

## Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway through Reserves in British Columbia

Nadine Schuurman

*Laudatory narratives about the power of the railways to triumph over the geography of this country obscure a history of material violence against Native peoples in British Columbia. Beginning in the 1880s, three railways were responsible for the devastation of orchards, houses and irrigation ditches on reserves. This paper examines the geography of reserve allocation along the Fraser River and the ensuing legal support for designation of the same land as a railway corridor. Testimony from witnesses to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in B.C. in 1914 is used to illustrate Native objections to the appropriation of their land for railway construction. The latter half of the paper examines the role of railways in "reterritorializing" Native land for subsequent incursions of capital and cultural change. The paper concludes with a discussion of the means by which the physical construction of railways acted as a strategy for (re)inscribing colonialism.*

*Des récits élogieux sur le pouvoir des lignes de chemin de fer à triompher de la géographie de ce pays masquent un passé de violence matérielle contre les peuples autochtones de Colombie-Britannique. À partir des années 1880, trois lignes de chemin de fer furent responsables de la destruction de vergers, de maisons et de fossés d'irrigation dans des réserves. Cet article examine la géographie de l'allocation des réserves le long de la rivière Fraser et l'appui juridique qui s'en suivit pour la désignation de ces mêmes terres comme corridor de lignes de chemin de fer. Un témoignage de témoins à la Commission royale sur les affaires indiennes en Colombie-Britannique de 1914 sert à illustrer les objections des Autochtones à l'appropriation de leurs terres pour la construction de lignes de chemin de fer. La dernière moitié de cet article examine le rôle des lignes de chemin de fer dans la "reterritorialisation" des terres autochtones pour de futures intrusions de capitaux et de changements culturels. L'article se termine par une discussion sur les moyens par lesquels la construction de lignes de chemin de fer servit de stratégie de réinscription du colonialisme.*

[T]he railroad ran on a fixed schedule along a prescribed route, and so, for all its demonic potentialities, became a nineteenth century paradigm of order.

– Marshall Berman (1988, p. 159)

Your paper words are violent,  
The vulgar weapons of your undeclared war.

– Ron Hamilton (1991, p. 46)

## Introduction: The Railway in the Colonial Canadian Imagination

The railway was a pre-eminent symbol of technology and modernity. As such, it captivated the colonial Canadian imagination. The railway became part of a manifesto of progress in a uniquely Canadian political iteration. The "Philosophy of Railroads," for instance, written by Thomas Keefer, a civil engineer, became a polemic of industrial advancement during the 1850s. It began with evocative descriptions of the harsh Canadian land and climate and culminated with promises of the transcendence of the railroad:

Old winter is once more upon us, and our inland seas are "dreary and inhospitable waters" to the merchant and to the traveller; – our rivers are sealed fountains – and an embargo which no human power can remove is laid on all our ports. . . . The animation of business is suspended, the life blood of commerce is curdled and stagnant in the St. Lawrence. . . . Far away to the South is heard the daily scream of the steam-whistle – but from Canada there is no escape: blockaded and imprisoned by Ice and Apathy, we have at least ample time for reflection – and if there be comfort in philosophy may we not profitably consider the PHILOSOPHY OF RAILROADS. [Keefer in Francis & Smith, 1986, pp. 383–84]

The message was clear: the economy of Canada was ruled by winter, by the inaccessibility of the frozen land and rivers, while commerce to the south prospered, enhanced by a network of rail lines. Canada's economic survival in a modern economy would not be assured until the problems of distance were reduced by laying track. Keefer deftly pleaded with the public to turn their melancholic ruminations, engendered by their imprisonment in "Ice and Apathy," to the practical consideration of railroads. His "philosophy" was widely published and became a valuable political tool for the manufacture of national consent for public financing of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).

The subsequent inauguration of the gargantuan task of constructing a railway "*ad mare usque ad mari*" was buoyed by public support. Ties and rails were, however, preceded by a complementary technology of colonial power. Most spectacularly, the political indispensability of the railway was displayed by subduing Native peoples at Duck Lake in 1885 when the CPR was turned into a metaphor for "national honour" (Granatstein et al. 1990, p. 35). With its financing politically consolidated, the railway neared completion at its western terminus in British Columbia in 1885. The ethic of modern industrial progress, represented by the railway in B.C., was not always enthusiastically embraced by Native peoples whose land it traversed. Conflicts, compromise and cultural adjustments were forced by the construction of railways on the land and lives of First Nations peoples. This paper explores the material and social repercussions of railways on the Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx peoples in the southwestern interior of B.C.<sup>1</sup>

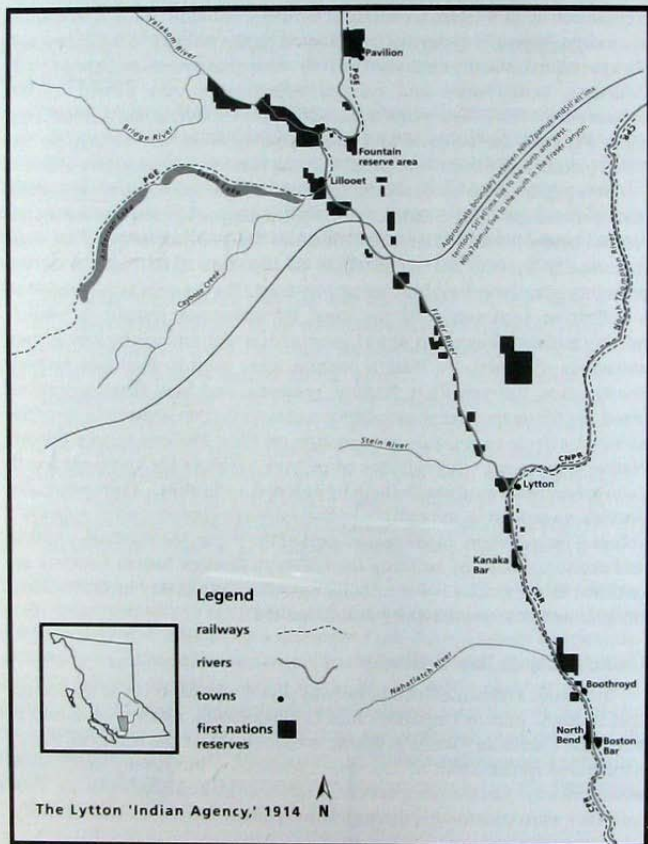
This paper begins by sketching some of the legal and political conditions that opened a space for construction of railroads through the limited Indian reserve land allocated in British Columbia. The provisions that were used rhetorically by officials in an effort to convince First Nations of the propriety of railway building are emphasized. The paper is not intended as a definitive exploration of the legal infrastructure erected to protect railway builders, but rather as an investigation of the means by which state narratives of equity for Native peoples were used to facilitate railway construction through First Nations reserves, and how these narratives acted as a framework for the inscription of colonialism. Descriptions of the material effects of railway construction on First Nations people follow. Native responses to the violence of railway building are juxtaposed with paternal assurances given to them by colonial authorities. Their responses provide a contrast to the optimism that railways represented in Canada's colonial imagination. In the second part of the paper, the political, cultural and economic uses of building the railways through Indian reserves are outlined in the context of a colonial agenda. The railway of the colonial imagination is metaphorically deconstructed.

## Constructing the Railway

Building a transcontinental railway was a condition of the agreement that brought British Columbia into Confederation. Ottawa promised to build the Canadian Pacific Railway across the province from the Rocky Mountains to the Strait of Georgia. Eventually, buoyed by enthusiasm about railways and the prospect of attendant industrial development, three rail lines were constructed through Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx territory.



The first line, the CPR, was completed in 1885. It followed the North Thompson River west and entered the Fraser Canyon at Lytton. From Lytton, it crossed the river and followed a narrow strip of land terraces that cling to the west wall of the river canyon (see map). Two subsequent railways were built: the Canadian Northern Pacific Railway (CNPR) and the Pacific Great Eastern (PGE). The CNPR later became the Canadian



National Railway, but at the time it was referred to as the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR). Constructed in 1913, the CNR followed essentially the same route as the CPR along the Fraser River, but occupied the eastern face of the canyon. It preceded the building of the PGE by only one year. The PGE came from the north and passed through Pavilion, Fountain and Lillooet, where it veered west to Seton Lake and Anderson Lake. From there it ran south to Howe Sound and the Strait of Georgia.

The geography of the Fraser Canyon is critical to a discussion of railway construction through Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx territory. Between Lillooet and Yale the Fraser River, which drains 25 percent to 30 percent of British Columbia, forces itself between two narrow rock walls that rise hundreds of feet above the river. Only 5 percent of British Columbia is covered by arable land, and the Fraser Canyon is not an exception. In certain places, the cliffs support narrow strips of arable land. In others, soil is virtually absent and the rocky crags support only fishing caches. Like arable land, water is scarce in the southern interior of British Columbia, and the climate is exceedingly dry. Farming the terraces along the Fraser River requires irrigation, and water rights were fiercely guarded. Native people were assigned some water rights, along with their reserves, but usually these were second, third or fourth water rights.<sup>2</sup> Additional water rights could be purchased, but Native people were disenfranchised members of an emerging cash economy. The problem was not only water but also a means of distributing it. The untilled soils of the Fraser Canyon were coarse and, even if irrigation was in place, the water frequently drained right through them. Land and the water to irrigate it were of utmost concern to First Nations people along the Fraser River.

Unlike other western provinces in Canada, British Columbia did not sign treaties with Native people.<sup>3</sup> In addition, reserve allocations were smaller in British Columbia, with an average of 10 acres assigned for each family compared with an average of 160 acres per family on the prairies and 80 acres per family in Ontario. Frugal reserve allocations and a political unwillingness to negotiate treaties with Native people in B.C. were tied to a tradition of political conservatism. Despite efforts by the federal government to persuade the B.C. provincial government to increase reserve allocations, the province consistently refused to grant more substantive reserves to First Nations people. Understandably, land became the central political issue for Native people in British Columbia. Building railways through these rocky terraces had completely different implications for Native people than on the prairies or in the Canadian Shield.

Native concern about the proposed route of the CPR predated its

construction. In a letter from Nicola River in August 1878, Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, Indian Reserve Commissioner, described the contents of a "Public Notice" posted on a reserve. The notice described the path that the CPR would follow through proposed and existing reserves. Sproat, whose job was to allocate reserves to First Nations people, was acutely aware of Native anxiety about the railway. He appealed to J.B. Humphreys, the provincial secretary: "I am desirous of knowing how [the railway running through] this reservation will affect my work among the Indians" (Sproat, 1878). Sproat recognized that government promises and intentions regarding Native well-being would certainly be undermined by railway construction of this scale. This was especially true given that the railway was routed along the sparse terraces flanking the Fraser River.

Construction of a rhetorical legal infrastructure prepared the ground for the building of three railways through the southern interior of British Columbia. Provisions that would enable rail construction through reserves were embedded in a matrix of federal legislation. Preparation of the legal terrain for the age of railways began with the Indian Act of 1876. Article 20 made provision for railway or road access through reserves:

If any railway, road or public work passes through or causes injury to any reserve belonging to or in possession of any band of Indians, or if any act occasioning damage to any reserve be done under the authority of any Act of Parliament, or of the legislature of any province, compensation shall be made to them therefore in the same manner as is provided with respect to the lands or rights of other persons. [*Indian Act, 1876*]

The Indian Act employed a language of equality commensurate with the parlance of universalism that marked much 19th century colonial discourse. All people, White or Native, could have their land appropriated for railway construction. While this act provided legal protection for the government and, on the surface, seemed to protect Indians from unscrupulous railway developers, there were many ensuing instances in which the CPR failed to compensate Native people.

Legal ground had been further prepared for the CPR by provisions for appropriating reserve land for railways. "An Act respecting the Canadian Pacific Railway" passed in the House of Commons in 1881. Article 12 stated that "The Government shall extinguish the Indian title affecting the lands herein appropriated, and to be hereafter granted in aid of the railway" (Innis, 1923, p. 305). It consolidated the legal basis for the CPR's passage through reserve land.



Almost thirty years passed between the construction of the CPR and the later lines through southern British Columbia. Their legal passage was smoothed by the appointment, in 1912, of a Royal Commission on Indian Affairs. Ostensibly appointed to investigate the "Indian land Question," the commission was also given the mandate to designate railway access through Native reserve land. The agreement between the federal and provincial governments, under which the commission had been jointly appointed, contained this provision:

If during the period prior to the Commissioners making their final report it shall be ascertained by either Government that any lands being part of an Indian Reserve are required for right-of-way or other railway purposes, or for any Dominion or Provincial or Municipal Public work or purpose, the matter shall be referred to the Commissioners who shall thereupon dispose of the question by an Interim Report. . . . [Royal Commission, 1916, p. 11]

The Commission was entrusted with the mandate to allocate reserve land to power companies and railways as it saw fit. In addition, it was given the power to adjudicate claims for damage that had resulted from past railway construction. Vested with considerable authority, the Royal Commission began touring the province in 1913 to collect "evidence" from Native bands. The railway pervaded the testimony of Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx people to the royal commission.<sup>4</sup>

Like the Indian Act, the commission used a rhetoric of equality in discussing the railway. Commissioner McKenna told the assembled audience at Lytton that White people as well as "Indians" were subject to appropriation:

Land for railway or a public work can be taken from a White man without his consent. The Crown must consent to the taking of Indian land for public purposes; and so, in that respect, the Indian has more protection than the white man; but no railway or public work can enter upon an Indian Reserve without the consent of the Crown, and the Agent will always notify the Indians when such consent is given. [Transcripts, 1914, Lytton]

A strategic geography informed the rhetoric of legal parity between whites and "Indians." Any equality was evanescent. The Commission was in a position to grant right-of-ways to railway companies without consultation with Native inhabitants and did so. On the surface, this could be read as an exception to Section 2

of the inter-governmental agreement under which the Royal Commission had been appointed: *"no amendment to any reserve allocation could be made without explicit consent of the Tribe."* [Royal Commission, 1916, p. 10]

Section 2 was concordant with the Indian Act in that each stressed compensation or permission as a condition of expropriation. An added proviso allowing the commission to sequester right-of-ways through reserve land circumvented the liability associated with "amendments" or "appropriation" of reserve land. The required *consent of the Tribe* could be granted directly by the royal commission. Thus, while the CPR was constructed within the legal model of compensation for appropriation, subsequent rail lines were built using right-of-ways as well as appropriation. The former allowed routing of railways through reserves without the bureaucratic and financial impediments associated with appropriating reserve land. Over thirty years, emphasis in the federal legal discourse had shifted from appropriation to access.

This patchwork of acts and provisions was well buttressed by an accompanying rhetoric of equality and fair treatment for "Indians," intended to forestall resistance. Members of the Royal Commission assumed the task of explaining to Native witnesses the legal conditions that allowed the construction of railways through reserve land. As they travelled through southern B.C. espousing the legality of railway construction, the commission was busy determining whether additional right-of-way access was required for any of the three railways passing through Nlha7pamux or Stl'atl'imx territory (Royal Commission, 1916, p. 11). Many of the Commission's interim reports between 1913 and 1915 dealt precisely with these issues. Interim reports nos. 35, 35A, 36, 36A, 37, 38, 44 and 44A recommended granting the PGE right-of-way through reserves between Lillooet and Anderson Lake.

Decision-making about the routing of rail lines was vested in the Commission, which was subject to pressure from railroad companies on one hand and recommendations from Indian agents on the other. There was, however, little avenue for Native influence. Chief Luss of Cayoose Creek articulated the frustration felt by this band in the face of the PGE:

I am going to let you know that I have been here a very long time; and this here railway destroyed me, and one white man came right here above me here and took my place way, and now I have no place, and that is what makes me sorry. [Transcripts, 1914, Cayoose Creek]



Construction of earlier railways had left tracks of anxiety. The CPR had been completed in 1885, but at Lytton Sub-Chief Harry Mack expressed ongoing concern about the railways. He asked the commissioners for clarification about the planned construction of new railways:

The Reserve that I am on is very small. . . . The Government has always said that we must stay on our Reserves. That is why we are frightened to take up any more land outside our Reserve. The C.P.R. Surveyors have gone through there, and they want to put a railway on that side of the river.

Witnesses were understandably confused about the rights of railway companies to build through assigned reserves. Commissioner McKenna described the basis on which railways received right of passage through reserve land:

It was explained that if any land was required for right-of-way purposes, it should be given away only with the consent of the Commission, and that the Indians would have to be fully compensated.

Native witnesses recognized that, despite an accompanying rhetoric of progress and fair compensation, railways had not benefited them. Harry Mack replied, saying,

Just as you see fit about these railways, it will be alright. I would like the agreement to be made very binding between the white men in general and with the Indians, because you see we Indians have not a word to say. It has been that way since the beginning when we had any dealings with the white men. [Transcripts, 1914, Lytton]

Mack's statements pointed to an ongoing problem: lack of a precise and consistent legal framework for the construction of railways and attendant damage. His caution about agreements between the government and Indians is echoed through the testimony of Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx witnesses. Wariness about railways was not isolated but grounded in a history of unsatisfactory relations with Europeans over land.

Although the CPR was built thirty years before the commission visited the canyon, memories of the damage it caused to reserve land were fresh in the minds of many witnesses. Henry Mack, speaking on behalf of the Lytton band, articulated the fear that if members of his band occupied land outside of their reserve, it would be subject to appropriation by the railway.

Damage caused by the CPR had created apprehension about repercussions of any further railway construction. The commissioners made an effort to reassure Native people that no land would be given to the railway companies without consent of the commission. Their political mandate was, however, to approve access for railways and public works through reserve land.

In the Fraser Canyon, railway access was compounded by the scarcity of tenable land. The geography of the canyon restricted land use. Only a narrow strip of flat land is tenable along the steep banks of the Fraser River. Native people were increasingly forced to share this land with railways as well as gold miners. Missionaries living among the Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx had stressed the virtues of sedentary agriculture. Their injunctions to renounce fishing in favour of farming was echoed by Indian agents who had a specific mandate to introduce farming among "Indians." Construction of railways simply compounded the existing problem of limited arable land along the mountainous banks of the Fraser River. Reserves occupying these terraces were bisected by either the CPR or CNR. Charlie James of Boothroyd described the effect of building railways through this thin corridor: "I dont [*sic*] think there is more than five acres that can be cultivated. The railway came in, and made this strip that could be cultivated very narrow. . . ." [Transcripts, 1914, Kanaka Bar]

Ironically, the railway, which was theoretically a means of connecting Native agricultural goods with markets, adversely affected possibilities of their sale. Reserves were generally remote from roads. From Lytton north to Lillooet, reserves on the west bank of the Fraser River were further isolated by the river. The Commission inquired about markets during its session in Lytton:

Q. What do you do with the potatoes you grow on this land?

A. We cant [*sic*] take them anywhere to sell, so we use them all ourselves.

Q. You dont sell any because you cant get across the river?

A. That is about right; we havent got a road, and we cant go. [Transcripts, 1914, Lytton]

The band had not given up:

We have strung a cable across the river about one mile below our Reserve, and we had to use a ripear to cut our lumber out and build a little scow for ourselves to bring the produce across the river . . . . I would like to have a road built and a bridge.

In 1914, two railway bridges crossed the Fraser River at Lytton, but trains did not transport Native agricultural produce. They did, however, hinder production. Witnesses to the commission frequently made reference to problems they were having with railway construction and maintenance. Billy Sigh described the effect of the railway:

There is a flat of about a quarter of an acre, which was fit for cultivation, where we used to plant some potatoes. The rest is all sidehill, but this quarter of an acre, the railway has gone through it, and there is not much left. [Transcripts, 1914, Boston Bar]

Farther north in Stl'atl'imx territory, a concerted effort to cultivate orchards was thwarted by the construction of the PGE.

Not only land designated for agriculture was affected by railways. Billy Sigh of Boston Bar testified to the commission:

I have had some trouble with the C.P.R. They want to take my land – that is, the land I have been living on for some years. They told me I would have to leave there because it belonged to them. The C.P.R. has moved their fence right up to my house, and they have taken in the principal dwelling part. I am talking about [reserve] No. 2. and they say I will have to move away from there. [Transcripts, 1914, Boston Bar]

Those whose dwellings were not displaced by rail lines often experienced difficulties obtaining sufficient water for irrigation.

Construction of both the CPR and the CNR had increased demand on the limited water supply. Asked by the commission about water on the reserve, Johnny Mack at Boston Bar replied, "We havent [*sic*] very much water here, because white men have taken most of it. We havent even enough to irrigate our gardens here" (Transcripts 1914, Boston Bar). This contention was challenged by a Commissioner:

You have 50 inches from a creek at North Bend, you have 100 inches from a creek in the middle of the Reserve, and 100 inches from a creek at the south of the Reserve. Now, do you get the full use of all that water?

Johnny Mack responded, "No we dont [*sic*] get the full amount. . . . The C.P.R. men use it." The Commission assured Mack that "Mr. Graham [the Indian agent] was studying the water question," but Johnny Mack was skeptical. "No one," he said, "has ever helped us here, and we are very, very poor for that reason." Efforts to build irrigation ditches were also



frustrated by railways. At Cayoose Creek, Chief Luss presented a list of complaints, among them several dealing with water and irrigation. "That land the P.G.E. railway destroyed, our Indian Agent Mr. Graham will tell you about that. The railway destroyed a ditch. . ." (Transcripts, 1914, Cayoose Creek). Luss also testified about a general lack of water caused by railway interference with a flume that the band had constructed to irrigate their land. After consulting its files, the commission found that the railway had repaired the damage. Luss objected that the flume was still damaged, adding that, "I will do the best I can if the railway will fix our flume a little better than it is." Luss received the common reply that "Your Indian Agent will see to that."

Railway companies compensated Native people begrudgingly. Responding to a question about whether he had been paid for damage done thirty years before by the CPR, Harry Sam answered, "One piece that I had fenced and was using for my garden I did get \$100 from the railway though they promised my \$200 but I only received \$100 from Mr. Graham" (Transcripts, 1914, Lytton). At Seton Lake, where the PGE was being constructed, the commission informed a witness that

The Agent ought to make enquiries into any orchards that are destroyed, and the Indians should be compensated for any loss. The Government is going to compensate you for the loss, and the Government is also going to give you 500 trees for the trees you lost.

The witness replied that "The Indian Agent told us that he was going to give us some new trees last Spring, but we haven't seen them yet" (Transcripts, 1914, Seton Lake). Here, as elsewhere, the Indian agent was the mediator between railway companies and First Nations. Failure to compensate Native people for damage caused by construction of the railways contributed to a cynicism on the part of Native witnesses.

Native complaints about railway construction were, however, forestalled by promises of compensation. Bands who acquiesced to the demands of the Royal Commission were more likely to be compensated. Toward the end of a session, Indian agent Graham often announced that the cheques for compensation were in his hand. At the end of his testimony, the chief of the Pavilion band complained that "The railway came through our place here and we have not been paid for it." Mr. Graham declared, "That matter is now settled. I have the cheques now in my possession which I intend handing over to them in a day or two" (Transcripts, 1914, Pavilion).

The band at Pavilion had been willing to comply with Department of Indian Affairs policies. Bands who resisted the care-taking role of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) received more parsimonious treatment. In Boston Bar, where the authority of the commission was obliquely challenged, the commission dismissed complaints about the CPR destroying a man's house and land saying, "Well, Mr. Graham will have to go into that matter" (Transcripts, 1914, Boston Bar). There was no promise of cheques "in a day or two" for bands who questioned the authority of the commission. In no case were cheques actually issued during the hearings. The cheques themselves were part of a theatre of presentation. They allowed the Commission to end the hearing dramatically. Cheque distribution was part of a process of absorbing and diffusing material and cultural evidence of the violence done by the railway.

From the transcripts of the Commission, testimonials abound with references to damage caused by railways, not only to land, but to rock slides caused by dynamiting. In several cases, these obstructed the Fraser River and prevented the salmon from swimming upriver. The effect on its fishery was disastrous. It was almost entirely closed for one year and stocks were not restored for decades. The most spectacular of the slides occurred at Hell's Gate, just south of Boston Bar, during the construction of the Canadian Northern Railway in 1913. The Hell's Gate slide cast a long shadow on the politics of the province.

Political fortunes were closely tied to the railway. Premier McBride of British Columbia had much at stake, himself, in the completion of the CNR. As the railway approached the west coast, the line was in desperate need of cash. Federal cash subsidies of \$10,000 per mile had been promised for its construction along the 535 miles from Yellowhead Pass in the Rocky Mountains to Vancouver (Regehr, 1976). Despite an extra \$30,000 cash loan, the railway was on the verge of bankruptcy, and Premier McBride had promised the B.C. provincial legislature that the CNR would be completed before it reconvened (Regehr, 1976, p. 389). Lack of money and time made that promise increasingly difficult to fulfill. McBride responded on one hand by urgently applying for more federal funds, stressing that the alternate line was necessary under conditions of imminent war. On the other hand, he tried to accelerate the pace of construction by demanding that lights be strung through the canyon so that the labourers could work day and night. The premier required that men "[work] double shifts in the canyon especially where trestles and similar structures are likely to hold you back" (Regehr, 1976,

p. 390). Such measures, undertaken for the sake of McBride's political fortunes, culminated in the accident at Hell's Gate. Fisheries officials described the damage:

In a number of places they have literally shot the whole side of the mountain in to the river, filling up numerous bays where the fish used to rest and as at Skuzzi new points projecting far out into the stream have been formed so congesting the waterway as to make it next to impossible for the fish to get through. [Dept. of Marine and Fisheries Report, cited in Regehr, 1976, p. 390]

As a result of the slide, Fisheries officials severely curtailed the Native fishery. Some communities were allowed to continue to fish one or two days a week. Bands close to the slide were informed that the fishery would close until further notice. Testimony to the Commission reflected the hardship caused. Head Chief Paul was questioned at Lytton about food supplies:

Q. Do they catch any fish here?

A. The last two years we havent [*sic*] caught very many, and the last two years we Indians have got hardly any at all, and has made us very poor, and we havent got sufficient food to last us, and the old people have none at all. [Transcripts, 1914, Lytton]

The cause of the fish shortage was clear in Chief Paul's mind:

In building this new railway there has been a slide in the river so the fish could not get by. Besides that, they have started canneries, and are using fish-traps, so there is no enough fish going up the river, and the Government only allowed us two days out of the week to fish.

Fishing restrictions, as a result of the slide, combined with a decrease in wild game had led to famine in some parts of the region. Head Chief Paul of Lytton articulated the connection:

The last two years we havent caught very many [fish], and the last two years we Indians have got hardly any at all, and that has made us very poor, and we havent got sufficient food to last us, and the old people have none at all. [Transcripts, 1914, Lytton]

The Department of Fisheries and Marine assumed control of the situation. After the slide, few salmon could navigate upriver and what little



catch remained was tightly regulated. Native people up river from Hell's Gate bore the brunt of the shortages as well as the emergency regulations. By 1914, a restrictive infrastructure was well in place. Native fishers could fish only two days a week and their catch was rigorously monitored. On some reserves, restrictions were more severe: at Lillooet, the fisheries commissioner told the band one day, in the middle of the week, that they could fish until the following Saturday in order to stockpile for the winter. After that, they would not be allowed to fish for the rest of the year (Transcripts, 1914, Lillooet). Testimony to the Royal Commission was rife with descriptions of the hardship caused by overfishing.

The Commissioners mediated on behalf of the Fisheries Department. Information about fishing restrictions relayed by Commissioners to the Stl'atl'imx did not acknowledge the poverty and struggle that resulted from such restrictions. Rather, it expressed the prevalent White belief that Native people had overfished and that strict policy measures were in order to regulate the native fishery, which was believed to be hurting the fifty-four commercial canneries at the mouth of the Fraser River.

Native starvation was discounted by Whites. Near Anderson Lake, a hatchery, built in 1903, discarded fish roe. Due to increasing regulation of the fishery, a number of Stl'atl'imx were forced to harvest the rejected roe in order to survive. The *Prospector*, a local newspaper, ran an article that illustrated Native resistance as well as prevailing settler attitudes:

The Indians of Anderson Lake and vicinity are protesting somewhat vigorously against the weir recently built by the fish hatchery authorities across the lake creek. They complain they are unable to procure their winter's stock of salmon. It would be nearer the truth to say that they are not willing to row down the lake to get the salmon after the hatchery authorities have obtained the spawn. The hatchery will dispose of the [dead fish] to the Indians who are prepared to take them away, but this new way of catching fish does not suit the Indian mind. He prefers to get his salmon singly . . . by means of his spear. [*The Prospector*, cited in Drake Terry, 1989, p. 216]

The story was very different from a Stl'atl'imx perspective. William Elliot from Anderson Lake told the commission that the hatchery "could give [the fish which had the eggs removed] to the Indians, but they wait until they are half rotten before they give them to the Indians" (Transcripts, 1914, Anderson Lake). The commission defended the hatcheries, while Native people continued to protest against the regulation of Native fishing.

Peter Chalal warned the commission to "leave them salmon alone so that we can make a living" (Transcripts, 1914, Seton Lake).

Commissioners sought to convince Native witnesses that fish stocks would increase if their control was left in the hands of the Fisheries Department. At Lytton they explained the rationale for limiting the Native fishery:

You understand that this year the shortage of fish was on account of this slide, which prevented the fish from coming up, and the Government were desirous that as many fish as possible should get up to the spawning grounds, so that in later years there would be more fish – do you understand that? [Transcripts, 1914, Lytton]

The commission's role in explaining the new order of things extended beyond specific details concerning the railway's damage to the fishery. It was the harbinger of a new economic order, an expression of large scale colonization and social change. The railway was a vehicle for the incursion of capitalism and associated "progress" into Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx territory.

## Deconstructing the Railway

The first section of this paper described processes by which railway construction wreaked havoc on Native land and communities. What follows is a brief consideration of conceptual explanations for the violence of processes of modernity. The goal is to link modernization and its machines to its effects on First Nations people. In this context, building of railways through Native land clearly constitutes coercion, a coercion that pervaded cultural and material spaces of Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx peoples.

Capitalism has been described as a "machine" that codes peoples and territories for productive use. The process may be divided into two stages (Young, 1995, p. 69). The first stage involves erasing or "de-inscribing" the existing cultural landscape, and the second reinscribes the culture and land so that it can support capitalist production. Robert Young describes the links between deterritorialization and colonialism:

[Deterritorialization] also describes rather exactly the violent physical and ideological procedures of colonization, deculturation and acculturation, by which the territory and cultural space of an indigenous society must be disrupted, dissolved and then reinscribed according to the needs of the apparatus of the occupying power. [Young, 1995, pp. 169–70]

The railways' incursion into British Columbia was physically violent, and testimony given to the Royal Commission is filled with complaints about the damage caused by railways constructed through Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx land. Destruction of the landscape through railway construction was an initial stage of "deterritorialization" leading to erosion of the existing physical and material culture of Native people. Best and Kellner describe the effect of "de-inscribing" the landscape as a "desacralization . . . which shatters all restrictions to economic development" (Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 89).

Cultural havoc and the "creative" destruction of landscape were a means of preparing First Nations people for incursions of capitalist development. At Seton Lake, Chief Peter told the commission about the destruction of orchard trees by the building of the PGE: "Benjamin had an orchard of 20 bearing trees but on account of the railway destroying that orchard they were pulled up. . . . Alexander had 40 trees, and the railway went through and destroyed the orchard" (Transcripts, 1914, Seton Lake). In Anderson Lake, Chief Bob answered a question by the commission about how many houses there were on No. 3 Reserve: "They were going to build houses there, and this railway came through and tore them down" (Transcripts, 1914, Anderson Lake). Demands by the Department of Indian Affairs that Native people settle in houses and become sedentary farmers were thwarted by the progress of railways.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, Best and Kellner argue that destruction is essential for recoding societies for wage labour:

Capitalism subverts all traditional codes, values, and structures that fetter production, exchange, and desire. But it simultaneously "recodes" everything within the abstract logic of equivalence (exchange-value), "reterritorializing" them within the state, family, law, commodity logic, banking systems, consumerism, psychoanalysis and other normalizing institutions. [Best and Kellner, 1991, p. 89]

The introduction of wage labour reinscribed First Nations' societies for capitalism. At Lytton, Head Chief Paul testified:

As soon as our boys are old enough, they work on the railways, and work for white men wherever they can get work. [Transcripts, 1914, Lytton]

The practice of working out for wages was inscribed during the construction of the CPR, which had employed some Native workers. The introduction



of a cash economy strongly encouraged Native inculcation into a modern labour force. Once incorporated into the labour force, however, it was difficult for Native workers to retain their place. Thirty years later, work on the railways was harder to secure than it had been during the construction of the CPR. Asked if men from Fountain Indian reserves worked on the PGE, Chief Adolph replied, "No, not on this railway" (Transcripts, 1914, Fountain). In those thirty years, immigration to British Columbia had increased and, while both White and Chinese workers were employed building railways and roads, it was harder for Native people to secure employment.

Natives objected to the selective hiring of Whites on public works projects. At Bridge River, David asked the commission: "We cannot get any work on the wagon roads – why can't we get some work on the wagon roads? We are the first people here" (Transcripts, 1914, Bridge River). Reserves were being "reterritorialized" by railway construction. Labour was liberated by the modernizing process but, by the 20th century, non-Native labour dominated the market. Natives who wanted steady work on roads and railways but could not find it became part of an available, surplus work force. Some bands did retain access to wage labour. In response to the commission's question, "What do you do for a living here?" Chief Bob of Pavilion responded, "We plant some potatoes and one thing and another like that and salmon and deer – that is what we live on. Then we go out working for the whites; all my boys work out" (Transcripts, 1914, Pavilion).

The railway enforced critical functions for a capitalistic society that depended on available wage labour. It introduced the paradigm of clock time to First Nations people. The regularity of the railway and the wage labour required for its construction contributed to ordering Native society. Anthony Giddens identifies the critical function of railways in imposing regulation and structure on people's lives (Giddens, 1987, p. 174). Clock time modified Indigenous patterns of activity in the canyon. Seasonal work on farms and public works imposed different rhythms on Native communities than had fishing and root gathering. The whistle of two railways running through the canyon was symbolic of the introduction of a new disciplinary regime.

While "working out" became more difficult as White settlers competed for the same jobs, it became increasingly necessary in a money-based economy. Wage labour bought services. Chief Peter from Seton Lake, responding to questions by the commission about medical treatment, said, "It is only the railway men that go to the hospital – the men who dont [*sic*] work on the railway they are not put in the hospital" (Transcripts, 1914,

Seton Lake). Native men who worked for the railway received medical treatment, a payment for service following the logic of capitalism.

## Conclusion: Inscribing Colonialism

The construction of railways inscribed colonialism at a number of levels. Their construction was linked to Confederation and the ensuing geographical extension of the Canadian state. On a political scale, they were part of the process of nation-building. As provinces joined the Dominion, a mechanism was required for instilling a national consciousness as well as developing trade. Anthony Giddens, in theorizing the modern state, identifies three solidifying mechanisms: "the mechanization of transportation; the severance of communication from transportation by the invention of electronic media; and the expansion of the 'documentary' activities of the state" (Giddens, 1987, p. 173). Building the railway corresponded to these postulated requirements for political control of the nation-state while also providing a unifying public focus. With the railway, control of the nascent Canadian state could be extended to include Native peoples from coast to coast.

Construction of the railway was a stark reminder of the hypocrisy that pervaded colonial rhetoric. The breach between the enthusiasm of the Canadian public for railways and the effect of railways on First Nations in southwestern B.C. is expressive of a more general dissonance associated with colonial political discourses. Homi Bhabha demonstrates that there is a necessary fissure between the rhetorical stance of a colonial power and its resolve, a "discursive doubleness" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 95). Embedded in colonial discourse, this doubleness allows the state to ostensibly extend privileges of colonialism to Native peoples while, in fact, denying them. In the case of the Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx peoples of British Columbia, legal provisos for railway building were presented to them encased in a rhetoric of lawful authorization. Native people were seemingly privileged subjects of the law with the attendant rights and privileges. On the ground, however, they became objects of the law. They were neither consulted nor listened to and serve as a reminder that legal discourse is always a technology of power.

Three railways were undertaken through Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx territory, each ensconced within a legal framework that protected investors while incurring substantial damage to limited reserve land. The precise legal basis for building railways through reserves in British Columbia is difficult to pinpoint because the discourse was infinitely mobile. Constantly shifting legal provisos made it difficult for Native people to negotiate the

terms under which railways passed through reserve land. Native witnesses to the royal commission repeatedly testified that they had not been treated fairly, in accordance with the law as they understood it. The law and its accompanying provisions were, however, sufficiently supple to effect an aura of propriety while evading culpability. For Native peoples, the railway was one purveyor of the realization that paternal discourses of protectionism were hollow, exemplifying the inherent double meaning of colonial discourse.

Finally, railways reinscribed Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx territory both geographically and sociologically. They disrupted reserves, and destroyed fields, orchards and fisheries. After the slide at Hell's Gate, Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx people were not able to depend on the fishery for their livelihood. Nor could they become farmers. Their food supply was significantly diminished. They competed with White and Chinese immigrants for scarce jobs "working out." Evolving capitalist practices, which accompanied railway construction, reinforced values associated with precise time-organization, wage labour and a cash economy. These systems of organization were consolidated by the Indian Act, Indian agents and the Royal Commission that had adjudicated right-of-ways for the PGE and the CNR. These changes to Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx land and culture, violently inscribed, represented the introduction of a new cultural order.

The optimism surrounding the prospect of railways, articulated by Thomas Keefer in his polemic on behalf of railroads, and widely adopted by Canadian politicians and public alike, is in stark contrast to the experiences of the Nlha7pamux and Stl'atl'imx peoples. The former were anxious for commerce and trade to be entrenched via steel wheels. For Native people in B.C., the railway was the harbinger of the industrial age established, in part, through material destruction of reserve land. Though many First Nations people made concessions and even benefited from the resulting economic development, it was imposed and controlled by colonial governments and European developers who reaped the greatest benefit and profit.

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## Notes

- 1 During the 19th century, the Nlha7pamux were renamed "Thompson Indians," after fur trader and explorer David Thompson. Presumably, British settlers found the Indigenous name difficult to pronounce. In recent decades, the Nlha7pamux have reclaimed their tribal name. It is pronounced *ent tla' ka pa muk*. The "7" represents a sound in their language similar to "seven." The Stl'atl'imx name shares a similar history. Their tribe became the Lillooet. Only recently have they begun to use their Indigenous name, pronounced *Stal at la' mix* by some. It is also pronounced *slew' mix*.
- 2 First water rights allowed an individual to use as much water as he or she required, after which those with second water rights gained access to the source. Those with third or fourth water rights were entitled to access to the remaining water supply.
- 3 Before British Columbia entered into Confederation with Canada in 1871, fourteen treaties were signed with First Nations on Vancouver Island. Indigenous people, who could neither read nor write, signed with Xs. Those "treaties" covered only a small portion of Vancouver Island and no part of the mainland.
- 4 Archival references containing Native responses to colonialism are few. Rare among government documents, the transcripts of the royal commission contain Native voices. They are, however, exclusively male voices in that women were not asked to present testimony before the royal commission.