half dozen cul-de-sacs that make up the reserve, which are all formed around an enormous open field that houses the Cheam Longhouse, community hall, band office, and the ball hockey rink. I was being introduced to the community, its landscape and its people.

On my second day I was fortunate enough to be taken out on the water by June's son, Rick. As it turns out, he is widely known in Sto:lo territory as one of the most talented and respected fishers. He has spent his life on these waters. He has fought for his people's right to be on the river. As a result, he has been actively targeted by the government, particularly the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Rick has more than a decade's worth of experiences in the Canadian Justice System. He is frequently singled out by colonial authorities. By attacking one of the nation's strongest fishers, Canada has sought to make an example out of him, sending a clear message to any other First Nations who stand up for their inherent rights to fish their ancestral waters.

Rick and his wife Wendy took me upriver to where the edge of Mount Cheam meets the Fraser River. From there we floated downstream, back towards the village. It was during this ride that Rick shared a series of stories and experiences that had a profound impact on how I came to see the people of Cheam.

He began by talking about *Lhilheqey*, also known as Mount Cheam. He spoke of the relationship his people have with the mountain goat, and how they used to cover Mount Cheam. He dove into the origins of the *Lhilheqey* and how *Xa:ls*, a Sto:lo transformer shaped the landscape as he brought balance to the world. Mount Cheam is one of the most widely-known transformer sites on Sto:lo territory, and she is said to look over the Sto:lo people, standing strong and tall for all, including the salmon people, to see. Mount Cheam leads the river to where the valley narrows, into the canyon where the warm summer winds have dried Sto:lo salmon since time immemorial.

As we floated down the river, Rick shared the origin stories of many more mountains. Each of these ranges has their own story, and it was obvious that many were known to Rick. While these narratives were replete with meaning and lessons to be learned, the most striking aspect of these stories is that, taken together, they frame *Pilalt Temexw*, Cheam's traditional homelands. And while these mountains form the surroundings, it is the river that runs through the center. The Pilalt have always lived along the Sto:lo river at the pivotal junction where the water turns toward the canyon. The waters that run through Cheam see the most salmon of any river in the world. As such, Salishan people have come from far and wide to negotiate the rights to fish on Pilalt territory and to trade with the people of Cheam. Ultimately, the Sto:lo are the people of the river. The river was the kitchen, highway, and the main street in the Sto:lo neighbourhood. As such, the Fraser forms the center of not only Sto:lo territory, but their entire way of life.

During our voyage, Rick spoke of the neighboring communities, such as Seabird Island, Chehalis and other Sto:lo nations. He explained that even calling them "neighbours" is misleading. He told stories of family that he has in these communities, and how there are kinship

relations that span all of *S'olh Temexw*. The people of Cheam have family upriver into the canyon and all the way down to the mouth of the ocean.

Rick was very careful to speak of those who came before him. He said that his ancestors walked the territory. They paddled the river. They *knew* these lands and everyone who lived on them. Furthermore, as river people, the Sto:lo have a unique relationship with the salmon people. It is through Rick's voice that I have come to understand how inseparable this relationship is. He has said that the salmon teach his people how to live. When the Sto:lo take a life from the salmon people, the nation becomes responsible for the dignity and survival of the salmon's community. He went so far as to call the salmon the "lifeblood" of the Sto:lo people. Over time, I have come to realize the truth in those words.

From here I was shown a number of family fishing spots, where both set netting and drift netting techniques are used. Rick pointed out a number spots that belonged to other families from Cheam, as well as a couple that were from other Sto:lo nations. We did not fish on this day, for it was clear that I had to begin to connect with the landscape, feel its energy, before being allowed to fish.

At one point, Rick shared with me the belief that what you eat is a representation of your relationship to the natural world. If you eat foods that are processed, controlled and manipulated, then you, too, will be controlled and manipulated. This is a testament to the spiritual relationship that exists between the people of Cheam and the salmon nations that call *S'olh Temexw* home. In particular, Rick stated that he felt like one of the few "wealthy" people in the community because so much of this diet comes from the salmon. Wealth, in this sense, comes from the quality and abundance of spiritual relations that one has to the rest of creation. This Indigenous notion of

wealth is a stark contrast to the settler notion of wealth as the accumulation and control over different forms of property. Are we wealthy because we have stacks of paper money, expensive cars, and fancy clothes? Is our success measured by how much we can take from others? Or is our wealth dependent upon the relations we hold with others. Here, Rick then began to discuss a number of forces that have compromised the community's ability to feed itself.

I will never forget what he said next: "Mick, let me tell you something. They [Canada] hate us. They always have and they always will". From here we began to touch upon the political struggles from the past. I heard stories of his grandfather Albert Douglas and his trips to New Westminster to fight for the community's way of life. He spoke of his uncle Sam Douglas, who was a fiercely respected leader in the community. These battles on and for the river were made even more vivid as their actual locations were pointed out as we passed by. I could not help but feel the power of the river, evoked by images of Sto:lo warriors standing strong on the beaches of Cheam. Each of these generations were dedicated to their people. They fought to keep their nation strong. Any resistance to colonial infringements was made with the resurgence of the community in mind.

As we neared the village, I began to hear of Rick's own experiences on the water. I heard about his run-ins with the DFO, RCMP, even recreational fishers. He spoke of the conflicts in 1999 stemming from the DFO's closure of the entire Fraser River, and how the community struggled to even feed itself. He spoke of how these struggles were all aimed at preserving the "old ways". It is obvious that the Pilalt ancestors of Cheam have fought to keep their way of life intact. They have struggled to maintain their traditions despite over a century of colonial

infringements. As such, Rick emphasized that it is his responsibility to continue that fight. To not do so would be to disrespect the sacrifices made by those who came before him.

“We belong to this river,” Rick frequently iterated. There have been confrontations with settlers, government ministries, media outlets, commercial industries, even Aboriginal politicians. The purpose of each of these encounters was clear, to return Cheam to a position of strength by (re)establishing and maintaining good relations with the salmon peoples.

As we returned to the beach, Rick shared his concerns about the youth in the community. At the time, Rick was on council and one of his portfolios was Child and Youth Care. He spoke of *Xyolhemeylh*, Sto:lo nation’s child and family services agency. Unfortunately, the agency’s funding is directly related to the number of children in custody. Rick said he cannot help but feel this runs contrary to his goal, which is to have Sto:lo children back in Sto:lo homes. To do so, he says, we must begin to heal our families. Rick posits that the best way to do so is to get families back on the water. The future generations must have the opportunity to learn from experience. They must have a chance to be on the water. They have to be given the chance to be Sto:lo.

During our drive from the beach to the house, Rick spoke of the *Xwelitem*. I knew right away that it was a Halq’emeylem phrase, but I had no clue what it meant. After a while I came to understand that he was talking about non-Native people. As it turns out, *Xwelitem* is a phrase that means “the hungry people”. It refers directly to the American settlers that came north into Sto:lo territory following the Gold Rush of 1858. While the Sto:lo nations had encountered numerous European explorers since Simon Fraser’s journey fifty years earlier, it was not until the Gold Rush that they came in large numbers. These miners came to the territory with nothing except an insatiable desire for gold. They came empty-handed and they were starving. The Sto:lo took pity

upon these men, bringing them into the community where they were clothed, sheltered and fed. However, no amount of salmon could suppress their appetites, for what they craved was gold. Hence, the phrase “*Xwelitem*” has been used to refer to non-Native people. Despite this meaning, Rick finished our outing by sharing his fear that it is now Indigenous peoples that are the “hungry ones”. We have become the *Xwelitem*. I mention this conversation because how useful this understanding will be throughout the rest of my project.

In brief, this first experience on the water was one of the most powerful and awe-inspiring events of my life. I could seek to describe the landscape, the river, and its inhabitants in the most detailed splendor, but it would still fail to capture the true power of what I felt. It is something that can only be experienced. However, as this project will demonstrate, these opportunities are being systematically limited by the Canadian state.

### **Staying Afloat in the Community**

Beyond the Douglas/Quipp family, I was fortunate enough to get to know a number of the other families who live in Cheam, including the Victors, Edwards, Alecks, and Neumans. From my first day in Cheam, it was clear that many people in the community were gravitating towards ball hockey. A number of young men and women in the community had recently taken up playing the sport and it was not long before I joined in. Many of these young ones have had problems with drugs and alcohol and they were finding refuge in playing hockey. In fact, I played, on average, four to five hours of ball hockey a day for two months. Over this time I began to see drastic changes in many players. There was a confidence that was not there before. It was easy to see the life return to these young men and women.

What was striking was the support the players received from the community. There were always a number of parents and grandparents, along with dozens of children who came out to watch us play. They even came out to practices! As I began to work my way up the ranks, people soon began inviting me into their homes. Typically, they would want to know why I was in the community. I would generally introduce myself, my family, nation, and share a little about myself. Upon hearing that I was dealing with fishing issues, members of the community were always eager to share their stories, concerns, issues and experiences. Most of the youth in the community were raised in the community, on the water. They have lived on the river, as Cheam. However, I was always told of how difficult it is to feed one's family from the river alone. There are just not enough salmon anymore. There are too few openings issued by the DFO. Many fishers have been verbally and physically attacked on the river, both by recreational fishers, as well as by the fisheries department itself. Many nights are spent hanging nets, mending holes and ensuring boats are maintained and ready to go. Ultimately, tomorrow comes and the river remains "closed". It was through these visits that I was able to gain a deeper appreciation of what it means to be Sto:lo. It is at the dinner tables and on the couches of Cheam that I began to "experience the experience" of being in Cheam.

In addition to this, I spent much of my days in the band council office. There are tens of thousands of documents in the Cheam Indian Band archives. As I have already mentioned, I did not come to Cheam with a fixed academic project. At the time, the band had recently hired someone to undertake the task of cleaning, sorting, and organization all of these files. When I arrived, this project was in the early stages. Over time, however, these records have found homes. June and I were content to allow our relationship to continue developing before deciding

on a topic. Ultimately, we worked out a project that would consider both my interests and the needs of the community. My focus was on trying to understand the relationships that I had began to build, but the archives were certainly a source of inspiration. While the dynamics of my work were always changing, I tried to delve into past documents so that I could draw connections with the lived experiences that were shared with me during my stay. As these archives continue to be shelved and organized, a whole wealth of information will become available for the community to use in its journey.

### **An Understanding of Sto:lo Identity**

Upon reflection, I believe that my approach meshed quite well with what the people of Cheam wanted to show me about themselves. Evidence of this, I believe, can be seen in the many relationships that I have built with children, youth, and elders alike. I have spent time with June and her family, I've been in many homes (and hockey rinks) around the village, and I spent a great deal of time in the band's offices. One strand through the stories I have heard at each of these locales, is that of colonial imposition. Canada and British Columbia have long sought to separate Indigenous peoples from their territories. For the Sto:lo this has meant forced separation from the salmon people, who are not just a source of food for the people of Cheam, they are also the source of identity and sense of self for the entire nation. For the Pilalt, this has meant a separation from their role as the caretakers of the Sto:lo river. Despite these infringements, Cheam also has a strong tradition of resistance. They have never relinquished their responsibilities to the homelands, their ancestors, or to the rest of creation.

In this chapter, I have sought to establish an understanding of what it means to be Sto:lo, to be Cheam. I have tried to convey the complexity of this identity. The Sto:lo way of life is undoubtedly intergenerational, interterritorial, and international.

To be Cheam is to respect and honour the struggles of their ancestors. To be Cheam is to be responsible for that history of resistance, to breathe life into that past so that it may live today. On the other hand, Sto:lo identity also focuses upon the generations that are still to come. The people of Cheam are constantly trying to find new ways to teach their children their traditions *on the river*.

To be Sto:lo is to pay heed to all of the nations within the confederacy. The village of Cheam does not exist in isolation, as there are kinship ties from the Fraser Canyon to the mouth of the Pacific, and beyond. The community continues to take these responsibilities seriously, and these obligations play a significant role in the way decisions are made.

My understanding of what it means to be from Cheam also includes an *international* or *interpersonal* element. Cheam maintains strong connections with other peoples, whether they be Sto:lo or *Xwelitem*. As the people of the river, the Sto:lo learn how to live from their relationship with the salmon peoples. The people of Cheam also identify strongly with their Pilalt ancestors. Prior to contact, the Pilalt were the stewards of the Sto:lo river, holding great responsibility in terms of the Sto:lo-salmon relationships. Living upon the most productive arm of the river, the Pilalt played host to many neighbouring nations who would come to fish.

Due to its proximity to the canyon, the Pilalt way of life centers around the sockeye salmon. Prior to contact, the Pilalt were known for their role as the “stewards” of the Sto:lo river. Pilalt territories cover the eastern portion of the Fraser Valley where the river begins to narrow

into the canyon. This has long presented the best fishing grounds, with people coming from far away, from nations such as the Quw'utsun, Wasanec, and Snuneymuxw, each in search of the opportunity to fish for Sto:lo salmon. As sockeye return to their homes upriver, they expend a lot of energy, burning much of their body weight. As they pass through Pilalt territory, the sockeye have ascended the river just far enough so that they are the ideal size for wind-drying. If that were not enough, the Fraser canyon provides the ideal conditions for dry racking as the warm summer winds are funneled through the cliffs along the river. Upon announcing their arrival, many visiting nations would pay tribute to the people of Cheam. Bringing gifts from their own territories, these Coast Salish nations came to Cheam because of the abundance of salmon during the summer months. The Pilalt, as stewards of the river, would not have seen this influx of visitors as an invasion. Instead, these migrations would have been seen as “more a reflection of the regional nature of Sto:lo socio-economic relationships and a reflection of the far reaching nature of the Sto:lo extended bilateral kinship system”<sup>9</sup>. It is this international relationship, more than any other, that defines the people of Cheam. It is worth repeating, but the salmon are the lifeblood of the nation.

In sum, to be Cheam, to be Sto:lo, to be Indigenous in *S'olh Temexw* is to be responsible to all of these facets of their identity.

It is obvious that the Sto:lo continue to see themselves as the people of the river. However, it will also become apparent that his conception of self is much different than, say, Canada's representations of Cheam. Again, I am reminded of Rick's words: “Let me tell you something. They hate us. They always have and they always will”. I have contended that

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<sup>9</sup> Mohs, Gordon. “The Upper Sto:lo Indians of British Columbia: An Ethno-Archaeological Review.” Unpublished Consultation Report for the Alliance of Tribal Councils, 1990. Cheam: Cheam Indian Band Archives. p. 4.

research has been a part of imperial and colonial rule. In this sense, we cannot speak of research, of being Indigenous, without an analysis of imperialism and colonialism as it pertains to the people of Cheam. Through the spread of imperialism, cultures have been expropriated, repackaged, and resold under countless forms. Such impositions have caused great cultural disruption and disconnection. As the next section will lay out, the Canadian state remains a colonial entity that actively seeks to separate Indigenous peoples from their identities, through disconnection, dispossession, and misrepresentation.

## **From Indigenous to Aboriginal: The Colonization of Sto:lo Homelands**

In the previous section, I spent a great deal of time trying to lay out an understanding of research within an Indigenous context. It was my contention that research is a process of coming to understand where we fit within creation. Research is a journey of reconnection, one in which we begin to relate to and participate with the energies and spirits that surround us. Our experiences as colonized peoples have shown us that our oppressors seek to separate us from our identities, from who we are as the *original peoples*. We know that the spread of imperialism and colonial rule has brought us into contact with a settler society that has come to take. They have taken our lands. They have taken our cultures, fractured our traditions and used any pieces they chose to entice us into following their lead. They have taken away our ability to see ourselves for who we truly are and they have given us a “toxic mimicry” of ourselves in return<sup>10</sup>. It is a distorted image and we cannot see ourselves in this light.

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<sup>10</sup> see Jensen, *op. cit.* p. 66.

It is crucial that we have an understanding of what colonialism entails, and more importantly, we must seek to comprehend how colonial processes have made their way into our lives. In the context of the Sto:lo people, this involves the development of the Canadian state, particularly within the confines of British Columbia. Foreign settlement on *S'olh Temexw* has had profound implications for Cheam, and the harms done to its peoples must be acknowledged. The Canadian state, in its federal and provincial forms, has imposed itself upon our communities and its legacy is well known. Beyond the structures of the state, there are a plethora of ideologies that have been pushed upon our peoples. We are systematically stripped of the experiences that are needed to *be* Indigenous. Instead, we are provided with opportunities to become 'civilized', 'developed', and 'modern'. As we will see, we are given the chance to be 'Aboriginal'.

For the past two centuries, nations along the Sto:lo river have encountered non-Indigenous foreigners. These men came hungry but they were visitors who were embraced by many communities. Upon his arrival on the beaches on Cheam, in 1862, Father Herboez was surprised and "precautious" when the Pelaltos "brought me a beautiful salmon as a present"<sup>11</sup>. These types of illustrations demonstrate the hospitality extended by Sto:lo people when recognizing guests on their homelands. Conversely, this example also shows how surprised *Xwelitem* visitors were at their reception by the Sto:lo. In retrospect, we now know why. When the prospect of profit presented itself, European imperialists began to settle the lands along the Sto:lo river and its tributaries. There was no effort on the part of colonial authorities to negotiate the terms of their stay. They ignored each of the nations that span the mighty Fraser. Since the colonization of *S'olh Temexw* began, Sto:lo peoples have had to confront the colonial state, in

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<sup>11</sup> Roman Catholic Oblate Missions, 1862, Vol. 1. Cheam: Cheam Indian Band Archives. p. 5.

Canada, which has imposed itself upon their homelands. In its bid for legitimacy, Canada has sought to transform Indigenous nations so that they may be subjected to imperial rule.

Based upon these experiences, we can say that imperialism is a total system of foreign power in which another people, culture and way of life *penetrate, transform, and define* our societies<sup>12</sup>. Through the settlement of Indigenous lands, particularly along the Fraser river, early colonialists sought to impose imperial rule in the name of the British Crown. To gain a meaningful understanding of these theories and processes, we must connect them to the pain and suffering caused by the disconnection and separation caused by colonial impositions. Colonial rule has sought to detach Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories. Sto:lo traditions hold great power in relation to the peoples who live on its lands (and in its waters). In order strengthen their own claims, British colonists deliberately damaged Sto:lo ways of life, including its structures and worldviews. From this position of weakness, Indigenous nations have been force-fed the ways of their oppressors. Imperialism is, therefore, the practices, theories and attitudes of the European ruling class that allow for the penetration, transformation, and (re)definition of Indigenous societies.

From this we can say that colonialism entails the implanting of European settlements on to Indigenous lands. Colonialism is centered upon the invasion and occupation of Sto:lo homelands and the subjugation of traditional ways of life for the purposes of profit, expansion, and domination<sup>13</sup>. However, it is important to note that Indigenous peoples do not experience imperialism or colonialism as abstract theories. Indigenous understandings of colonial processes

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<sup>12</sup> This definition is based upon a “working definition” formulated by the students in our program. It has since been developed into its present form. See also “colonialism”.

<sup>13</sup> This definition is also drawn from IGOV seminar and course work.

are based upon lived experience. As such, we must always remember that colonialism represents a “set of real people and relationships and structures”<sup>14</sup>.

### **Encountering the *Xwelitem*s**

While the 1808 arrival of Simon Fraser, a fur prospector for the North West Company, is commonly known as the “first contact” between the Sto:lo and European peoples, this visit is said to have had a “relatively small impact upon Sto:lo society”<sup>15</sup>. The oral histories of many Sto:lo nation communities tell us that the people knew that foreign visitors would be coming. Starting in 1776, James Cook and George Vancouver came, hand-in-hand, claiming the territories of our ancestors as their own. In my territory, these Europeans had a hunger for the skins of our otters, which were thick and golden. As Snuneymuxw, my ancestors would have made many journeys across the Salish sea, up the river into the canyon. We would have negotiated our way up these waters through a series of kinship relations. Many Salish people would have come to Pilalt territory in the summer months. We would have brought many of the prized gifts from our lands and our waters in exchange for the early sockeye that were dried in the warm canyon winds. We would have brought stories of these sea-faring men.

From these initial encounters with Europeans, a series of epidemics began to devastate Sto:lo territories. The smallpox epidemic of 1782 is said to have made its way into the Sto:lo nations from the west through many of the extensive kinship and trade relations that the people had with each other, and with other Indigenous peoples. This epidemic was the first of many,

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<sup>14</sup> Alfred, Taiiaki. 1999. *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*. Toronto: Oxford University Press. p. 79.

<sup>15</sup> Carlson, Keith Thor. 1997. *You Are Asked To Witness: The Sto:lo in Canada's Pacific Coast History*. Mission: Sto:lo Heritage Trust. p. 28.

each of which devastated the Sto:lo. By the time Simon Fraser reached *S'olh Temexw*, the Sto:lo people would have been reeling from extreme loss due to disease. A great deal of knowledge would have been lost as transmission across generations was immediately compromised. Many nations, including Sto:lo peoples, would have been compromised and fragmented due to these losses. However, those who survived would have been raised in their cultural traditions. They would have been able to maintain many, but not all, of the social relations that had formed the basis of their communities. Estimates of population loss range from six-two percent to more than ninety-five percent, with elderly people being disproportionately affected<sup>16</sup>. Drawing upon numbers drawn from the journals of Simon Fraser, Gordon Mohs posits that there were at least 28,000 Sto:lo people in more than seventy villages (each with an average of 400 people) along the river<sup>17</sup>. What is striking is that these numbers would have been quite low as they were within a few years of post-contact epidemics.

Being short in numbers, Sto:lo nations would have come together unlike ever before. Prior to European contact, the people of Cheam identified most closely with the Pilalt nation. Their traditional territories, *Pilalt Temexw*, were centered on the Sto:lo river in its last stretch as it winds into the canyon. Many of the fishing spots in the canyon are known as shared territories, common to all Sto:lo peoples. Families from all over *S'olh Temexw* held rights and responsibilities over certain parts of the river. As the peoples who lived on the length of river leading up to the ravines, which are known for concentration of salmon as they return home, the Pilalt were in a special position to surveil and commune with the salmon. Over many

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<sup>16</sup> See Carlson, *op. cit.*, *You Are Asked To Witness*, pp. 56-68. For a broad look at the impacts of European diseases upon Indigenous peoples of the so-called Americas, see Charles Mann, *1491*, pp. 24-36.

<sup>17</sup> Mohs, *op. cit.*, p. 52-54.

generations, the nation was able to develop a close relationship with the sockeye people. So when other Sto:lo nations would come to Pilalt territories, they would have communicated and consulted with the people of Cheam in respect to their rights and responsibilities as visitors. Due to the extreme impact of diseases, such as smallpox and tuberculosis, nations along the Sto:lo came together unlike ever before. Most bands would have been decimated, and it was crucial for each community to rely upon its familial ties in neighbouring areas. Today, we see this coalescence in the identification of the people of *S'olh Temexw* as “Sto:lo”. While respect must be paid to the relations that exist between the people of the river, it is through the collective strength of each of its nations that the Sto:lo confederacy has been able to thrive on these territories. Those First Nations who live along the Fraser river (and its tributaries) must stand strong as Sto:lo, but each nation must “remember” their place within creation. This is precisely what would have happened as the rounds of European diseases afflicted our lands.

Then came the *Xwelitem*.

This time the Europeans came from the east. They came looking to trade for the furs described by Cook, Vancouver, Fraser and other European scouts. They came knowing, from the reports put forth by men such as Simon Fraser, that they would encounter a series of Indigenous peoples who lived along the river. These Europeans came to Sto:lo territory beaten and on the verge of starvation. As visitors, they were brought into Sto:lo homes and given food and shelter. They filled themselves with salmon. They felt what it was like to be Sto:lo. But none of this was enough. They began to set up their own homes under the auspices of the Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1827, Fort Langley established the first trading post on Sto:lo territory. This marks the start of direct economic relationships with European merchants. British fur traders saw the

opportunity to secure economic advantages for themselves through export to imperial centres in Asia and Europe. Whether for exportation over land to the east or by a maritime route to the west, these early Europeans were desperate to trade for the furs of many from *S'olh Temexw*. They came too far to leave empty handed. European goods were nice but by no means necessary to the survival of the Sto:lo people. As such, the Sto:lo were able to maintain trade relations on their own terms. Carlson (1997) notes that the “sea, river, and forests were so plentiful that the Sto:lo needed little from the fort, and therefore saw no reason to alter their lifestyle to accommodate the HBC”<sup>18</sup>. European visitors would have been forced to adhere to local traditions in order to secure the access to trade relations for which they came.

For instance, Fort Langley was established as a fur post. However, as the people of the river, the Sto:lo were more inclined to deal with salmon. Due to the influence that Sto:lo nations continued to possess, the outpost would remain but its focus would be upon the trade of salmon. This type of relationship, on Sto:lo territory according to Sto:lo ways, would flourish for many years. There would have been very little reason for the Sto:lo people to consider early Europeans as threats to their territorial integrity. Once again, however, the appetite of these visitors proved to be insatiable.

### **From Visitors to Squatters**

The Gold Rush of 1858 is a turning point in recent Sto:lo history. It is this event, more than any other, that spurred the settlement and colonization of Sto:lo homelands. During that summer, word had reached San Francisco, which had been amidst a gold rush of its own for the past decade, that there were bars along the Fraser River that were replete with gold. As such,

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<sup>18</sup> Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

gangs of miners came flooding onto Sto:lo territory. Between May and July of 1858, more than thirty thousand gold miners arrived in the Fraser Canyon. This resulted in the intense exploitation of the sandbars along the river. Here we see that, “unlike the men at Fort Langley, who realized that they needed to develop positive relationships with the Sto:lo in order to prosper, the gold miners sought to pursue their dreams of fortune *despite* the Sto:lo”<sup>19</sup>.

As American prospectors began encroaching upon Sto:lo lands, the British colonial government took notice. Upon arrival, gold miners began laying claim to deposits along the Fraser River. To assert its presence, on August 1, 1858, all the lands of *S’olh Temexw* were declared to have become a colony in the British empire. This ensured the government could issue licenses and collect rents from gold miners along the river. In reality, this was unbeknownst to most Sto:lo communities. The colonial government began its occupation by catering to Euroamerican settlers. For instance, gold prospectors were “issued 25 square foot claims” by the colonial government<sup>20</sup>. While the size of these allotments may seem insignificant to some, it is important to note that there was an influx of more than 30,000 foreigners, each of whom could bring forth a claim to the colonial government. Considering their numbers, these claims become astronomical. While the gold rush lasted only a couple of months, it was enough to spur the settlement of the colony. These land claims were all along the river and were issued without regard for its original peoples, namely the Sto:lo. Colonialism, in this sense, represents the implanting of foreign settlements upon Indigenous homelands. Our experiences have shown that colonialism is an all-encompassing system that involves the invasion and occupation of our homelands and the subjugation of our traditional ways of life.

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<sup>19</sup> Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>20</sup> Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

## **From Squatters to Colonizers**

In the wake of the Fraser River gold rush, it is clear that the British empire intended on asserting itself as the highest authority in the area, as evidenced by its allotment of bars along the river to American miners. They came as visitors but soon they wanted to stay. Most European nations had devastated their own territories but since their economies were based upon constant growth, these nations began infringing upon other peoples' lands. This certainly holds true for the British on Sto:lo territory. Fur traders came to obtain the skins of many animals who share our lands. While they were quite successful in their endeavour, the Sto:lo people would not stand by while the *Xwelitem* ate everything in sight. Trade relations between the Sto:lo and *Xwelitem* were long-standing and well-established. However, they were becoming inconvenient for the foreign populations who sought to settle on *S'olh Temexw*. Realizing that that the "fusion of Indigenous cultures with their land is so complete that the only way to take that land is to destroy the Indigenous culture", the British colonialist sought to destroy the Sto:lo people<sup>21</sup>.

This necessitated a physical separation of Indigenous peoples from our ancestral homelands. If we are not allowed to commune with other entities, then we are unable to access the knowledge and wisdom needed to live a good life. This includes the spirits of our ancestors as well as all of the entities of creation who share our territories. It is through the establishment and maintenance of relationships with these peoples that we come to know how to live together. Our responsibilities as Indigenous peoples come from these original instructions. For the Sto:lo people this means a life on the river. The Pilalt have a unique responsibility, which emanates

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<sup>21</sup> Neu, Dean and Richard Thierrien. 2004. *Accounting For Genocide: Canada's Bureaucratic Assault on Aboriginal People*. New York: Zed Books Ltd. p. 9.

from the land itself, to build relationships with those who have learned how to live in *S'olh Temexw*, namely the salmon peoples. By taking their flesh, we become responsible for the survival of the salmon. Here we begin to see that it is “individual and shared responsibilities to the natural world that form the basis for Indigenous governance and relationships to family, community, and homelands”<sup>22</sup>. These form the natural laws that have empowered our nations and kept us strong. In this respect, the only way to wrest the land from Indigenous peoples has been to actively destroy our cultures.

European expansion was taking place long before settlers came to *S'olh Temexw*. Colonialism, as defined above, is a tool that serves an imperial agenda. Imperialism can be thought of as the total system of foreign power in which another culture, people and way of life *penetrates, transforms, and defines* the colonized society for the purposes of economic exploitation. European imperialists came to Sto:lo territories in search of animals whose skins could be sold for profit abroad. They wanted to ensure that they would regulate the relationship with these entities. Hence, they imposed their own system of control upon Indigenous lands. Colonies were established in order to facilitate this expansion, as well as to ensure that control remained in European hands. At every step, British colonizers were reserving privileges for themselves. These profits and privileges came at a price, and it has been the Sto:lo people that have paid the price. Such is the story of the colony of British Columbia. Ever since the *Xwelitem* have begun to settle on Sto:lo territory, they have persistently sought to subjugate its Indigenous peoples.

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<sup>22</sup> Corntassel, Jeff. “Toward Sustainable Self-Determination: Rethinking the Contemporary Indigenous-Rights Discourse.” *Alternatives*, Vol. 33, 2008. 105-132. p. 122.

Before establishing the colony of British Columbia, European imperialists had not established any procedures for negotiating their relationship with the Sto:lo people. However, European settlers did have centuries of experience along the eastern seaboard wherein they were able to negotiate their status as visitors on Indigenous lands. One such example is the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*.

The *Royal Proclamation* was issued by the British monarchy to announce the premises of its relationship to the “New World”. From the settler perspective, this proclamation claimed all of the lands from Hudson’s Bay to the Pacific Ocean, allowing the British empire to reserve profits derived from the fur trade, and later settlement, for itself. It explicitly states that the “several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom we are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed”<sup>23</sup>. However, the act also “recognized the rights of Indians to unceded lands in their possession”<sup>24</sup>. The significance of the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* lies in its affirmation of the nation-to-nation relationship that had come to govern British-Indigenous relations in the east. So while this did not create Aboriginal title, it did provide clear confirmation for its existence. On a basic level, the *Proclamation* confirmed the British empire’s commitment to the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island according to the principles established by the Two-Row Wampum.

The Two-Row wampum, or *Kaswentha*, principle exists within an international context. The notion arose from the 1613 treaties between the Kanien’kehaka and Dutch settlers and

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<sup>23</sup> Neu, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> Isaac, Thomas. 2004. *Aboriginal Law: Commentary, Cases and Materials*. Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd. p. 4.

became the basis for Indigenous-European relations for many years. The wampum exchanged at these proceedings presented two rows of beads running parallel along the belts. These rows

“symbolize the two paths or two vessels, travelling down the same river together. One, a birch bark canoe, will be for the Indian people, their laws, their customs and their ways. The other, a ship, will be for the white people and their laws, their customs and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will try to steer the other’s vessel”<sup>25</sup>.

These vessels, the canoe and the ship, represent Indigenous and European peoples, respectively. Together we travel the river time, but we do so in our own ways, with our own integrity. As noted by John Burrows, the Two-Row Wampum “reflects a conception of governance that recognizes the simultaneous interaction and separation of settler and First Nations societies”<sup>26</sup>. As such, any interference with the autonomy or freedom of the other was strictly forbidden. “So long as these principles were respected, the relationship would be peaceful, harmonious, and just”<sup>27</sup>.

This understanding of the Two-Row Wampum, as enshrined in the *Royal Proclamation*, is typically held as the ideal means by which treaties between our peoples are interpreted. This tradition remains the only coherent theory regarding British sovereignty that is not based upon supremacist ideology. Europeans had the right to be in North America because of their negotiations and agreements with its original inhabitants. They are here today because of treaties. Settlers were allowed to establish and maintain their own political traditions because they

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<sup>25</sup> Imai, Shin. 1999. *Aboriginal Law Handbook*. Scarborough: Carswell Thomson Professional Publishing. p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Burrows, John. 2002. *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. p. 126.

<sup>27</sup> Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness, op. cit.*, p. 52.

negotiated treaties with the Indigenous nations in which they came into contact. The Canadian Constitution is itself a treaty right. However, Indigenous peoples know all too well that treaty obligations have not been met. The Covenant Chain remains broken. This approach was never implemented in British Columbia. Without the negotiation of treaties, the occupation of the Fraser Valley by foreign settlers was (and is) illegal, even according to the colonizer's own laws. We can say with absolute certainty, that the Crown's own laws were being systematically broken in the way British Columbia was developing, both politically and economically.

### **The Xwelitem Bring Civilization**

*“Colonization necessarily involves the contact, and practically the collusion, of two races of men - one superior, and one inferior - the latter being in possession of the soil, the former gradually supplanting it. The history of every civilized country illustrates the truth of this proposition... The rights of the Indian we have always defended, and we will always defend them. But these rights we do not conceive to be to hold large tracts of valuable agricultural and pastoral land, which they do not use, and cannot use” New Westminster British Columbian, Dec 1865*

Thus far, I have sought to demonstrate that, initially, European peoples came to Sto:lo territory as visitors. While the people of Cheam would have been reeling from the devastating impact of foreign diseases, such as smallpox, upon the community, early contact with European traders had little impact on the integrity of the nation. Upon discovering deposits of gold along the Fraser River, British imperialists immediately began to settle on Sto:lo lands. Furthermore, we have seen that the English had centuries of prior experiences with First Nations to the east. They had even gone so far as to develop formal procedures to develop relationships with Indigenous nations. We see these principles enshrined in the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*. This approach entailed a nation-to-nation relationship, wherein Indigenous and European ways of life would coexist without infringing upon the autonomy, freedom, or power of the other. In this

context, the British Crown negotiated thousands of treaties with Indigenous nations across what is now North America. However, we have also seen that early settlers sought to displace the original peoples of *S'olh Temexw*. They were not interested in any meaningful form of coexistence with the Sto:lo nations. In fact, the Crown was in the process of consolidating its powers across the continent in hopes of establishing itself as a colonial state, that is, Canada.

European imperialists came to Sto:lo territories in search of animals whose skins could be sold for profit abroad. They returned in search of gold. And just in case there was anything else they might deem valuable in the future, European settlers decided to maintain their presence. Rather than establish treaties with the Sto:lo people, they imposed their own system of control with every intention of dominating and exploiting all the forms of life that thrive on *S'olh Temexw*. Colonies were established in order to facilitate this expansion, as well as to ensure that control remained in European hands.

Colonialism, as we have seen, is the story of Indigenous lives and our encounters with settler society. It is about how our peoples have been stripped of our spiritual, physical, mental, and intellectual powers so that our freedoms may be restricted. This includes the colonization of Indigenous lands, as well as the colonization of Indigenous minds. It is through the forced disconnection from our lands, our social relations, our histories, our own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world that the *Xwelitem* have been able to penetrate, transform, and define Sto:lo society for their own purposes. In turn, our ways are replaced with the ways of our oppressors.

The *Xwelitem* way of life, which we now know as “civilization”, is dependent upon ownership of land. It is assumed that land, as the cumulation of all the spiritual entities that

shared a particular territory, can be placed under the exclusive control of certain people. This way of life posits that humans can possess (or own) the ability to dominate and exploit the rest of creation within their areas of property. This belief finds its roots deep within European imperial traditions. European Judeo-Christianity, which dates back millennia, posits that human beings (and men in particular) are the pinnacle of creation. In the first book of the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis posits that God said: “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth”<sup>28</sup>. From this exalted position, God then tasks man with the responsibility to “fill the earth and subdue it”<sup>29</sup>. Here we see a deliberate separation of humans from the rest of creation. Man is placed above all. Even more than that, humans are tasked with dominating nature in whatever ways they may deem necessary. The implication of such a position is that human perspectives, needs and desires are put into a position of privilege despite being amongst the last to join creation. Here we see the “rejection of creation as a living ecosystem” and “the concept of nature as depraved, an object for exploitation and nothing more”<sup>30</sup>. This objectification of creation, when paired with economic exploitation, allows the entities of the earth to become commodities fit for trade in an industrial economy. These interpretations of the world held that “civilized people exploited natural resources and manipulated the environment to serve their purposes, by cutting down trees, planting crops, mining the earth, and constructing factories”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> *Holy Bible*, King James Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Genesis: 1:26.

<sup>29</sup> *Holy Bible*, *op. cit.*, Genesis: 1:28.

<sup>30</sup> Deloria, Jr., Vine. 2003. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing. p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Carlson, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

This position stands in opposition to the views held by Indigenous peoples, such as the Sto:lo. The people of Cheam are an intricate part of the land, *Pilalt Temexw*. Our responsibility, as Indigenous peoples, is to seek to understand where our place fits within creation. We learn this knowledge by fostering relations with those who came before us. The salmon have lived here much longer than humans. Likewise, the river was here before the salmon. It is from the spirits of the river, of the salmon, and of their ancestors that the people of Cheam learn how to live.

Settler society, however, saw the rest of creation as objects that needed to be transformed, consumed, and marketed before they became valuable. Indeed, we have seen that they saw this as their religious obligation. To separate oneself from the rest of creation and to act to exploit and dominate nature is the essence of civilization. To Europeans this was the most advanced and highly developed stage for a society to reach. They believed that human populations were meant to “progress” from a state of savagery to become civilized. Since settler society failed to connect with or seek to understand Sto:lo ways of life, they were deemed subordinate. This has created misconceptions about Indigenous peoples which have persisted through to today. Here we see that the:

“advances on the voyage of progress [are] marked by the distance, implied by the dominion of humankind over nature, between society and nature. The more nature was mastered, the less humankind was dependent on nature, and the further humankind moved in the line of progress”<sup>32</sup>.

From this perspective, wherein progress and civilization are considered the most advanced state of human societies, the destruction of all other cultures makes perfect sense.

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<sup>32</sup> Blaser, Mario. “Life Projects: Indigenous Peoples’ Agency and Development.” In *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects and Globalization*. Ed. Mario Blaser, Harvey Feit, and Glenn McRae. Ottawa: Zed Books Ltd., 2004. 26-46. p. 27.

On the other hand, Sto:lo nations such as Cheam have experienced civilization from a much different perspective. For Cheam, civilization has involved the dispossession of their homelands, disconnection from their traditional cultures, and persistent attempts to make *Xwelitem*s out of the Sto:lo people. European colonizers have always ignored the realities faced by Sto:lo peoples because of their decision to stay. Instead, they relegated Indigenous peoples to the lower sections of their societies. They have treated us as if we were their children, whom they believe must be shaped and controlled.

### **Kill the Indian, Save the Child**

One of the first institutions established by settler society on Sto:lo territory was the St. Mary's residential school in present-day Mission. The school was operated by the Roman Catholic Oblates who came north from the United States following the Fraser River Gold Rush. Led by Father Leon Fouquet, the Oblates set up the school to act as a "fortress against the state worse than barbarism seen among the native people"<sup>33</sup>. Amongst his first acts upon arriving in *S'olh Temexw*, Fouquet spit in the face Quitselkanum, a revered Sto:lo leader. The Oblates had a strict adherence to the notion Original Sin, which proclaims that children are inherently "bad", born as sinners. Due to this inherency, children must be quelled from evil through a proper Christian education. In this sense, children must forget what it means to be human so that they could learn to be civilized.

For civilized culture, it is separation which prepares the way for selfhood. Even today, mainstream society holds the belief that personal development requires children to move away from their parents and families. We must "make it on our own". While this has been normalized

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<sup>33</sup> Glavin, Terry. 2002. *Amongst God's Own: The Enduring Legacy of St. Mary's Mission*. Vancouver: New Star Books. p. 18.

today, it is not the way of Indigenous peoples. Our development as individuals must take place within the context of community. As we have seen, this conception of community goes beyond human relations and includes many of the entities with whom we come into contact.

Unfortunately, experience has shown that isolation is an important tool of colonization. By removing Indigenous children from their families, the residential school at St. Mary's immediately isolated an entire generation of Sto:lo children from their lands. While at the school, young Sto:lo children were taught that their own traditions were inferior to those of the *Xwelitem*. After shutting these youth off from any form of meaningful support, the Oblates began to bombard them with colonial propaganda "carefully aimed at convincing them that they [were] backward, ignorant, weak, insignificant, and very, very fortunate to have been colonized"<sup>34</sup>.

For this reason, we must consider the residential school system as part of the colonial structure, alongside the imperial government, its courts and such. Since the colonial government in British Columbia had little in terms of capital to develop its economies of resource-extraction, there were certainly no funds to be given to the Oblates at St. Mary's. However, the St. Mary's mission was immediately offered support by the colonial government. B.C. Indian Commissioner I.W. Powell posited that "barbarism can only be cured by education", adding that residential school such as St. Mary's deserved applause for their efforts in "the emancipation of the Indian from his inherent superstition and gross ignorance"<sup>35</sup>. It was Powell's contention that if it were possible to remove Sto:lo children from their communities for long enough, a generation of English-speaking Natives accustomed to the ways of civilized life could be produced, thereby

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<sup>34</sup> Daes, Erica-Irene. "Prologue: The Experience of Colonization Around the World." In *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Ed. Marie Battiste. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000. p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Glavin, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

solving the “Indian Problem”. In this sense, Wa Thiong’o (1993) is correct to assert that “it can never be in the interests of the section controlling the wealth, power, and the instruments of self-definition to provide the other sections with the true and correct picture of things as they are”<sup>36</sup>.

One of the facets of Indigenous life that the Oblates were most active in suppressing was the use of traditional languages. For instance, Sto:lo children attending St. Mary’s were forbidden to speak *Halq’emeylem*. Children were told that the language of their ancestors was “evil” and “inferior”. Instead, they were forced to learn the English language. If any students were heard conversing in their native tongue, the Fathers and Sisters certainly had the discretionary powers to force children to converse in English. African scholar Ngugi Wa Thiong’o aptly notes that “[Indigenous] languages were oppressed so that we, the captives, would not have our own mirrors in which to observe ourselves and our enemies”<sup>37</sup>. Our languages were not merely a means by which we communicated, they were the means by which we came to understand ourselves and the world in which we live.

*Halq’emeylem* is the language of the Sto:lo people and it is a direct reflection of their relationship to their territory. It reflects the actions of Sto:lo people as they relate to their surroundings. By stripping Sto:lo children of the ability to speak their own language, they were denied the chance to see themselves in the same light as their ancestors. Traditionally, stories have been passed on from one generation to the next through the use of Indigenous languages. Language, in this sense, allows for the transmission of cultural beliefs, practices, and lived experiences over great periods of time. It is also through the language of ceremony that Sto:lo

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<sup>36</sup> Wa Thiong’o, Ngugi. 1993. *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. London: James Currey Ltd. p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> Wa Thiong’o, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

peoples are able to connect and renew their relationships with their ancestors. We begin to see that *Halq'emeylem* is the vessel that supports the entire Sto:lo worldview. Hence, the suppression of *Halq'emeylem* must be seen as an attempt to isolate Sto:lo children from their ancestors, their past, their histories.

This education in civilization was meant to shatter the “mirrors” from which the Sto:lo are able to see themselves. These mirrors were then replaced with those of the colonizer. Inevitably, these representations have presented an image of Sto:lo people as savage, uncivilized, and backward. In a distortion of history, the Sto:lo are made to look as though they were in the way of “progress”. If Indigenusness is viewed as a “state of backwardness, Indigenous peoples’ needs might be taken to be progress guided by those who are more advanced, as the rhetoric of the civilizing mission and its successor, development, has it”<sup>38</sup>. However, if Indigenusness is seen for its connections and harmony with the rest of creation, our needs might include the preservation of our cultures. Colonial institutions, such as the residential school system, have served to obscure such realities.

Even today, authors such as Terry Glavin have sought to portray Sto:lo experiences at St. Mary’s in a positive light. In *Amongst God’s Own*, Glavin tries to challenge what he calls the “dominance of a single narrative template” of residential schools as oppressive and Indigenous peoples as victims<sup>39</sup>. While he admits that some abuses did occur, he indicates that he wrote *Amongst God’s Own* to show that not all residential experiences point to suffering. This is

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<sup>38</sup> Blaser, Mario. “‘Way of Life’ or ‘Who Decides’: Development, Paraguayan Indigenism and the Yshiro People’s Life Projects.” In *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects and Globalization*. Ed. Mario Blaser, Harvey Feit, and Glenn McRae. Ottawa: Zed Books Ltd., 2004. 52-71. p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> Glavin, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

certainly true. There are many stories shared amongst the people of Cheam that point to positive experiences while attending St. Mary's. There are stories of family and friendship. There are stories of opposition and resistance. There are stories of young Sto:lo children overcoming their experiences to become great leaders in their communities. I would argue, however, that this is due to the resilient spirit of the Sto:lo people rather than a reflection of the school's beneficence. These experiences do not change the underlying intentions of the school, which was the destruction of Sto:lo nationhood and the integration of Indigenous peoples into the imperial structure. As Cheam elder Joe Aleck notes, "There was abuse, and there was neglect... The way the government wanted to take our culture away, our language away, I could almost call it genocide"<sup>40</sup>.

I have chosen the example of the residential schooling experiment on Sto:lo homelands because it illustrates many of the facets of colonial rule that continue to plague the people of Cheam today. We have seen that colonialism, as the invasion and occupation of Indigenous territories, requires the penetration, transformation, and redefinition of Indigenous nations for the purposes of imperial profit and privilege. Moreover, we have seen that the colonization of *S'olh Temexw* has compromised and ignored the integrity of Indigenous nationhood. Unlike Indigenous-settler relations in the east, the Sto:lo-*Xwelitem* relationship has been much more one-sided. European imperialists did not see Sto:lo communities as nations. Rather they were seen as impediments to "progress" and "civilization". From this perspective, Native peoples have been assimilated into the colonial hierarchy. Today, Indigenous peoples are treated as First Nations *within* Canada. Whether treated as "wards" of the state or as lower forms of government,

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<sup>40</sup> Glavin, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

the Sto:lo people have been denied nationhood upon their own homelands. For instance, the Pilalt nation had special responsibilities for the early summer sockeye in their return to northern spawning grounds. By taking control over the fisheries along the Fraser river, successive colonial governments have made it clear that they believe Canada is the highest authority over Cheam's homelands.

This cursory, albeit superficial, glimpse into the colonial impositions at St. Mary's has also served to demonstrate the active disconnection of Indigenous peoples from the source of their experiences and responsibilities. This entails separation of Cheam people from their ancestral homelands, especially the Sto:lo river. It includes the detachment of Sto:lo children from their families and from the rest of creation. Generations of Sto:lo children have been denied the chance to *be* Sto:lo. We have seen the deliberate destruction of Indigenous forms of self-definition. In short, our cultural traditions, our "mirrors", have been taken away and fragmented.

Finally, this example has shown that penetration and transformation are not enough. Colonial society must also seek to redefine how Indigenous peoples see themselves. After actively destroying Indigenous ways of thinking and being, they must be replaced with the "civilized" ways of colonial society. These ways have been shown to present a distorted image of Native peoples. Unfortunately, many of our peoples have come to see themselves in the mirrors given to them by those who benefit from our oppression. In short, we have come to see ourselves the way they want to see us. We have come to see ourselves as "Aboriginals".

## From Original to Aboriginal

*“[C]onquest of the Indigenous population becomes inevitability only when settlers’ imperial claims to legitimacy are accepted and normalized by Indigenous peoples. Legitimation (acceptance and support for colonial institutions) is a fundamental mandate of the colonial regime.” - Taiaiake Alfred<sup>41</sup>*

In the first section of this project, we began to see what it means to “be Indigenous”. I argued that to be Indigenous is to be a part of the original peoples of a particular territory. As the original peoples, Indigenous nations each have their own cultures, traditions, and practices that arise from and for the lands in which they reside. Indigenous peoples share similar worldviews, believing that human peoples must share their space with other spiritual entities. In this light, to be Indigenous is to live life in harmony with the rest of creation. All Indigenous peoples have their own original instructions on how to live in communion with others. It is through the establishment and maintenance of reciprocal relations with others that we are able to learn and live our sacred responsibilities.

Moreover, we have seen that to be Cheam is to be Native to the Sto:lo river. The people of Cheam live beneath the protection of *Lhilheqey*, also known as Mount Cheam, the protector of life on *S’olh Temexw*. To be Sto:lo to is live life on the river, alongside the many salmon peoples. The people of Cheam have been taught to learn from the salmon. It is from the salmon peoples that the Sto:lo are able to learn how to live on their homelands. In this sense, to be Cheam is to be responsible for *S’olh Temexw* and to each of the nations sharing its territory. Being Indigenous in Cheam is to be responsible for the teachings of the ancestors. It is also about being responsible for the generations yet to come.

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<sup>41</sup> Alfred, Taiaiake. “Colonialism and State Dependency.” *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, Vol. 5(2), Nov. 2009. 42-60. p. 50.

Unfortunately, we have also seen how European imperialists have managed to penetrate, transform, and define Sto:lo nations. Colonial rule has consistently sought to reserve profit and privilege for European settlers, much to the detriment of the Indigenous populations. Early colonial governments favoured foreign gold miners, for instance, so that they could establish a regime of privilege. Through its support for the “civilizing mission” put forth by the residential school system, successive colonial governments have altered the way Indigenous peoples see themselves, as individuals and as nations.

As noted above, conquest of Indigenous peoples become inevitable only when settlers’ claims to legitimacy are “accepted and normalized” by Indigenous peoples. It is in this light that we must see Canada. Canadian history must be seen as an attempt to construct its own story, free from its European roots but independent from the realities of Indigenous nationhood. Hence, Canada’s history should be seen as a series of desperate attempts to connect to the lands north of the forty-ninth parallel. The only way to accomplish such a task has been to include Indigenous peoples within the state system, as “Aboriginals”.

Colonialism has sought to redefine Indigenous identities and sense of self into a series of abstractions that totally ignore lived realities. In essence, colonial ideologies have been pushed upon our nations. An ideology is basically an imaginary relationship between people and the real conditions of their existence<sup>42</sup>. As “imaginary” relationships, ideologies present false consciousnesses that are designed to colonize our minds so that we may be rendered into a position of weakness and complacency. Today, ideology works hidden behind state apparatuses and structures. If politics occupy center stage, it is the ruling ideology that works as the puppet

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<sup>42</sup> This particular definition is drawn from Louis Althusser’s *On Ideology*. New York: Verso. p. 36.

master. As we have seen, the colonial education system was designed and forced upon Indigenous peoples in order to produce (and reproduce) the forms of knowledge required to hold a particular occupation within colonial society. Furthermore, the education system has served to produce (and reproduce) submission and an acceptance of oppression. In both of these facets, education serves to fit Indigenous peoples into any number of colonial hierarchies, whether based upon race, sex, or class. Ultimately, colonialism as an ideology serves to generate power for the imperial elites in Canada<sup>43</sup>.

To be “Aboriginal” is to move away from being Indigenous. The prefix “ab” is used to denote a deviation or movement away from something. For instance, to be “abnormal” is to move away from the norm. In a similar vein, to be “Aboriginal” is to move away from what makes us the original peoples of our respective territories. Hence, “Aboriginal” may be described as the “terminological and psychic displacement of authentic Indigenous identities, beliefs, and behaviours with one designed by Indian Department bureaucrats, government lawyers, and judges to complete the imperial objective of exterminating [Indigenous] presences from the social and political landscape”<sup>44</sup>. As a colonial ideology, Aboriginalism presents a false consciousness that seeks to entrench colonial mentalities deep within First Nations’ cultures and societies. Aboriginalism keeps the Indigenous peoples of Canada submissive and complacent whilst their identities are actively destroyed. Perhaps this is best summarized by Taiaiake Alfred, Director of the Indigenous Governance program, when he says:

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<sup>43</sup> Barker, Adam. “The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and the Hybrid Colonial State.” *The American Indian Quarterly*, Vol 33(3), Summer 2009. 325-351. p. 325.

<sup>44</sup> Alfred, Taiaiake. 2005. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Peterborough: Broadview Press. p. 126.

“Aboriginalism obscures everything that is historically true and meaningful about [Indigenous peoples] - our origins, languages, and names; our land, our heritage, and our rights - and puts in their place views of history and of ourselves and our futures that are nothing more than self-justifying myths and fantasies of the Settler”<sup>45</sup>.

Successful British colonial governments, and now the Canadian state, have realized that they cannot silence Indigenous peoples nor can they deny the legitimacy of our claims to our ancestral homelands. Therefore, colonial regimes have deliberately sought to collaborate with certain Native people. Hence, colonialism via Aboriginalism seeks to establish a cooperative comprador class of formerly Indigenous people who will uphold the colonial apparatus. The colonialist hates the sight of the colonized but soon realizes that the colonized is indispensable<sup>46</sup>. For “the more freely he breathes, the more the colonized are choked”<sup>47</sup>. The profits and privileges of the colonialist come from the deprivations of the colonized, but the oppressor does not want to see this. As such, the colonizer seeks to make the colonized into his own image.

In confronting colonial authorities, Cree leader Harold Cardinal points out that if you “tell a person long enough and often enough that he is inferior, and likely he will eventually accept the false image you thrust upon him”<sup>48</sup>. Having faced colonial authorities for centuries, it is unfortunate, but many Indigenous peoples have begun to accept the ideology of our oppressors. Even worse, we have begun to live these false images. In doing so, we have allowed the assault upon our cultural identities to continue. We have seen that the colonial system perpetuates itself through a number of socio-economic and psychological rewards and

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>46</sup> This discussion is most drawn out in Memmi’s The Colonizer and the Colonized from pp. 51-69.

<sup>47</sup> Memmi, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> Cardinal, Harold. 1969. *The Unjust Society*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. p. 4.

punishments that are designed to coerce Indigenous peoples into accepting the social norms of whitestream society.

In this sense, Aboriginalism places all things European over and above Indigenous matters. It offers an identity of assimilation wherein our people are “manipulated by colonial myths into a submissive position and are told that by emulating Eurocanadian people they can gain acceptance and possibly even fulfillment within mainstream society”<sup>49</sup>. From this we must begin to see the *Xwelitem* as occupying a position of power and privilege. It is a position from which we have been systematically denied. Only by acting like the *Xwelitem*, measured by our willingness to leave behind our cultural responsibilities, are we able to access the power and privilege reserved for settler society. Rather than pursuing an abundance of good relations with the rest of creation, we become wealthy through the accumulation and control of private property. Therefore, the Aboriginal is an imperial tool that allows the empire’s capitalistic purposes to prevail.

Colonial authorities, such as the Canadian government, have actively prevented Indigenous leaders from fulfilling the goals and ambitions of their own people. These leaders have been manipulated into satisfying the objectives of the Canadian state, such as accelerated resource extraction and ever-increasing profits for the ruling class. This cooptation can be seen in all of our communities. Rather than seek internal peace within our nations, Aboriginals pursue stable relations with mainstream society. Once more we can find wisdom in the words of Taiaiake Alfred:

“Aboriginals, because they are, at base, cultural mirrors of the mainstream society and because they aspire to elite status inside Settler society, are

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<sup>49</sup> *Wasase, op. cit.*, p. 23.

afforded opportunities to usurp the voice and rights of Onkwehonwe to represent what it is to be Indigenous culturally and politically”<sup>50</sup>.

In short, it is through the use of Aboriginals that Canada is able to present an air of legitimacy. Indigenous peoples who are willing to become civilized lend a certain credence to Canada. Aboriginals may question government policies but they do not threaten the legitimacy of the Canadian state. Having demonstrated that the colonial system is based upon the creation of profit and privilege, how can we expect any meaningful changes from within this regime? The truth is that we cannot, and for this reason I would assert that Aboriginals are more dedicated to colonialism than they are to the decolonization of their lands and minds.

Ultimately, Canada remains driven by the “logic of imperialism and engages in concerted colonial action against Indigenous peoples whose claims to land and self-determination continue to undermine the legitimacy of Canadian authority and hegemony”<sup>51</sup>. This should be a powerful realization for Indigenous peoples. While Canada remains focused upon the colonization of Indigenous lands and minds, these actions must be considered as desperate attempts to suppress the legitimacy of our claims. Simply by *being* Sto:lo, the people of Cheam pose a great danger to Canada. The continuance of Indigenous traditions show that Canada does not have exclusive jurisdiction over the territories it now occupies. Moreover, just *being* Indigenous demonstrates the existence of alternative forms of governance. It is for these reasons that Canada seeks to dominate and destroy Sto:lo nations: they posed a direct challenge to the assumed sovereignty of the British Crown.

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<sup>50</sup> Wasase, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>51</sup> Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

## **Encountering the Department of Fisheries and Oceans: Flooding the Community**

On June 8th, 2009, one week into my stay in Cheam, Chief and Council asked that I attend a meeting with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). We gathered at the Cheam Band Office and all I was told was that we would be discussing the upcoming fishing season. Upon entering the conference room, I was introduced to a number of bureaucrats from the DFO's Lower Fraser management team.

Since the meeting was held on Pilalt territory, Cheam began the proceedings. Chief Sidney Douglas immediately thanked the Department for coming into the community to discuss matters. He added, "We are here today because we seek good relations between our peoples". It was quickly apparent that Cheam would be airing its issues and concerns regarding the DFO and its management of the salmon fisheries for the summer of 2009. Chief Douglas spoke of how ceremonial rounds have been compromised due to the Department's refusal to grant ceremonial licences for the community. Today, funerals are the only ceremony in which the DFO willingly issues ceremonial fishing licences.

Following the Chief, Rick Quipp speaks of how members in the community have confronted him over his acceptance of a five-fish permit from Sheldon Evers, a DFO Resource Manager, who was present. Here, Rick touches upon the First Nations "food fishery" and how Department regulations have ensured that there is not enough salmon to feed the community. Without enough fish to eat, he adds, "we have become dependent on western foods". As a result, the people of Cheam must spend their days working within the confines of the wage labour economy. We hear of how this has compromised many social aspects of the community.

After Rick has spoken, June Quipp begins to talk. We hear that she believes that Department officials are coming to Cheam with closed ears and closed hearts. She contends that when the DFO meet with First Nations, they come with preset agendas. Their mandate is handed down from Ottawa, leaving little to come from meetings such as this. Upon letting her issues be known, June states that “You’re pinning us to the ground”. Getting the attention of these government bureaucrats, she added: “We will not be threatened”.

Upon hearing the concerns of Cheam’s councillors, the representatives from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans iterated that they have heard Cheam’s concerns. Diana Trager, the Director for the Department’s Lower Fraser Area, spoke first. She was socially awkward, clearly nervous and in a constant state of discomfort. She spoke of stock numbers and potential catch allocations. There were escapement values and sustainable yields. She threw around statistic and numbers. Ultimately, Diana Trager argued that if only Cheam had the capacity to understand her figures, that they would begin to understand the Department’s positions regarding the need for conservation. Other DFO representatives were asked to speak, and each emphasized that they were looking forward to dealing with Cheam throughout the upcoming fishing season.

While the Department representatives were asked to listen and hear Cheam’s concerns, their immediate focus was in getting the community to agree to the Department’s fishing plan for the year. After nearly two hours of articulating the injustices caused by DFO infringements, the government officials sincerely thanked Chief and Council for their heart-felt presentations. It was clear that there was a lot of work to do before Canada and Cheam could work together in the area of fisheries along the Sto:lo river. That being said, the Department clearly wanted an agreement

to be signed with the community. Realizing that their were not going to be getting the deal they were sent for, the government bureaucrats ended the meeting and crept away. It was clear that both Cheam and Canada needed to go their separate ways.

In this section, I will attempt to put the experiences that I gained from this meeting into the context of the colonization of Sto:lo lands. The Department of Fisheries and Oceans is a ministry within Canada's federal government, and as we will see, it has been in a unique position to affect Sto:lo peoples, particular in Cheam. Much like other processes of colonization, the DFO has been focused upon the penetration, transformation, and redefinition of Sto:lo nations since its arrival in British Columbia. The people of Cheam, as the last remaining Pilalt tribe, have traditionally had a unique position that has entailed great responsibility. As stewards of the Fraser River, the people of Cheam have played a crucial role in relation to other Sto:lo nations. Canada, through its fisheries department, has sought to suppress and destroy Cheam's position. In turn, the DFO has been active in maintaining a separation between Cheam's ability to manage the human-use of the river on its territories and the harvesting of salmon amongst its "user groups". The Department's focus has always been upon the suppression of Indigenous ways of life along the Sto:lo river. By delving into my own experiences, this section will demonstrate how the DFO imposes its own structures and ideologies upon the people of Cheam, as well as touch upon the impact of these colonial apparatuses.

**“We are here today because we seek good relations between our peoples”**

Chief Sidney Douglas, as one of the elected leaders of the Cheam Indian Band, called the meeting to order and was the first to speak. Chief Douglas is a soft-spoken yet ardent speaker. He does not say much but when he talks, people listen. On this occasion, there is passion in his voice that I had never heard. He was calm and collected, yet powerful and assertive. After thanking the Department for coming to Cheam, he announced: “We are here today because we seek good relations between our peoples”. It is only upon reflecting on these words that I have come to feel their true power.

To say “We are here today”, is a statement worth celebrating. In the previous section we have seen that colonialism seeks to infiltrate, compromise, and control Indigenous ways of life. The imposition of colonial rule on *Pelho 'Ihwxw Temexw* has compromised Cheam’s ability to live on its traditional territory *as Pilalt*. British imperialists, realizing the connection between Cheam and their river, sought to separate people from the source of their experiences. In doing so, the people of Cheam have been forcibly removed from their role as the caretakers of the Sto:lo river. Despite these infringements, they have survived. The people of Cheam remain rooted and connected to the Sto:lo river in ways that cannot be explained. The only way to understand these connections is to experience them. To understand what it means to be Sto:lo, one has to be out on the water. Due to the DFO, however, opportunities for Native fishers are few and far between.

During my first meeting with DFO, Chief Douglas wanted to emphasize that because of the Department’s restrictions, much of the community’s ceremonial rounds have been disturbed. The council then agreed that the Department has long been repressive of the ceremonial traditions of the Pilalt nation. Certainly, the Department of Indian Affairs has played its own role

in subduing Indigenous traditions and ceremonies, evidenced by the *Indian Act*'s long-standing ban on ceremonies. Today, however, it is the DFO that has the greatest impact on Cheam. In showing their respect for and to honour their ancestors and other spirits with which they commune, the ceremonies of the Sto:lo people typically involve the offering of salmon as gratitude for their gifts received. At one point, elder Joe Aleck interjected with a brief list of ceremonies that have traditionally required the offering of salmon. These include: birthing and naming ceremonies, traditional marriages, the cleansing of traditional regalia, numerous healing ceremonies, the hanging and brushing of cedar boughs, spiritual cleansing before hunting and fishing, as well as for the winter dancers of the Longhouse<sup>52</sup>. What I have presented is an abbreviated list of a handout that Joe Aleck presented to the DFO representatives. Ultimately, we begin to see how many of these rites, which occur with great frequency, carry the responsibility of offering and sharing salmon. Today, Sto:lo nations must apply to the Department for licences to access the river and the salmon. These salmon, which will vary as per each ceremony, have been systematically deprived by the colonial government, and the DFO is certainly implicated. In fact, the only ceremonies with which the Department authorizes ceremonial licences with any regularity are funerals and memorials. It is atrocious that it is only in death that the people of Cheam can access their birthright, the very source of their identity.

When Chief Sidney Douglas spoke of “good relations between our people” he was consciously emphasizing Cheam’s position as representatives of the Pilalt nation, the original stewards of the Sto:lo river. However, there have been countless impositions by the colonial government’s fisheries department that have been aimed at separating the community from its

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<sup>52</sup> “First Nations Ceremonies: Cheam First Nation.” Handout presented by Joe Aleck on June 8, 2009, council meeting with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Cheam: Cheam Indian Band Archives.

ability to collectively care for the fisheries along the river. We have seen that “fishing” is not merely the act of killing fish. Fishing, for the Pilalt, consists of a plethora of practices that are deeply embedded the web of relations that cover *S’olh Temexw*. For Cheam, fishing is synonymous with life itself. We have seen this understanding of fishing as a form of Indigenous stewardship wherein the community monitors its relationship with the salmon peoples. Through a series of rights, ranging from rights to certain fishing sites, at particular times, employing specific technologies, the people of Cheam have always been able to fulfill their obligation to the river and its children, ensuring future generations may do the same. This stewardship was integral to the Sto:lo social order. By breaking these responsibilities, successive colonial governments have ensured First Nations’ stewardship along the Fraser river remains fragmented.

When British Columbia joined the Canadian Confederacy, there was no intention of extending the *Fisheries Act* to the province<sup>53</sup>. Both the province and the federal fisheries department were focused on creating the conditions that would allow an industrial fishery to grow on Sto:lo territory. In terms of dealing with the Indigenous people of these lands, colonial authorities were initially content to use Sto:lo fishers in harvesting and processing for early sockeye canneries. As we have seen, the colony of British Columbia has always failed to negotiate the terms of its stay, on Indigenous lands, with its original nations. So while there were no treaties signed on Sto:lo territory, the colonial government unilaterally confiscated their lands anyway. In terms of allotting reserves for Indians, the province felt that “great care should be taken that the Indians... should not be disturbed in the enjoyment of their customary fishing grounds, which should be reserved for them previous to white settlement”<sup>54</sup>. British Columbia’s

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<sup>53</sup> Newell, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> Newell, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

Attorney-General George Walkem contended that “granting large tracts of land to Indians would simply divert them from more lucrative economic activities, such as fishing, which in turn would inflict a serious injury upon them and the Province”<sup>55</sup>.

Despite the province’s intention of allowing First Nations to continue their traditional fishing practices, the federal fisheries department had other ideas. Beginning in 1888 and continuing ever since, the DFO has implemented measures that have greatly affected Cheam’s ability to fulfill traditional obligations. The most glaring infringement of the colonial government lies in its separation of management and harvesting aspects of the fishery.

Traditionally, many Coast Salish families would have ventured to the Sto:lo river, particularly upriver near the canyon, in order to maintain kinship ties with family members along the river. When visiting Pilalt territory, where the early sockeye salmon run in great abundance, it was certainly possible to obtain the right to harvest these salmon. However, this access was determined by the intricate system of Pilalt stewardship, which relied upon a web of communities spanning the river, so that the salmon may be taken without harming their ability to fill their spawning beds upstream. Fishing, in an Indigenous sense, would certainly include the aspects of what we now call “management”. Cheam’s nationhood was directly linked to its responsibilities as the caretakers of the river.

Even today, Cheam continues to assert its nationhood over Sto:lo fisheries. The community continues to maintain that it has the responsibility to ensure the health of the Sto:lo-salmon relationship. By continuing to assert their right and responsibility to act as the caretakers of the Fraser river, Cheam First Nation continues to challenge the imposition of the Department

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

over its fisheries. The Pilalt contend that it is they, not the DFO, who have the responsibility and jurisdiction to monitor human-use of the salmon who climb the Fraser river. Perhaps the words of late-Chief Sam Douglas can best summarize this position:

“It’s not DFO’s responsibility to solve problems. It’s their responsibility to enforce the instructions we give them. I don’t think it’s their business to solve the problems of our people. The councils of the bands and families of the twenty-four bands need to take the responsibilities of putting things in order. Our people need to speak up for themselves”<sup>56</sup>.

This position stands in stark contrast to the position put forth by the Aboriginal politicians within the province. Many Aboriginal political organizations, such as the First Nations Summit and the B.C. AFN, find themselves in a position between the province, who supports them financially and politically, and their own nations, the people who they purport to represent. Ultimately, these organizations are content to distill any Indigenous presence on their traditional territories in return for positions of privilege within colonial structures. In doing so, Aboriginal politicians are inevitably held up by mainstream society as representatives of all Native people. These coopted leaders are little more than puppet collaborators for the Canadian state.

For instance, the First Nations Summit and the B.C. Aboriginal Fisheries Commission’s B.C. First Nations Fisheries Action Plan: Preparing for Transformative Change in the B.C. Fishery is an attempt to address the horrid conditions of the Fraser River due to over a century of colonial impositions. The state of all salmon of the Fraser remains dire, and these Aboriginal leaders were tasked with finding appropriate solutions. Ultimately, their solution was to propose a form of “co-management” with the Canadian government. This is the radical reform that will transform fisheries along the Fraser river, getting a hand in our own oppression.

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<sup>56</sup> Lower Fraser Fishing Authority. 1993. “Rebuilding Sto:lo Fisheries Law: Report of the Community Consultation Process - Part 1.” Cheam: Cheam Indian Band Archives. p. i.

Furthermore, it is argued that this must take place within a “government-to-government context”<sup>57</sup>. As such, it is their contention that co-management should take place in a similar light to that of the Kelowna Accord and the “New Relationship” in British Columbia. However, it must be acknowledged that these positions place First Nations as governments *within* Canada. This has to be seen as a denial of our nationhood. To accept such a position is to acquiesce. It is to accept a position wherein we are privileged to sit at their table. Luckily, this is not a position that Cheam has been willing to take. Virtually every Consolidated Fish Conservation Plan, which Cheam gives to the Department before each fishing season, includes the following statement:

“It is not possible to understand the identity of Cheam/*Pilalt* people without considering the relationship they have always had to the Early Stuart Sockeye, which are Cheam’s only source for dried fish. Wind-drying the fish in the traditional manner is integral to the culture and the social fabric of the Cheam people. Dried fish is synonymous with the Cheam/*Pilalt* people and its importance to the existence and identity of Cheam cannot be overstated”<sup>58</sup>.

This represents a strong assertion of *Pilalt* nationhood that is directed at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In doing so, Cheam is positioning itself as the descendants of the *Pilalt* nation. Moreover, it is the Early Stuart Sockeye that are integral to this relationship. Since the Department of Fisheries is most focused on allowing as many Early Stuarts upriver as possible, so that they may fill the spawning grounds as early as they can, there are rarely openings for First Nations to harvest Early Stuarts. In effect, the Department has denied the nationhood of the *Pilalt* and cut off its people from accessing the river on their own terms.

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<sup>57</sup> “B.C. First Nations Fisheries Action Plan: Preparing for Transformative Change in the B.C. Fishery.” First Nations Summit. Cheam: Cheam Indian Band Archives. p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> “Success on the River: 2008 Consolidated Fish Conservation Plan.” Cheam: Cheam Indian Band Archives. p. 11.

### **“We’ve been forced to depend on western foods”**

After discussing the implications of DFO regulations upon their ceremonial regulations, Cheam’s council turned to expressing their concern regarding the social impacts of the Department. At one point, one of the councilors, Rick Quipp, stresses that some members of the community are upset with him because he accepted a five-fish permit from the Department. Certainly, five fish is not enough to feed one family for any extended period of time, not mind an entire community. Since First Nations like Cheam have been separated from their ability to determine their own involvement on the river, the nature of consultations with the colonial government have centered around the allocation of salmon harvests. Having been left fighting for scraps at a table that keeps us subservient, many Native people are left with little choice but to become dependent upon western foods. Rick pointed out it was the DFO that has acted to remove Cheam fishers from the water. They created the food fishery so that we could not trade and barter our salmon. And the DFO has since narrowed their understanding of food fish to the point where it is a criminal offense, under Canadian law, for Sto:lo fishers to take what they need to feed their families, communities, and nations.

Today, the people of Cheam typically work in full-time positions, both on- and off-reserve. Having been forcibly separated from participating in the local salmon fishery on their own terms, most fishers have to hold down full-time occupations just to put food on the table. One of colonialism’s greatest atrocities is that it segregates us from the rest of creation. We have to pay for food. We have to pay for the roofs over our heads. We have to pay to live. Struggling to survive within the confines of the wage labour economy, we become dependent upon store-bought foods. We rely upon grocery stores and supermarkets to feed our families. Even worse,

these store are filled with everything they have stolen from us, and other Indigenous peoples. There are watermelons from Guatemala, pineapples from Hawaii, and salmon from the Fraser river. The salmon found in supermarkets are increasingly drawn from fish farms along the Pacific Coast. Where these fish are “wild”, they are not caught by the original fishers of these lands. They are caught by the commercial fishers who have gained great profit and privilege since their formation.

While the Canadian *Fisheries Act* came into effect in British Columbia in 1877, it was not until 1888 that the Fraser river came under heavy regulations<sup>59</sup>. By this time, there were nearly two dozen industrial fish-processing factories along the Fraser river. Cannery operators were quite anxious to solidify their own monopoly over salmon harvesting and processing in the area. Seeking refuge in the colonial government, operators such as the B.C. Packers Association were able to have the number of licences on the Fraser limited to 500<sup>60</sup>. However, these limitations immediately became a political problem within settler society. British tradition has typically held marine animals such as salmon to be considered “common-access resources”, meaning that any subject of the Commonwealth has the right to exploit public waters. Ultimately, this restriction would be lifted, but licencing would remain a feature of the Department’s rule.

Regardless of their numbers, it is irrefutable that the Canadian government issued the bulk of its licences to canneries and that they made it easy for Sto:lo fishers to work for them. There were many people who resisted these policies, but, as Diane Newell points out, “most of them were already obliged to fish for specific cannery operations because of the cash advances

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<sup>59</sup> Newell, Diane. 1993. *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada’s Pacific Coast Fisheries*. University of Toronto Press: Toronto. p. 70.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

received at the end of the previous fishing season”<sup>61</sup>. Furthermore, these operators were quick to call upon the government’s Indian Agents to “remind delinquent Indians... of their debts and obligations”<sup>62</sup>. For many people in Cheam, this marks the beginning of a dependence upon the wage labour economy and the colonial government for support. Meanwhile, the *Xwelitem* was settling in as the upper class in British Columbia. This begins to demonstrate how Cheam has been pulled into colonial-capitalist system in British Columbia.

Back at the table with the DFO, Rick Quipp talks about how a hundred years ago, the Sto:lo’s diets would have been virtually all fish, balanced across the many types of salmon who visit the territory. There are estimates that in the century preceding European contact, the average Sto:lo person would have consumed approximately 220 kg of salmon per year<sup>63</sup>. Due to the restrictions of the Department, which operates from a closed position in which user groups must gain permission through the issuance of valid fishing licences, the amount of salmon within most people’s is now quite low. Here, Rick calls himself one of the few “wealthy ones” in the community because he has been able to maintain so much salmon in his diet.

Chief and Council made it abundantly clear that the lack of salmon has had a tremendous impact on the community. Sandra Victor, for instance, asserted that her physician has ordered her to consume salmon as much as she can, with three to four times per week as ideal. For many Indigenous peoples with health concerns, such as diabetes, salmon such as spring and sockeye , which are rich in nutrients, low in saturated fat but replete with fatty acids such as omega-3, are

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.. 83.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>63</sup> Ware, Ruben. “Five Issues, Five Battlegrounds: An Introduction to the Fishing Industry in British Columbia, 1850-1930.” Cheam: Cheam Indian Band Archives. p. 7.

the perfect food. There is certainly something comforting in enjoying the same salmon that so many generations of Pilalt people have thrived upon. For Sandra, it was important for her to admonish the DFO for its regime of regulations, which has systematically separated the people of Cheam from their rightful position as the guardians of the Sto:lo river. She aptly noted that she wants to continue to eat and enjoy Fraser river salmon, not because her Doctor ordered her to, but because it is what her people have always eaten. Salmon is what made her ancestors strong.

Ultimately, by controlling the community's access to the Fraser river and its salmon, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is ensuring that Cheam cannot relate to the salmon peoples on their own terms, in their own ways. The reality for many Sto:lo people is that if they want to enjoy salmon from the Fraser River, they have to travel to the town's supermarket and buy commercial-caught fish. And if you want that salmon from the supermarket, you had better be willing to pay for it and only Canadian tender is accepted. As such, many people are forced off the water and into wage labour jobs in order to reconnect with their lifeblood, the salmon.

**“You have to realize that our mandate comes from Ottawa”**

During this first encounter with the DFO, I heard a statement that would be replicated, in one form or another, at subsequent meetings with the Department. DFO officials, whether Area Managers like Diana Trager or Resource Managers like Sheldon Evers, have been trained by their government to rely upon preset agendas and rigid mandates in order to ensure that Canadian ways trump First Nations traditions. After venting their concerns to the Department, the Cheam council was visibly frustrated when the DFO representatives began to talk about an agreement for the upcoming fishing season. It was obvious from each member of Chief and Council that there were outstanding issues, such as the Department's refusal to pay heed to Pilalt nationhood,

that needed to be resolved before the two parties could proceed in their relationship. When questioned over why they came to the community, one representative replied that “You have to realize that our mandate comes from Ottawa”. As we will see, this statement begins to encapsulate the mentalities held by colonial bureaucracies.

Part and parcel of the move from a “nation-to-nation” relationship between Indigenous and Settler nations to a “government-to-government” position is the development of bureaucracies. For First Nations such as Cheam, the imposition of foreign rule has brought the community into contact with colonial structures such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. As Canada has sought to establish the legitimacy of its claims to Sto:lo territories, it has attempted to restructure Indigenous societies by forcing them to develop “their own bureaucratic infrastructures [that are] modelled on and linked to those of the governments with which they must deal”<sup>64</sup>. Hence, we see that the imposing colonial state is unwilling to respect the Indigenous nationhood of the original peoples. Furthermore, this assumes that the internal mechanisms of First Nations’ governance systems are not adequate to interact with foreign nations. As such, nations like Cheam must be forcibly separated from their ancestral obligations, such as caring for the river. In turn, these communities become miniature versions of the Canadian bureaucracies in which they engage.

Therefore, it is crucial that we begin to see this bureaucratization for what it is: continued imposition by colonial structures within our communities. Bureaucracies are a mechanism by which Canada maintains its presence in our communities, and a direct hand in our decision-making. The truth is that in order to participate with colonial officials within these parameters,

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<sup>64</sup> Nadasdy, Paul. “Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon.” Vancouver: UBC Press. p. 2.

Indigenous peoples must become familiar with the languages employed by various administrations, as well as organize themselves into bureaucracies that are capable of engaging with the government. In essence, we must become full-time fisheries experts. Thus, instead of spending our days out on the river, interacting with the rest of creation, gaining the experiences that make us strong, we must spend out time in the office, sending faxes and taking memos. This is a deliberate separation of Indigenous peoples from the source of our identities, namely the land. While our homelands remain what we fight for, we now do so in a way that detaches us from these experiences. Nadasdy notes that, “by forcing [Indigenous] people to bureaucratize their society and to spend their days in an office rather than out on the land, these processes serve to undermine the very social relations, practices, beliefs, and values that [Indigenous] people hope to preserve through co-management and land claims in the first place”<sup>65</sup>.

It is my contention that much of this bureaucratization stems from the colonial government’s problematizing of Sto:lo fishers. Since the *Fisheries Act* and its regulations were first implemented in British Columbia, we have seen that Canada has slowly shifted salmon production away from the river and into the oceans. This shift has also seen control shift from Indigenous nations to the colonial government and its processing companies<sup>66</sup>. Prior to contact, each nation along the Sto:lo river would have had their own territories, some of which were shared with others, that would allow their peoples to fish for the salmon of the day. Thus, Indigenous fishing typically took place inland, along the Fraser river, and its creeks and tributaries. Here, the salmon could be found in their greatest concentration. This would allow

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>66</sup> See Newell, *op. cit.*, Tangled Webs of History, Harris, *op. cit.*, Fish, Law, and Colonialism, and Ware, *op. cit.*, Five Issues, Five Battlegrounds.

each nation to assess the salmon as they passed by, allowing them to determine the appropriate proportions that would allow both the community and the salmon to survive. Right from the get-go, however, the industrial fishery was established in tidal areas, at the start of the harvesting chain. This placed Indigenous fisheries in the “politically vulnerable middle ground” between the locales of the commercial fishery and the spawning grounds of the salmon<sup>67</sup>. In turn, it was the colonial government that got to decide who to accommodate. Inevitably, they chose to side with the commercial fishers. This only serves to reinforce the image that Canada promotes of itself as the benevolent, impartial arbiter of conflicts between industry and First Nations. Since then, our communities have been given scraps at a table that keeps us subservient. Once the industrial fishers have emptied out the river by fishing at its mouth, the DFO can be sure that no salmon will climb the river for days at a time. It is during these times that our fishers are granted access to the river, when there will be nothing left to catch.

Over my time in the community, I was able to attend numerous meetings with the DFO. Each time I heard the same excuses used by its officials. “Sorry, I can’t speak to that” or “I haven’t been around long enough to know the answer to that” were used frequently. Plain and simple, this is the Department’s way of claiming ignorance. However, this is no longer an excuse. The problem is that representatives are replaced so often, there is always an uncertainty and unclarity of what has happened in the past. This, paired with clear marching orders from Ottawa, allows government bureaucrats to ensure that they remain in control of the agenda when consulting with First Nations. As such, colonial bureaucracies are best described by their

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<sup>67</sup> Newell, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

mediocrity<sup>68</sup>. The truth is that “Yes-Men” are always replaceable. The Department seems to send representatives that lack any form of decision-making authority. DFO officials are given their mandates from Ottawa and must carry out these marching orders. If they cannot do so, someone else will be brought in to do so instead. For Cheam, this must be frustrating. The community always brings out its decision-makers, in the form of elders, leaders, and elected officials.

We see this issue shine through when Diana Trager defends herself by arguing that her “mandate comes from Ottawa”. In fact, one councilor from Cheam called her out on this. If she cannot properly relay First Nations concerns to the Department, then she should bring Ottawa to Cheam so that they may begin to understand the community’s issues. June added: “We’ve brought our decision-makers. Where are yours?”. If it is the Prime Minister of Canada or the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans that has the authority to make decisions in regards to the settler perspective, than it is they who should be at these meetings. Surely this would be a step towards the nation-to-nation relationship stressed by the people of Cheam. Unfortunately, this option remains off the table.

Ultimately, a reflection upon this experience has shown that Canada, primarily through its federal Fisheries Department, has actively infringed upon the nationhood of the Pilalt people. For the past century, successive colonial governments have sought to marginalize First Nations fishers from the salmon fisheries along the river. One of the most profound ways the DFO has accomplished its insidious objectives has been through the controlling of Indigenous ceremonies through the use of permits. Rather than fishing for salmon as they are needed, the people of Cheam must seek permission for the salmon which they intend to use in traditional ceremonies.

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<sup>68</sup> This is drawn from Memmi’s description of colonial society as plagued by mediocrity. See The Colonizer and the Colonized. p. 48-51.

Cheam elder Joe Aleck has shown that the number of ceremonies that continue to be practiced are severely limited the number of fish in the community. Since there is such a shortage of salmon, spread over a number of cultural uses from spiritual, to political, social, and economic obligations, the practices have been curtailed. In reality, many of these ceremonial obligations are met by sacrificing fish used to feed the community.

This deprivation of experience is a hallmark of colonial rule in British Columbia. While there are openings in which Sto:lo fishers may be on the water, their numbers dwindle with each passing year. More importantly, we must acknowledge that under these conditions, Indigenous fishers are not allowed on the river on their own terms. Our access to our territories is contingent upon our oppressors. To accept such a position is to acquiesce. It is to bestow legitimacy upon Canadian rule, particularly over Sto:lo waters. By seeing ourselves in this light, we privilege the ways of mainstream society. This is an explicit denial of Pilalt nationhood. Colonial society has gone to great lengths to control the ways in which its inhabitants see and understand the world around them. For instance, fishing is typically thought of as the practice that involves the capturing and killing of some sort of fish. By narrowing the definition of fishing like this, we begin to lose the surrounding practices such as the fabrication of fishing apparatuses, the preservation of salmon, and the traditional trade relations based upon these fish. Most importantly, this has allowed the Fisheries Department to keep Indigenous forms of management off the table. Ultimately, Canada retains the ability to control the terms by which First Nations fishers relate to the ancestral birthright. The DFO determines who may fish, when they may access the water, which salmon they may catch, as well as the manner in which they may be caught.

This separation must be seen as a deliberate attempt to disconnect Indigenous nations from their traditional responsibilities. For the Pilalt, this has meant restrictions that deny the community the chance to relate to the salmon peoples on their own terms. As Rick pointed out in our meeting, we cannot expect the younger generations to fully relate to their teachings during the short and scant openings currently offered by the Department. We have seen that the purpose of this endeavour has been to secure profit and privilege for the colonial elite. However, this has not detracted from the legitimacy of Indigenous claims to their traditional territories. As such, Canada has sought the support of certain Native people to serve as collaborators and backers of the colonial order.

Early, I called these individuals Aboriginals. As the people of Cheam have been pushed off the water, they have consistently stood up to defend themselves and their responsibilities as the descendants of the Pilalt. This has often required the community to sit down at the table with the DFO in meetings like the one described above. However, this has pitted the community against a massive bureaucracy spanning Ottawa to Victoria. In order to engage with such a bureaucracy, Cheam has needed to spend time off the water, in the band offices, in order to adequately consult and negotiate. By even playing their game we are accepting Canadian rule(s). In turn, we move further and further away from the experiences that make us who we are. By spending days in the office, we begin to disconnect ourselves from the source of our identities. For Cheam, this means time away from the river.

## **“We Will Not Be Threatened”**

*“Although the loss of land must be seen as a political and economic disaster of the first magnitude, the real exile of the tribes occurred with the destruction of the ceremonial life and failure or inability of white society to offer a sensible and cohesive alternative to the traditions which Indians remembered. People became disoriented with respect to the world in which they lived.” - Vine Deloria<sup>69</sup>*

Throughout this project, I have sought to “share back” many of the stories and experiences that were shared with me during my time in Cheam. I have tried to bring forth a new understanding of research as it pertains to Indigenous peoples. It is this understanding that I have brought with me when I first came to the community, and throughout my time this understanding has only grown stronger. This approach has allowed to come to an understanding of what it means to be Indigenous in *Pilalt Temexw*. This research has also allowed me to explore the history of colonialism on Sto:lo territories and how these processes have attempted to penetrate, transform, and define our peoples. Ultimately, colonial rule has damaged and fractured many of the traditions of our nations. For instance, Canada has acted to separate Cheam from its experiences and responsibilities relating to the Sto:lo river. However, as June asserted during my first encounter with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans: “You’re pinning us to the ground and we will not be threatened”.

In the first section of this project, I presented research as a process in which Indigenous people come to understand, relate to, and participate with all of our relations. Research is a journey of reconnection and remembering. To research is to act for the betterment and rejuvenation of our communities. As we search for the pieces of ourselves, we begin to reconnect

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<sup>69</sup> This particular quote was drawn from Taiaiake Alfred’s “Colonialism and State Dependency”, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

with the source of our identities. The Pilalt nation has been dis-placed by the Canadian government, and it is the responsibility of each member of the community to take the actions necessary to restore their place in *S'olh Temexw*. The people of Cheam must begin to “remember” themselves as the Pilalt nation. The community must remember the stories and struggles of their ancestors. It is only through those efforts that the community may continue to resist today. Moreover, the people of Cheam must begin to recenter themselves within their own community. Rather than seek validation and acceptance from mainstream colonial society, we must begin to focus on our own needs.

In my time in Cheam, I have beared witness to the struggle of the nation. I was fortunate enough to apprentice under a true Indigenous leader in June Quipp. By employing my approach to research, as a process of establishing and maintaining good relations, I have been able to gain acceptance and form deep-seated relationships with many people in the community. This interpenetration of experience has allowed me to begin to make meaning out of these lived experiences. While this understanding is always changing, this project has been my attempt to share where I am today. As a young Indigenous man, I believe that I have a strong understand of the realities of contemporary colonialism in British Columbia, particularly as felt by Cheam First Nation. In this respect, the community governance project has been my own activity in “location”. I have sought to speak with my own voice, as an Indigenous person.

The second section of this project was dedicated to an exploration of how colonial society has penetrated, transformed, and redefined many aspects of Sto:lo society. As the *Xwelitem* began to establish their own political traditions, they did so despite Sto:lo forms of governance. Rather than adhering to a nation-to-nation relationship, Canada and British Columbia have

treated First Nations as subordinate and inferior. Today, this can be seen in the government-to-government approach to consultation supported by many Aboriginal peoples. We have seen the First Nations Summit's support for co-management regimes as one such example. By accepting our role as Aboriginals, we are legitimizing the colonial state that has long acted to suppress and destroy our traditions.

However, I have also sought to hold up Cheam for their collective efforts in resisting the colonial system. One of the most striking examples of their resistance was demonstrated in my first meeting with the DFO. The Department continue to control the means by which Cheam is able to relate to the Sto:lo river. If this were not enough, we have seen that we must begin to model ourselves off of these proceedings, forming intricate bureaucracies that are linked to the colonial government. While we can speak to these officials however we choose, it is only by engaging on their terms that we are able to gain their approval. Again, I come back to Rick's words: "They hate us. They always have and they always will". Canada has failed to build meaningful relationships with the people of Cheam, and perhaps it is time that we begin to turn away from our oppressors. In The Colonizer and the Colonized, Albert Memmi offers three choices in respect to the colonial situation<sup>70</sup>. Indigenous peoples can accept the realities of contemporary colonialism, assenting to the status quo. This pathway has long led to the genocide of our peoples. Secondly, we can stay within the colonial situation and seek change. Ultimately, I believe that this is no different than the first choice. This is the pathway of the Aboriginal. This only leads to assimilation into the depths of the colonial hierarchy. We can talk about change and working with the system to achieve that. However, the problem with always being a conformist

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<sup>70</sup> Memmi, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

is that when you try to change the system, it is not you who changes the system, but the system that inevitably changes you.

This leaves us with Memmi's third choice: revolt. Rather than seek change from within, it is time that we leave the margins of mainstream society and recenter ourselves within our own traditions. We have to leave the colonial relationship. No matter how benign the colonizer tried to make himself look, no matter how well Canada presents itself, this remains a relationship of abuse, oppression, and exploitation. Our only choice, *as Indigenous peoples*, is to escape the colonial situation. We must leave the state system and we must return to the place from which we originate, the land. We have to act with the intention of rebuilding our nations based upon the teachings of our ancestors. Essentially, we have to return to a life in tune with the workings of creation. It is through this journey of rediscovery that we may begin to (re)understand the relationship between power and nature. Power flows from a respect for nature rather than an isolation from it. By returning to the water, the people of Cheam reconnect with the source of power and knowledge that will allow them to repair their fragmented ways. By re-attuning ourselves to the natural processes of our territories, we open ourselves to the possibility of reestablishing our relationships with the rest of creation. For the Pilalt, this means reestablishing themselves as the caretakers of the Sto:lo river. This means rebuilding their relationships with the salmon peoples. Our responsibility is not to ensure the survival of the "human race", rather we are responsible for the continuation of all life so that future generations will have all that they need to thrive. However, we must work on ourselves first. As individuals and as nations, we must continue to remember what it means to "be Indigenous".

## Resources

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