



Opinion

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The People are in the Land and the Land is in the People: The Importance of Storyscapes in Cultural Heritage.

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My writing has largely addressed the clashing perspectives of meaning and being with respect to colonial government institutions and First Nations, with the hope of strengthening discussions on Indigenization for branches of government such as the Parks, the courts and land claims cases, environment and wildlife, forests lands and natural resources etc., but also to broaden settler understanding within industry and those interested in land use and development within Indigenous territories. Through the concept of storyscape, I seek to problematize the colonial process of erasing Indigenous presences on the land through settler re-coding, re-mapping, and re-storying of Indigenous traditional territories. Through the course of my research, and in studying the oral traditions of various First Nations in what is now British Columbia, I note a poetics of existence that emerges from the fusion of body and world that took place over the millennia Indigenous peoples have spent on the land, thus the land can be seen as an entire way of life and identity. It therefore is important in the above circumstances, to contextualize First Nation's landscapes (their traditional territories) as cultural heritage and a part of the people themselves. Elsey [1] Social anthropologists have long entertained a notion that culture seizes nature and that nature has been rendered understandable from culture to culture, on the basis of the human stories that gets embroidered upon the land. The anthropological notion that culture seizes nature conceptualizes the relationship between culture and nature by explaining how nature becomes nested within a culturally specific human story that provides a perspective on the natural world thus telling us how

the world comes into being, how it works and what it all means. A wide range of anthropological field studies (Ingold [2], Basso [3], Feld [4], Brody [5], Kahn [6]), demonstrate how differences in cultural meanings and folkloric traditions from region to region or society to society, lead invariably to contrasting worldviews and interpretations with respect to the natural world and to the attitudes and behaviors of humans toward their environments. In sum, my work highlights clashing perspectives of meaning and ways of being between colonial/settler government institutions and First Nations.

In contrast to Enlightenment explanations of nature characteristic of European-based societies, Indigenous worldviews and methodologies tend to accord a great deal of import to the relationship between land and story, and thus the primacy of oral tradition with respect to First Nations peoples. Such oral and folkloric traditions ultimately inform long standing inhabitants about their relationships with nature, the supernatural, and how the people arrived at that place. Thus, we can see how explanations and meanings about the natural world, are actually a cultural matter inseparably linked to the interpretations of humans and nested within the human story or what I have termed "storyscapes" (Grieder and Garkovich [7]). The array of origin stories worldwide with their explanations of land, water and the elements give rich testimony to the human inclination of creating meaning on the basis of a wide range of symbols and symbolic interpretations integral to the process of culture. Within the Western line of thinking, through a rationalist perspective, the cultural, spiritual, oral, and experiential

values of one's environmental surroundings are awarded a very low priority and thus are rendered more or less insignificant within the enterprise of human knowing and of valuing the world.

However, Anishinaabe kwe researcher and scholar Kathleen Absolon [8] explains that an Indigenous process of knowledge collection is generally experiential and holistic and, that oral tradition is a methodology in and of itself and is the primary means of gaining insight into Indigenous process, and to this I'll add into the Indigenous meaning of land. Thus, the land is supremely important to Indigenous peoples as they face the courts with respect to the formalization of their constitutional/Aboriginal rights as is occurring in Canada. According to Frideres and Gadacz, "Aboriginal peoples have a clear vision of their heritage and culture as distinguished from that of the mainstream society." (2005:16) Thus Indigenous identity is being decolonized and re-situated in a renewal of ways of knowing, oral tradition, and experience and according to Okanagan scholar Jeanette Armstrong, "in a relocation of the Indigenous self in between self and other and between the Indigenous self and the wider external and surrounding world", thus it is ultimately situated on the land and within the territory. Thus, assimilative, and Western mainstream forms of knowing are being problematized and are deeply thrown into question.

To demonstrate how Indigenous identity becomes coded in land and story, much of the surrounding landscape in the Stein Valley (of what is now British Columbia) a valley sacred to the Nlaka'pamux and St'at'imc people has a poetic, sacred and ceremonial significance and also a "narrative meaning". In this sense, the Stein Valley can be described as a storyscape as found in the legends and trails of meaning and being of the St'at'imc and the Nlaka'pamux people. The stories and traditions found in the Stein River Valley are vested in an historic path moving along the side of the Stein River rich in symbolic sites, sacred rock landmarks (landforms), rock paintings (pictographs), and Nlaka'pamux named places that speak to the ageless human presence on the land. (M'Gonigle and Wickwire [9]).

"The trail beside the river becomes the container for all that has happened there within the centuries-old vortex of human and non-human activity. Worn with the weight of generations of foot traffic, the access trail has been the pathway of aspirants and spiritual quests, of women going into the middle Stein to pick oyster mushrooms (Kumash-ekwa, at Shklimeen or "wade across place") and harvest cedar roots for baskets (at Kiskw or Kemkamatshoots) and of families migrating to a place near "canoe landing", or shtlidheel shtlahkows, to engage in night fishing, which is done with a pitch lamp shone into the dark waters to see the fish." Elsey [1] 100-101, Elsey 1997, M'Gonigle and Wickwire [9].

As shown in the anthropological studies of the cultural heritage of the Stein Valley by Wickwire, Arnett, York, Daly, Elsey et al., the cultural memory as vested within the Stein is a part of the local Nlaka'pamux people themselves. The land is found to be the living expression of the Nlaka'pamux as found in the pictograph panels, placenames, storied landforms, and the trail; it is the container for

all that's happened there. Being an untouched wilderness valley, the richness of the Stein Valley/Nlaka'pamux storyscape serves as a living representation of a storied landscape and of the land as Indigenous meaning and being in contrast to the re-coding, renaming, and re-mapping that accompanies colonial/settler presences that erase and silence the Indigenous presence.

Normally and regrettably, such colonial erasures are accomplished through Western cartography, through settler renaming and re-framing and the ultimate layering of a settler presence over the pre-existent Indigenous presence so as to obscure, remove, obfuscate the age-old Indigenous presence on the land. Therefore, "According to Armstrong [10], Hall [11], and Sorflaten (2006), there is a significant danger of Indigenous homogenization through global mass economic culture, which both includes but also transcends the boundaries of national state governments" (Elsey [1]) [12-18].

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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