Swimming Upstream Against (Neo)colonialism: The rise of industrial salmon aquaculture and decline of Sockeye salmon in the Stó:lō

Introduction

This past Fall, I was assigned a group project to critically review and analyze information on the case study of industrial salmon aquaculture and decline of wild salmon in the Fraser River, known as the Stó:lō to the Stó:lō people (people of the river) for a class in Indigenous Governance. Prompted by this class, I have come to recognize the impacts and symptoms of colonialism, the underlying foundation of capitalism and globalization, throughout present-day issues of natural resource management and climate change. I have realized how the issue of the wild salmon decline is a result of colonization in what is now called British Columbia and is further challenged by ongoing, shape-shifting colonialism (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). In this essay, I will explain some of the connections I have made between the development of this case, colonialism and the global influences of neocolonialism. This paper ties the history of colonization in B.C. and early changes in salmon fisheries to present day challenges faced by Indigenous communities and government-run natural resource management organizations. Although the present status of this case is strongly influenced by state decisions, I argue here that the underlying issue that needs to be challenged in order to overcome the decline of salmon is not simply the government's weak environmental policies, but the government's role in perpetuating contemporary colonialism.

Before I had engaged with this case study, I had not deeply considered the role of colonialism in contemporary issues of environmental degradation and natural resource management. For most of my life, I have lacked an awareness of the histories of colonization and settlement in Canada, the process of settler-colonialism, and my role within it. I ascribe this to my upbringing as a settler of colour on occupied Qayqayt territories, which I only knew as New Westminster. I became aware of the term settler-colonialism and the territories upon which I

occupied upon taking Indigenous studies classes over this past year. Although I grew up beside the Stó:lō (what I knew as the Fraser River), I recognize that I have a weak relationship with the river and the salmon that swim its waters. I can explain my bond to the river by describing my interactions with it amidst urban sprawl - fenced pathways and raised bridges have constantly separated myself and the river. The experience in writing this paper and studying Indigenous history and politics in Canada has given me the necessary space to critically examine the differences between western environmentalist and Indigenous perspectives and their experiences with environmental issues such as the salmon decline.

Case Study: Industrial Aquaculture and the Decline of the Wild Salmon

> The salmon are the bloodline of our people, our main food and without them we lose our rights to fish! When they tested our ancestors' bones they showed that salmon made up 95% of our diet! With the salmon decreasing in our diet, we are suffering from disease, like diabetes and cancer. Our lives are interconnected with the salmon, they are our relatives. The salmon are going through the same colonial experience that we have gone through. (Indigenous Salmon Defenders, 2012)

Wild salmon are one of the most important foods for Indigenous peoples in British Columbia (Morrison, 2013; First Nations Health Council, n.d.). The decline of traditional foods as a result of ecological impacts of colonization, including development, urbanization, and growth of the market economy, has contributed to the increasing food insecurity and food related-illnesses of Indigenous communities (Morrison, 2013; Turner and Turner, 2006; Indigenous Salmon Defenders, 2012). The decline of traditional foods, including wild salmon stocks, has been widely recognized as problematic and the establishment of the Cohen Commission of Inquiry by the Canadian Governor General in Council in 2009 affirmed this issue (Cohen Commission, 2012). Many salmon aquaculture operations are located on the northwest coast of BC along the

ocean migration routes where wild Pacific salmon pass by headed for the Stó:lō (Volpe & Shaw, 2013; Morton, 2013). Indigenous communities, environmentalists, and scientists have recognized the salmon aquaculture industry as one of the causes of the decline of wild salmon due to its spread of disease, pathogens, and sea lice (Cohen Commission, 2012; Indigenous Salmon Defenders, 2012; Morton, 2013; Volpe & Shaw, 2006). Throughout my research, I was most affected by the active voices of Dr. Alexandra Morton, a marine biologist, and Dawn Morrison, chairperson of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, who organized the Indigenous Salmon Defenders March for Wild Salmon. While both of them have been engaged in activism regarding salmon farming, they approach the issue from very different perspectives as settler and Indigenous women. Morton (2013) has attempted to use western science as a means to prove diseases incurred by the industry as a reason for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) in order to shut down the salmon farms. Contrastingly, Morrison believes that Indigenous governance plays a stronger duty in this matter than science (personal communication with D. Morrison on November 13, 2013). Morrison's perspective challenged me to make deeper connections between this case study, colonial histories, and the role of Indigenous governance.

Colonization and Resource Management

Wild Pacific salmon are presently regulated as a resource by the DFO (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, n.d.). The politics of resource management in Canada are complex. This is an understatement, considering the largely unacknowledged occupation of Indigenous ancestral homelands by the state, which includes settlers who have identified capitalism and privatization of lands as corrupt (Tuck & Yang, 2012). In Canada, natural resource management excludes

Indigenous governance for a multitude of reasons including Canadians' unwillingness to accept its precedence and instead favouring colonial control and worldviews (Simpson, 2004). Despite co-management strategies in land and resource management efforts as an attempt to "empower" Indigenous communities, there is a lack of dialogue in the scientific realm on power dynamics, politics, ethics, and history (Nadasy, 2005; Simpson, 2004). These efforts to consult may become what Nadasy (2005, p. 228) describes as a "subtle extension of empire" since they do not fully embrace Indigenous knowledge as an entity in and of itself and fail to understand complex Indigenous relationships with the land, including animals such as salmon. Colonizers and settler peoples did and do not easily understand Indigenous worldviews and how they are deeply embedded in cultural, social, political, and economic values (First Nations Studies Program [FNSP], 2009; Kuokkanen, 2011; Little Bear, 2011). An example of this can be seen amidst the historical treaty-making processes across Canada, including the agreement with Governor James Douglas on Vancouver Island, who did not understand the local peoples' stewardship of the land that did not appear to be "occupied by cultivation, or had houses build on" (Tennant, 1990, p.18). To Douglas, all other land was "to be regarded as waste, and applicable to the purposes of colonization." (Tennant, p.18). Some of these misunderstandings prevail today and therefore, amidst discussions of environmental concern, such as the salmon decline, Indigenous peoples are reduced to mere stakeholders, alongside government agencies, scientists, environmentalists, and fishers, instead of acknowledged and affirmed as knowledge holders and caretakers whose lives have been interwoven with the salmon since time immemorial (Hsu, 2004; FNSP, 2009).

The diminished status of Indigenous peoples' fishing is a colonial legacy of BC fisheries (Harris, 2001; Newell, 1993). The ignorance of the colonizers' understanding of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and salmon, in addition to the colonial assumptions regarding

western superiority, have promoted asymmetrical power relations since the initiation of the first commercial salmon fisheries. The first salmon canneries emerged in coastal BC in the 1870s, which were long after Indigenous peoples had established salmon-based economies (Newell, 1993; FNSP, 2009). As the fishing industry expanded, work opportunities arose for Indigenous peoples at the canneries, which enabled a mixed economy that served as a means for them to support the concurrent Indigenous fisheries and traditional economies (Newell, 1993; FNSP, 2009; Kuokkanen, 2011). The fishing industry was not pleased with fishing competition from Indigenous peoples and the state acknowledged the successes of Indigenous peoples' new mixed economy with disdain (FNSP, 2009). This led to the 1888 Canadian fisheries regulations, which prohibited Indigenous net and spear fishing practices without government licenses, but permitted the "liberty" of Indigenous peoples to fish for sustenance (FNSP, 2009; Newell, 1993). These laws increased in the 1890s and through the 1900s when Indigenous peoples net fishing practices were blamed for salmon run declines and conservation efforts were instated (FNSP, 2009). The inflicted limitations on Indigenous fishing practices subsequently provided increasing resources to settlers (FNSP, 2009). Colonizers consistently undermined Indigenous economies and ways of knowing for their own benefit.

This brief narrative of historical injustice does not come as a surprise given Canada's colonial past and ongoing relationships with Indigenous peoples. While this fisheries example shows an obvious advantage given to settlers over Indigenous peoples historically, it is important to recognize that colonial impositions and oppressive power relations have not disappeared - they are simply less blatant today (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). As described by Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (2005, p. 601), "we live in an era of postmodern imperialism and manipulations by shape-shifting colonial powers; the instruments of domination are evolving and inventing new

methods to erase Indigenous histories and senses of place." Shape-shifting colonialism enables the loss of culture through Western hegemonies that normalize injustices for Indigenous peoples (Irlbecher-Fox, 2009) such as dispossession of homelands for the extraction of natural resources (Klein, 2012). As stated by Simpson, “we have not had the right to say no to development because Indigenous communities are not seen as people. They are seen as resources.” (Klein, 2012). Present-day colonial relations are compounded atop of historical injustices.

Ongoing Colonization of Salmon

The decline of wild salmon in the Stó:lō and its relevance to salmon aquaculture provides a crucial example of the role that colonial powers play in diminishing Indigenous economies and histories in the contemporary context. As argued by Newell (1993), Indigenous control over fisheries were and remain to be crucial to the well-being of Indigenous economies and the self-sufficiency of their communities. However, this is undermined by the impacts of salmon aquaculture in the province. Today, salmon aquaculture plays a large role in the economy of BC. Farmed salmon is the largest agricultural export product in BC (CAIA, 2012) and, ecological externalities excluded, is significantly more profitable than the wild salmon industry (Hsu, 2004; Sumaila, 2005). In 2007, the salmon farming industry contributed more than double the value of the wild salmon industry to BC's GDP; 134 million dollars compared to 67 million dollars respectively (The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 2007). For the salmon aquaculture industry and the state, this has been a great success (BC Salmon Farmers Association, n.d.; Fisheries and Oceans Canada, 2012).

This economic triumph has been a result of many actors on the local and global scale. One of these actors was former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of the Progressive Conservatives,

who replaced the Foreign Investment Review Act with the Investment Canada Act in 1985, which withdrew the requirement that Canadian citizens must hold majority ownership of Canadian registered companies (Volpe & Shaw, 2006). Mulroney's decision was a political strategy to encourage Canada's stake in the globalized economy (The Canadian Press, 2012), rooted in neoliberal ideologies, which encourage self-regulated market growth and expansion amidst the absence of state interference and regulations – this ideology further allows production and distribution to materialize on a global scale (Ervin & Smith, 2008). This process of globalization may be a form of aforementioned shape-shifting colonialism as "a deepening, hastening and stretching of an already-existing empire" (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, p.601), or neocolonialism, as coined by Nkrumah (1966), where multinational corporations reap profits from dispossessed Indigenous homelands.

As noted by Altimirano-Jiménez (2013, p.70) neoliberalism and neocolonialism are "not driven by an external, invisible hand but by specific actors, sites, institutions, networks, the state, and discourses, all of which have material effects in different places." The relevance of Mulroney's decision is noted because it enabled the establishment of Norwegian salmon aquaculture in Canada, which controlled over 90 percent of annual farmed salmon production in Canada as of 2006 (Volpe & Shaw, 2006). While Mulroney was instating the new investment act, there was an outbreak of parasites in Norwegian salmon aquaculture, which led to the Norwegian government's enforcement of stricter rules for aquaculture operations (Volpe & Shaw, 2006). These concurrent policy changes in both Canada and Norway provided an opportunity for Norwegian companies to move their operations and practices to Canada, specifically coastal BC, which would provide an "exemplary physical and biological habitat" (Volpe & Shaw, 2006, p. 5) for salmon farming. The year prior, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) began to

allow fisheries to import Atlantic salmon eggs, despite widespread concern by the public of introducing non-native species (Robson, 2006). This allowance also served the goals of Norwegian companies who had already established an international export market for Atlantic salmon (Volpe & Shaw, 2006). Thus as Norwegian companies became established in BC, the BC salmon farming industry expanded its production of Atlantic salmon, which composed 76 percent of BC's farmed aquaculture by 2006. As a contributing factor to the decline, both scientists and Indigenous peoples believe the aquaculture industry increased transmission of sea lice, disease, and pathogens from Atlantic salmon to wild Pacific salmon due to dense proximity of the farms to wild salmon runs (Volpe & Shaw, 2006; Morton, 2013; personal communication with J. Johnson on November 15, 2013). The implications of these impacts, which profit foreign multinational corporations, suggest an embedded neocolonialism, as these corporations "reap the benefit of similar colonial endeavors throughout the world." (Slowey, 2001).

The Faces of (Neo)colonialism

As the state is influenced by neoliberal approaches intertwined with their own economic "needs" to support their populations (Altamirano-Jiménez, 2010), BC is now dependent on the fiscal value that industrial aquaculture provides. This is embodied by the BC Liberals' slogan, "Secure Economy, Secure Tomorrow" (BC Liberals, 2013), whereas leader Christy Clark is adamant about economic growth (Hunter, 2013). Recent news media suggests that she is in favour of the Kinder Morgan, Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline, and Liquified Natural Gas projects (Hunter, 2013; Baily & Jang, 2013) – she has promised to provide "benefits" to First Nations communities (Wright, 2013), yet many Indigenous nations do not want to put the lands and water at risk for these developments (Save the Fraser Declaration, 2010). Clark's words echo those of

the DFO in their policy principles, which state that they will "respect constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights and will work with interested and affected Aboriginal communities to facilitate their participation in aquaculture development." (Cohen Commission, 2012, p.392) These examples exhibit how the state's inclusion of Aboriginal rights and title in natural resource development is narrowly based on the belief that Indigenous peoples desire to be part of the modern, globalized market economy (Kuokkanen, 2011) through what Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez (2010) refers to as a configuration of a new market-based Indigenous citizenship.

This case study shows how many Indigenous peoples are disproportionately benefitting from these economic developments and remain systemically oppressed by globalization (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). While many Indigenous communities on northern and mid-Vancouver Island are now participating in salmon aquaculture projects, much contention remains within communities about the viability and sustainability of these projects, in addition to the way they continuously do not meet Indigenous peoples' cultural and spiritual needs (personal communication with J. Johnson, 2013). Ironically, the rise of aquaculture was to meet the goals of the "blue revolution" to provide protein to more people (Volpe & Shaw, 2006). Evidently, the nature of shape-shifting colonizers in power (e.g. politicians, government agencies, corporations, band council governments) shows that these actors may wear the masks of many, interchangeable bodies. As articulated by Khelsilem Rivers (2013), these actors are trivial and are not the enemy themselves, but symptoms of the enemy, which is ultimately colonialism.

Resistance and Resurgence

Despite the multi-faceted, deep-rooted challenges faced by Indigenous communities, activists such as Morrison are working towards alternatives that engage the public and university researchers in this matter (personal communication with D. Morrison on November 13, 2013)

and educate Indigenous and settler peoples. Furthermore, through her work with the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, she is challenging extractivism (Simpson, 2012) and using anticolonial strategies to reclaim Indigenous knowledge (Simpson, 2004) by engaging with the recovery and maintenance of Indigenous food systems in a contemporary context and striving to educate others. Morrison's work embodies Alfred and Corntassel's (2005) mantra of a resurgent Indigenous movement through a decolonized diet, whereas "the struggle for freedom is the reconstitution of our own sick and weakened physical bodies and community relationships accomplished through a return to the natural sources of food...lived by our ancestors" (p.613). Although this may seem like a small step in the direction of decolonization, Alfred and Corntassel (2005) assert that in order to rise above colonialism, Indigenous peoples must start with themselves and gradually reach outward to their communities.

Will it End With Us?

I must point out that colonialism is not a problem for Indigenous peoples alone - it is self-harming for settler people in Canada and further intertwined with oppressive struggles of racism, gendered violence, poverty, environmental justice, and war (Walia, 2012). While these issues may not appear to be connected with the salmon decline, they share underlying aspects of the deeply embedded colonialism in our present-day society. However, it is clear that the conversations on Indigenous resurgence and cultural reclamation greatly differ from the environmentally-focused work on wild salmon conservation and biodiversity loss. I believe that those of us who care about the Earth and our future need a paradigm shift towards the recognition of root causes and colonial impacts from our histories here on this land. While it is challenging to make statements about specific solutions at this point, I see cooperative efforts for

small acts of resurgence through reclamation of Indigenous languages, foods, and land as steps towards healing. Today, many Indigenous organizations and peoples are working to educate others and support Indigenous peoples' claims to traditional practices and diets (Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, n.d.; Lekwungen Food Systems, n.d.) – in these instances, there is much potential for supportive, respectful collaborative work from settler peoples. While this case study does not have a simple solution, nor does this paper encompass as much as it needs to, the role of colonial histories in the production of the salmon decline is necessary to be discussed in this issue. The overcoming of colonialism will take an indeterminable length of time to heal, but I believe it will take the strength of all peoples to engage with this history, challenge these root causes and envision new solutions for both the salmon and ourselves.

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