

Winter Studies and Summer Rambles and Power Relations: Integrating Experiential Knowledge into Canadian Discourses of Ecology

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between settler and First Nations groups in the nineteenth century and today. Anna Brownell Jameson's account of settler/indigenous relations is similar to contemporary power imbalances between First Nations and governmental/corporate organizations. First Nations groups are frequently ignored in discussions of eco-development, and their concerns and fears over land use are often brushed aside by developers. In the case of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, Tseil Waututh concerns regarding their quality of life and environmental degradation to their territories have not been addressed by Kinder Morgan. By integrating postcolonial concerns into discussions of the environment, Canada can ensure that First Nations voices are heard and that their concerns are assuaged, potentially preventing ecological destruction and protecting food security and cultural practices. Additionally, by rejecting the Cartesian binary view of nature and society as inherently in opposition and incompatible, we can ensure that hierarchical colonial mindsets, which marginalize and derogate certain groups of people by placing them "outside society," are also rejected.

Keywords: Anna Jameson, Colonialism, British Columbia, First Nations, Pipeline Politics, Postcolonial and Eco-criticism

In the mid-1830s, when Anna Brownell Jameson travelled from England to Canada, formal colonial structures were in place between the predominantly English settler society and First Nations groups within Canada. Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* illustrates the way these structures manifested themselves in settler-First Nations relations, and shows the effects of the predatory trade agreements between the two groups. Today, Canada faces criticism from many who believe that the government continues to use its power to push First Nations groups into unfair land use agreements. The Trans Mountain pipeline is a particularly controversial project, with First Nations groups currently filing legal challenges against its expansion proposal recently accepted by the Federal government. When viewed through DeLoughrey and Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies*, Canada's relations with First Nation people can be directly tied to its commitment to ecological sustainability. Canada's colonial past continues to manifest itself in settler-First Nations relationships today, and viewed through a postcolonial lens, a traditional colonial understanding of the environment influences its ecological decisions.

Jameson's *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* is a useful entry point into an exploration of post-colonialism in that Jameson's experiences within colonial Canada demonstrate the formal colonial relationships which echo in Canadian culture today. Her first experience meeting First Nations people occurs when three "Chippewas," today known as Ojibwas, came to "beg from their Great Father the Governor rations of food, and a supply of blankets for their women and children" (Sugars & Moss 178). The language in the passage provides a window into colonial relations – Jameson's capitalization of "Great Father" suggests that the Governor is a sort of god-like figure to which the First Nations must pray for aid. The governor seems eager to fill this role, passing out supplies without giving the Chippewas the means to provide for themselves, thereby keeping them reliant on the settlers. Although Jameson, born in Ireland, is not accustomed to living in a position of power within a colonial framework, she does not speak directly against it, and the social structure is considered acceptable despite the one-sided nature of the colonial relationship. This scene suggests that the power structures in colonial Canada created a situation in which First Nations groups needed to beg provisions and food from colonial leaders, creating a dependence on British settlers.

Jameson finds a First Nations settlement later in the narrative, as she travels by canoe in the Lake Michigan region. She describes an "encampment of

Indian wigwams extending far as my eye could reach” along the shore of Lake Michigan and watches “the inmates” leave their homes as the sun rises (181). Her use of language is particularly interesting here, as she refers to the First Nations as “inmates” and “primitive” (181-2). Jameson recognizes that First Nations people, unable to compete with European technology, are in a sense prisoners within their own territory. They are unable to create the economic or social capital to provide the mobility to leave their village – even if they were able to, colonial racism and predisposed attitudes towards First Nations groups would impede them from developing independence within the colonial framework. In this instance, Jameson’s account shows her sympathy towards First Nations and the colonial power imbalance affecting them, but in her position as a woman and as a British tourist she does not have the influence or authority to aid them.

A later encounter with a group of Indigenous people comes when Jameson sits in on a meeting between local band Chiefs and a council of traders. The council asks the Chiefs whether they would allow payment for their furs in the form of goods, rather than currency, and despite their direct refusal Jameson remarks that “so completely do the white men reckon on having everything their own way... that a trader had contracted with the government to supply the goods which the Indians had not yet consented to receive” (184). Jameson’s account reveals the inequities within early relations between colonizer and colonized – the settlers know that their proposal does not need to be accepted by the Chiefs to become the new standard of trade. The imbalance of power between the two groups creates an irreconcilable difference in bargaining potential, which allows the settler society to make and break rules as they please. Although it is not formally acknowledged or acted upon, current Canadian demography, with only three percent of people within Canada identifying themselves as First Nations, continues to support this power imbalance (*Statistics Canada*). Despite Canadian political structures beginning to recognize First Nations as sovereign groups, there is still a tremendous power imbalance inevitably associated with this population difference.

DeLoughrey and Handley frame contemporary relations between colonialism and ecocriticism in *Postcolonial Ecologies*. The authors are particularly interested in the way that discussions of ecology often fail to include the historical context of colonialism when discussing ecological issues which began under colonial systems (DeLoughrey & Handley 14). They argue that this is because most lines of ecocriticism are organized with “an increasing tendency to naturalize

a dominant American origin for ecological thought,” displacing lines of criticism from feminist, Marxist, and notably post-colonial critiques (14-15). These American perspectives dominate the culture of ecocriticism while marginalized groups are at times ignored. The authors also argue that formerly colonized groups are now pressured through “modernization schemes” such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to radically alter postcolonial environments through intense forestry, mining, and ecodevelopment projects such as hydroelectric dams (16). They suggest that there is a pattern in which poor Southern nations, freed from colonialism, are induced to destroy their natural landscapes in pursuit of resources to sell to developed Northern states. In this way colonialism plays a significant role in ecological concerns, as the imprint of colonial rule leads countries to destroy their natural landscapes and ecosystems trying to catch up to former colonizers. In the context of Canada, this means that First Nations and Indigenous perspectives are considered less valuable to ecological discourse than settler society perspectives. Because they are not speaking from a North American normative perspective, First Nation bands are easily dismissed by corporate and governmental bodies. This difference in cultural capital ensures that First Nations perspectives on transformative projects such as pipelines, mines, and hydroelectric dams can be viewed as less valuable than Western perspectives. This difference causes developers to overlook First Nations concerns.

One of the most recent examples of this bias is the controversy over the Trans Mountain pipeline, extending from Edmonton to the South Coast of British Columbia. Executive director of the Living Oceans Society, Karen Wrysten, contends that the federal approval of the pipeline “pits [the Federal Government] against British Columbia’s First Nations and communities” (*Globe and Mail*). Part of the controversy surrounding the project comes from the belief that affected First Nations communities have not been adequately consulted on the pipeline’s effects. Squamish Chief Ian Campbell argues that only one third of the First Nation groups affected by the pipeline have signed on to Kinder Morgan’s land use agreement, in direct contrast to Kinder Morgan President Ian Anderson claim that eighty percent of affected nations have signed (*Daily Commercial News*). Campbell also points out that three nations have filed legal challenges against Kinder Morgan in an effort to stop the project. This discrepancy recalls Jameson’s experience with the First Nations Chiefs who knew that, despite their disagreement with the government’s proposals, they did not have the power to meaningfully influence

negotiations. From a postcolonial, ecological perspective, it appears Canada's colonial history, and the practice of ignoring First Nations protests as a colonial afterthought, continues to influence environmental discourses today.

The Trans Mountain pipeline is a nuanced issue which, despite bringing economic gains to Alberta and parts of B.C., threatens First Nations rights. In their *Lands and Resources Department, Treaty, Assessment of the Trans Mountain Pipeline and Tanker Expansion Proposal* the Tsleil-Waututh nation examine and explain some of the threats they face from the pipeline's development. The band argues that their "contemporary economy, environmental integrity, individual and community health, subsistence economy, and water rights" are at risk, along with ten other key features of Tsleil-Waututh life (Tsleil-Waututh Nation 25). The band fears that the pipeline will endanger key elements of the traditional and contemporary lifestyles, and there is concern that the profits of the pipeline will go to Kinder Morgan and resource sectors in Alberta. First Nations bands are experiencing the primary risks of the pipeline, as it often crosses their territories in places where spills cannot be easily detected or contained, while receiving few benefits. The Tsleil-Waututh are also concerned about the impact the pipeline may have on "rockfish, orcas and killer whales, finfish and salmon" within the Burrard Inlet (32). Damage to these populations will not only hurt local ecosystems, but will reduce the food security of First Nations who rely on fishing as a key part of their formal and subsistence economies (32). Despite all of this, however, and despite the negative impact on "Tsleil-Waututh natural and cultural resource bases, socio-economic conditions, title rights and interests, and the living conditions of future generations," the pipeline has been approved by the Federal government (85-6). If First Nations postcolonial input were seriously considered, these issues likely would have prevented such a decision without the implementation of conditions aimed at protecting the Tsleil-Waututh and similarly affected nations.

By moving forward with the Trans Mountain pipeline, the Canadian government inadvertently exposes how colonial power structures continue to influence policy decisions. DeLoughrey and Handley suggest that ecological critics need to allow "inexact sciences" such as listening, interpretation, and ethics to influence discourses of ecocriticism (DeLoughrey & Handley 34). They contend that these informal sciences allow postcolonial societies to present their experiences with environmental changes and colonialism in a way which confirms the

relevance of humanities in environmental development. Canadians are making efforts to take these personal narratives of experience more seriously, with government-sponsored projects such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but more must be done if corporations like Kinder Morgan are expected to incorporate experience-based data into their development planning. Current institutions demand hard evidence and data to back up any claim – by respecting postcolonial ecology, and the experiential knowledge which it allows, Canada can open itself and give First Nations concerns the attention they demand.

Another way of empowering experiential knowledge is by rejecting the binary distinctions commonly placed on nature and society. As Jason Moore explains, “the hardened dualism of Nature/Society is not the only possible distinction. It is not even the best” (Moore 6). Rather than seeing ourselves as separate from nature, and viewing nature as something to be protected or exploited, Moore contends that we need to view ourselves as existing within nature and consider ourselves as part of the web of life. With this framework in mind, discussions of postcolonial ecology would rely less on combining the two social issues, postcolonialism and ecology, and focus on how the othering of nature creates an environment for colonialism to flourish. When Nature and Society are placed into two distinct categories it is easy to imagine groups of people as existing within Nature, rather than Society. This allows groups with power, such as the British in the nineteenth century when Jameson visited Upper Canada, to categorize people as other, and exclude them from basic human rights and dignities. Rejecting this binary implies that no such categorization is possible, and acknowledges the position of otherwise disenfranchised groups. In this way, viewing society as existing within nature, rather than in opposition to it, creates conditions that encourage the equal treatment of current and formerly disenfranchised groups.

Anna Brownell Jameson’s experiences in Canada reveal the colonial history under which the country still operates. The power systems Jameson examined during her stay in Canada remain today, as depicted by the current controversy over First Nations rights and the Trans Mountain pipeline. First Nations groups in the nineteenth century had no power in their political or economic conditions, and our current political situation further alienates First Nations people by reducing local sovereignty. The current Trans Mountain pipeline debate exemplifies this – First Nation concerns are being overlooked in the hopes of

securing quick profits through eco-development. The Tsleil-Waututh nation maintains that “the [Trans Mountain pipeline] proposal does not represent the best use of our territory or its water, land, air, and resources for the present or the future,” but has been met with indifference from governmental and corporate bodies (Tsleil-Waututh Nation 86). Many institutions and practices have carried over from the mid-nineteenth century into current Canadian politics and policies; if the Trans Mountain pipeline is allowed to expand despite First Nations protests, then it is clear that paying lip service to First Nations protests is one such colonial legacy.

DeLoughrey and Handley’s theories on postcolonial ecology propose a way for Canada to give local power to First Nations groups by seriously considering experiential knowledge and the inexact sciences, which formerly colonized groups often prioritize. Additionally, by viewing society as a part of nature, rather than separating the two, we can ensure that the social othering common to colonial constructs is reduced, and disenfranchised groups are brought into one eco-society. It is time to empower First Nations by taking Indigenous land usage and environmental concerns seriously, and by integrating a postcolonial understanding of ecology into formal discourses of ecocriticism and development. It is only by empowering First Nations perspectives that eco-development can take place in a way that respects the sovereignty of all nations within Canada.

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