

Anniversaries of denial: Canada 150 and the impacts of settler cultural policy

Public celebrations for Canada's 150th birthday on Coast Salish territory promoted settler cultural denial, distorted history, and maintained the fog of colonialism. Coast Salish peoples have occupied their unceded lands and waters since time immemorial, yet colonial governments marked centennial and sesquicentennial dates of incorporation with elaborate hoaxes of pagentry, often including the Coast Salish themselves, as a means of normalizing settler and Crown occupation of lands and resources. These celebrations emphasized the recent Canadian settler tradition of multiculturalism and relied on the public's collusion as participants to entrench cultural entitlement. Similarly, historical apologies and Indigenous reconciliation initiatives for past wrongs are also instruments to perpetuate the colonial Canadian state and advance a program of assimilation and cultural erasure.

A BIPOLAR RELATIONSHIP

This article explores the specific role denial plays as a communication tradition in Canada, and how empirical beliefs enabled settler occupation of Vancouver 131 years ago. The research work I am doing now analyzes the role of pan-nativism and liberal multiculturalism in dominant settler cultural policy, both of which promote Coast Salish cultural erasure and obfuscate opportunities for redress. At odds with Coast Salish nationhood tendencies, domin-

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ant settler culture and communications frame unique and diverse Indigenous cultures as cultural tourism commodities to enact a notion that an "Indigenous Canada" exists. A consequence of this bipolar relationship to Coast Salish culture by colonial governments and mainstream cultural institutions is that Coast Salish culture is structurally underfunded, lacks development, and is neglected until it is needed by these same governments and institutions to raise massive budgets for marquee events and charades of inclusivity.

The premise that all who live within Canada's borders can share equally in its riches is in conflict with genuine reconciliation and requires silent adherence to Canada's white supremacist roots. Throughout Canada in 2017, tightly scripted birthday celebrations were held to inculcate colonialism through highly choreographed displays of public unity fuelled by almost half a billion dollars for reconciliation-themed programs (Hannay, 2017). The boundaries of Indigenous participants' sovereignty and their collusion and adherence to colonialism were inevitably blurred.

THE RECONCILIATION INDUSTRY

From Chief Bobby Joseph to Gord Downie, Canadians were invited through powerful individual stories to participate in reconciliation healing activities, but only one side showed up to do work, and it was Indigenous people. Their healing labour was offered to "fix" the colonial mistakes, while at the same

time, reminiscent of Dallas Smythe's "On the Audience Commodity and Its Work" (1981), the labour of marginalized participants was used to deliver "healing" as well as desired outcomes for elites. The victims' labour enabled the broadcasting of the reconciliation process to millions via social media, communicating a discourse of healing and recovery within the colonial apparatus, suggesting that Indigenous people can now "move on." But moving on, in this scenario, means accepting reconciliation without genuine redress or restitution. Through Canada's version of truth seeking, dominant settler society is not required to provide labour or time and can enjoy the fact that national policies (represented as "cultural genocide" by Canadian standards) get an easy reconciliation with the victims (Staniforth, 2015).

In a broadcast radio interview, Pam Palmater told me: "Reconciliation is fluff. It is also becoming an industry. I have noticed that businesses are now including reconciliation as if it is a 5-star gold rating" (Oostindie, 2016). Indigenous peoples' difference and self-representations are appropriated by the Canadian national meta-narrative. Even the fact that these representations often render a radical critique of the dominant culture is taken as further evidence of a centrist design to demonstrate the putative tolerance of the dominant society (Osborne, 2001).

The problem for the Canada 150+ festival was putting icing on a cake before the cake had been baked. Quantitative data analysis of the state of Coast Salish culture and representation, as well as Canada Council funding levels, reveal a cultural sector in crisis when compared with non-Coast Salish settler culture operating in the Vancouver area. Indigenous artists inadvertently advance the colonial goal of liberal pan-nativism and Coast Salish erasure by taking up

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* As a Dutch settler living and learning about the history of the peoples on whose unceded lands I am living, I am gratefully indebted for the patience and generosity of many Coast Salish individuals who have shared both with me. I attempt this writing to educate my colleagues and comrades on the roles and responsibilities of settlers to lift up Coast Salish culture.

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public space through arts festivals and venues that have no Coast Salish cultural policies. Only one out of about 10,000 artists exhibiting in the Vancouver Art Gallery, the region's premier public arts institution, has been Coast Salish. As for Canada Council funding, 97 percent of Indigenous-targeted funding going into Metro Vancouver goes to non-Coast Salish artists. Of the entirety of Canada Council funding going into Metro Vancouver, 99.98 percent does not go to Coast Salish culture (Low, 2016).

FESTIVAL CULTURE

When it is not blended with Indigenous culture from across Canada, the Coast Salish culture resurgence is hyper-commodified, fetishized, and packaged for the notion of Aboriginal cultural tourism. This takes place at the arrival gates of the Vancouver International Airport, in the 2010 Olympics artwork, and in Canada 150+ celebrations. Coast Salish culture apart from that receives little structural and ongoing funding. The settler state's motivation to spend on First Nation governments' complicity in marquee events is summarized by Glen Coulthard: "what is treated in the Canadian discourse of reconciliation as an unhealthy and debilitating incapacity to forgive and move on

is actually a sign of critical consciousness, of our sense of *unjustice*, and of our awareness of and unwillingness to reconcile" (Coulthard, 2014).

While appearing to promote Indigenous cultural resurgence, settler cultural practices instead cherry-pick when and how they use Coast Salish culture to adorn its festivals and events. Until landmarks are returned to their rightful Coast Salish place names, and settler society moves beyond the liberal instrument of territorial acknowledgments, and colonial governments work for genuine reconciliation and redress, and the Coast Salish are held up by dominant culture as the legitimate cultural heroes of their unceded lands and waters, Canada shall be merely the forever colonial wild west. 🍁

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