



Stories from Home: First Nations, Land Claims, and Euro-Canadians

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stories from home: first nations, land claims, and Euro-Canadians

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Storytelling . . . does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller*, 1969

This article arises out of the complexities and contradictions of my life, being both fisherman and anthropologist. The fisherman in me began as a young boy with trips to my father's boat in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. I watched him work and then, when I was able, worked alongside him. At 12, I was allowed to go fishing, and at 16 I earned the right to a full crewshare. Since 1982, I have filled several journals and notebooks with my thoughts and observations, and with the stories told by fishers during these ten fishing seasons. There is a rambling, almost chaotic, tone to the earlier entries; a tone reflective of the pulse of the boat and its crew. The events described are recorded from the perspective of a participant. I say this in recognition of Clifford's warning that "no sovereign scientific method or ethical stance can guarantee the truth of [these] images. They are constituted . . . in specific historical relations of domination and dialogue" (1988:23).

My participation does not, however, mean agreement with or support of Euro-Canadian opposition to First Nations' land claims. I have often found myself in a difficult situation—isolated in the corner of a ship's galley or trapped at the end of a dock—trying to explain to men afraid they will lose their jobs and their way of life that "Yes, First Nations people have a legal and moral right to control over their traditional territories and resources." Perhaps the complexity of my own ethnic identity, being neither fully Indian nor fully Euro-Canadian, or even my ongoing professionalization as an observing anthropologist creates a space within which I am able to raise an oppositional voice. Thus, by participant I mean only that my life experiences have been for more than thirty years inextricably bound by family and work to the small north coastal town of Prince Rupert. It is these experiences that I draw from in my attempt to come to terms with the virulent opposition to land claims expressed by many of the Euro-Canadian fishers with whom I work and amongst whom I grew up.

This article discusses the opposition of Euro-Canadian fishers to First Nations' land claims in British Columbia, Canada. The author draws upon his personal experience growing up in a fishing family from northern British Columbia to draw out the complexities of this conflict. The object of the article is not to convince the reader of the rightness or wrongness of Euro-Canadian opposition to First Nations' land claims but rather to create a space in which their fear of and their reactions to land claims can be better understood. [Euro-Canadians, First Nations, Aboriginal rights, fishing, British Columbia, ethnic conflict]

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Prince Rupert, the backdrop against which this story² is told is a solidly working-class town (population about 17,000), heavily reliant upon resource extraction industries. Most of those employed work in the pulp mill on the outskirts of town or in one of the several fish plants that line the city's harbor, or make their living from the sea as fishers. The coal and wheat terminals feed a constant flow of deep-sea freighters. During the summer months, eager American tourists flow through the town on their way north to Alaska.

When I returned to Prince Rupert in 1989 to conduct research, I came not simply as "Charlie, Basso's son out for the salmon and halibut season." I was also there to study interaction between First Nations people and Euro-Canadian fishers within the politicized context of First Nations' land claims. My work on the fishboat, however, limited my ability to observe such interactions in the sense in which I had first envisioned it. Yet I did learn a lot about Euro-Canadian fishers' perceptions of First Nations people and their land claims. The story(ies) before you reflect(s) this contingent nature of the dialectic between observer and observed and, as the narrative develops, you will be confronted with the misconceptions, fears, and material conditions that underlie one community of Euro-Canadians' opposition to First Nations' land claims. My aim is not to convince the reader that this group of Euro-Canadian fishers are right in their opposition to land claims but rather to create a space in which one can understand their fear and their response to First Nations' claims without having to agree with them or even tolerate their views.

the commercial fishery and First Nation claims

Despite the perception of independence fishers evoke in the popular conscience, their freedom is severely restricted. The fishing industry is "an industry subject to rapid social change and ruthless restructuring, loosely guided by state policies, and beset by turbulent economic conditions" (Clement 1986:7). The commercial, or capitalist, fishery in British Columbia dates back at least to the period of the fur trade, when First Nations people bartered fish products with the Hudson Bay Company in the 18th and 19th centuries. However, with the establishment of an industrial fishery on the Fraser and Skeena Rivers in the late 1800s and early 1900s, First Nations' fisheries were brought under the effective control of the Canadian state. First Nations' fishers were prohibited from selling fish except when licensed by the state, and in this early period, the private fish companies controlled the dispersal of these licenses.

The nonaboriginal fishery was a product of the expansion of capitalist relations of production to the fishery. Early salmon fishers were hired by industrial firms and paid wages. The first halibut fishers worked on large, company-owned steamers. Independent boat ownership and the rise of a simple commodity form of production in the fishery followed the establishment of the industrial fishery.

Today, British Columbia's fishing industry is best described as oligopolistic; "one firm has been the major processor for several decades and four firms altogether supply the larger part of the domestic markets" (Pinkerton 1987:66). Between them, these four firms control in excess of 75 percent of the landed value of all fish production in British Columbia. Many erstwhile independent fishers are tied to the large processing firms through a variety of economic mechanisms that severely limit their actual economic freedom.³

Fishers have, during different periods of the industry's history, adopted a variety of cooperative and/or collective strategies designed to improve their situation in life and to mitigate against the pervasive control of monopoly capital. Two important instances of successful collective projects in British Columbia are the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-operative Association (PRFCA) and the United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union (UFAWU). Both organizations resulted from an economic, ideological, and political struggle against monopoly capital. In Wallace Clement's words, they are "organized resistance" (1986:15). Though the social forces that led to the creation of fishers' cooperatives and unions emerged from the common poverty

of the 1930s' depression, early cooperators tended to be small-boat owners, while union membership was primarily recruited from among propertyless fishers (deckhands and renters) and fish-processing workers.⁴ This socioeconomic difference is at the root of the many bitter conflicts between the UFAWU and the PRFCA (known locally as the "Co-op").

In recent years, the Co-op's earlier preoccupation with the UFAWU as its major external threat has, to a certain extent, been replaced by the specter of First Nations' land claims and the subsequent loss of nonaboriginal jobs in the fishery. Many Euro-Canadian fishers believe that the economic impact of a fisheries-related First Nation claim settlement will signal the end of their ability to participate in the fishery. They draw on examples from American native claims settlements, such as the 1974 Boldt Decision in Washington state, which guaranteed treaty Indians 50 percent of the harvestable catch of salmon, to illustrate the potential for economic disruption of the nonaboriginal fishery.

Though the Boldt decision is considered by many Euro-Canadian fishers to be the primary factor in the decline of the Puget Sound fishery of Washington state, there is reason to believe that this industry was in decline prior to the 1974 judgment. During the 1950s and 1960s, catching capacity increased, stocks declined, and the market underwent a change in orientation from canned salmon to fresh and frozen. During this period, participation in the salmon fishery markedly expanded. From a base of 325 seine and 508 gillnet permits issued in 1951, the fleet increased to 437 seine and 1,989 gillnet permits in 1974.⁵ During the same period, however, the salmon pack (measured in cases of 48 one-pound cans) decreased from 735,146 in 1951 to 245,854 in 1974 (Boxberger 1989:127–153).⁶

Irrespective of the factors leading to crisis in the pre-Boldt decision fishery, the decision to restrict nonaboriginal fishers' catch to 50 percent of the harvestable salmon run contributed to their economic dislocation and the inflation of their fishing costs. A further unintended consequence of the Boldt decision was "the creation of a wealthy class of offshore, capital-intensive treaty fishermen [First Nations' fishers] who are intercepting much of the resource before it reaches the tribes' traditional estuary and river fisheries" (Knutson 1989:266). Given the experience of nonaboriginal fishers in Puget Sound, Co-op fishers' fears of First Nations' control of the fisheries are certainly understandable.

The viability of the Co-op is contingent upon maintaining a base of fishers willing to produce and deliver fish to the plant. If these fishers, most of whom are Euro-Canadian, lose access to the resource, the Co-op could possibly collapse.⁷ Hence, First Nations' attempts to regain control over their traditional lands are perceived by many Co-op fishers as a direct attack on their livelihood in a way the activities of the UFAWU never were.

Co-op fishers' fear for their livelihood is exacerbated by the lack of treaties between British Columbia's First Nations and the Canadian state.⁸ Unlike most other land claims cases in Canada which proceed within the context of previously existing treaties, First Nations' land claims in British Columbia come under a comprehensive claims program established by the federal government in 1973. Under the federal program, 18 claims have been submitted that cover a land mass in excess of 700,000 square kilometers, an area roughly equivalent to 75 percent of the land mass of British Columbia (see Cassidy and Dale 1988:15–19, 214–230).

Underlying First Nations' land claims is the doctrine of aboriginal title and the question of whether or not title has been extinguished. In brief, the doctrine holds that aboriginal title "is a legal right derived from the native people's historic occupation of their tribal lands. That title both predated and survived the claims to sovereignty made by European nations in colonizing North America" (Slattery 1987:729). Aboriginal title can only be extinguished by native consent. As a result, First Nations' claims in British Columbia require the provincial or federal governments to demonstrate that "aboriginal land rights were lawfully extinguished in the past or acknowledge their continuing existence" (Slattery 1987:731).⁹

In Canadian law, the recognition of aboriginal title dates to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which recognized aboriginal “rights to lands unsundered by them [First Nations], and . . . guarantee[d] their protection in the possession and enjoyment of such lands” (Mr. Justice Strong, quoted in Sanders 1973:8). However, most of British Columbia’s land and resources were never legitimately ceded to the crown. European settlers simply expropriated land without recognizing the aboriginal inhabitants’ preexisting rights.

Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia have vigorously opposed attempts to extinguish their title. From about 1850, British Columbia’s First Nations have sent out letters and delegations to Victoria, Ottawa, and London¹⁰ to assert their continuing title. In 1927, the federal government of Canada made it illegal for First Nations people to seek legal counsel and raise money for the purposes of land claims. The new law changed the nature of Native resistance “for some decades but when, in the 1960s, they were faced with federal attempts to extinguish their status, Indigenous peoples vigorously renewed their efforts” (Open Road Collective 1988:3).

A 1969 White Paper, introduced into parliament by the federal government, “argued that Canada’s Indians were disadvantaged because they enjoyed a unique legal status. The separate legal status of Indians [the government argued] and the policies which have flowed from it have kept the Indian people apart and behind other Canadians” (Miller 1989:226). In the White Paper, the government proposed to abolish the Indian Act and the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

Indians would be granted title and control of their lands and would become “ordinary” citizens who received services from and paid taxes to provincial and municipal governments. Federal funds normally spent on Indian administration would be transferred to the provinces, although this subsidy would be phased out eventually. Other proposals included a fifty million dollar Indian economic development fund and appointment of an Indian claims commissioner. [Dyck 1991:108]

The government, however, seriously misjudged the reaction of First Nations. Rather than accepting the dismantling of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and special status, First Nations leaders argued they “deserved all the normal rights and advantages of Canadian citizenship, as well as special government assistance to compensate them for the hardships imposed by arbitrary government administration of their affairs” (Dyck 1991:110). In opposing the White Paper, aboriginal organizations moved into a new era of resistance. The land claims and resource management proposals of First Nations are, in many respects, the logical outcome of their opposition to the 1969 White Paper.

The struggle of First Nations people to regain control of their traditional land and resources brings them into direct conflict with nonaboriginals employed in resource extraction industries such as fishing. Nonaboriginals anticipate the loss of their jobs and the end of their way of life. First Nations people, however, look forward to a better tomorrow in which they control their traditional land. Nonaboriginal fishers believe they are confronting a situation of diminishing opportunities, while First Nations people are operating within the context of potentially expanding opportunities. Although media and political attention given to land claim issues have increased, “public understanding of these developments has lagged far behind the amount of information being disseminated” (Dyck 1986:32). These different expectations of the future directly affect aboriginal people’s and nonaboriginal’s perceptions of the “other” and, consequently, affect how they interact with each other.

returning home

The beginning of a new season is always an exciting time for me. It is another chance to load the boat full of fish, to make the big trip fishers often dream about. It is a time in which I renew old acquaintances and make new ones.

My father is waiting for me as I step off the airport bus at Prince Rupert's terminal building. This year the occasion of my arrival is celebrated with dinner in a local Chinese restaurant. Every year, on my return to Prince Rupert, I join my father in readying his salmon seiner/halibut longliner for the upcoming fishing season. Sometimes we are joined by other crew members, sometimes not. Unless the work relates directly to preparing the actual fishing gear, the crew is not expected to help.

The day after my arrival, I go early to the dock where my father's boat is moored. I stop for morning coffee at the cafe near the entrance to the Co-op. It is a convenient, hence popular, meeting place for fishers, the Co-op's shoreworkers, and the occasional tourist who sits in conspicuously clean clothes while waiting for the Alaska ferry. Like me, many Co-op fishers gather over cups of coffee and the occasional breakfast before continuing on to their day's work.

I hurriedly drink my coffee. Even though Dad has decided that we (the crew) are not going to begin overhauling the gear "officially" until tomorrow, even though two of the six men who make up the crew have already begun to overhaul the gear, I have a lot to do.

"They're not like some other guys," Dad told me last night, "dividing everything up equal and stopping when they're done. These fellas don't act that way. No. They work until the job's done."

"Hey," I laughed, "maybe there won't be anything left to do."

"No chance of that," Dad replied. "There is always something to do."

Time to go to work. I pay for my coffee and leave. The morning is calm, fogged in. The dock is very quiet. The few people around are readying the Co-op's fleet of halibut longliners for the upcoming halibut fishery. I start up the stove and put on a pot of coffee for Dad. While I am laying out the paints, Luke,¹¹ one of the regular crew, comes up to the boat. He pauses momentarily, seabag in hand, and then welcomes me back for the summer.

"All ready for another season?" I reply.

"Season's half over," he says.

"Yeah, that's true. I was looking at some old tallies back to '68. By now the season would have been well underway."

"Yup," says Luke. He throws his bag over the rail of the boat amidships and quickly follows after it. He wastes no time in putting his gear away in the fo'c'sle and in claiming his bunk before the arrival of the other crew members. He appears on deck 15 or 20 minutes later. Now his gear is stowed firmly below decks, Luke is on his way home.

Just as he is stepping off the boat, I say, "I hear the United Church is going to raise a million dollars for the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en land claims court case."

"What's that!?" Luke stops dead in his tracks.

"I say, apparently the church is planning to raise money for their court case."

Luke pauses momentarily. He is a member of the United Church. He starts a laugh that turns quickly into a sneer as he affects a practiced cynicism. "Those Indians,¹² they're okay, but my family's been here [in Canada] for ten generations. Back where I come from [he moved from eastern Canada to British Columbia as a young man looking for work], we have people buried in our land for over 150 years—all family. Now you take in Halifax, there's an engineer who worked on planning that fort—spells the name the same as me. That fort is old. My people have been here for a long time. The Indians want it all, but I haven't got a homeland to return to—this is it. It's as much mine as it is theirs." Luke ambles off, up the gangplank, through the netloft, and on home to his lawn.

With varying degrees of intensity, most of the Euro-Canadian fishers I know share Luke's opinion about native land claims and "Indians." Many of them, like Luke, support the Pacific Fishermen's Alliance, a loosely knit coalition of fishers' groups dedicated to preserving nonaboriginal fishers' access to the commercial fishery. The UFAWU, the industry's main union, is conspicuously absent from this coalition. The UFAWU has taken a principled stand

in favor of land claims as long as these claims do not take jobs away from union fishers and shoreworkers. Understandably, the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, which represents First Nation fishers, does not participate. The Alliance is supported by nine gear-type¹³ and vessel owners' organizations, the Co-op and the Co-operative Fishermen's Guild (a direct charter, Canadian Labour Congress union that represents crewmembers in the Prince Rupert Fishermen's Co-op).

The Alliance has played a major role in court battles over native land claims. In 1986, when the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en attempted to use provisions under the Indian Act of Canada to enact a band by-law establishing a commercial fishery on the Skeena River, inland from Prince Rupert, the Alliance was instrumental in securing an injunction preventing the by-law. According to the Alliance, court interventions and, more recently, direct political actions in opposition to a "Boldt-like" settlement of First Nations' Claims in British Columbia are necessary to "protect Canada's fisheries and Canadian jobs" (Pacific Fishermen's Alliance, n.d.).¹⁴

the blockade

On the morning of August 2, 1990, 125 fishboats (containing close to 450 fishers) converged on Prince Rupert's government ferry dock in the early morning drizzle. Fish boats drifted about, periodically blowing horns and sirens. The harbor blockade was organized by the Pacific Fishermen's Alliance "to back . . . demands for participation in the process of land claims negotiations between the federal and provincial governments and native Indians in British Columbia" (Pacific Fishermen's Alliance 1990). The blockade was timed to delay the departures of the B.C. ferry *Queen of the North* and the Alaska state ferry *Aurora*.

The day before, over lunch at the cafe with Dad and two other Co-op skippers, Ernie Hendrickson and Jack Wick, I heard that a blockade was being organized. Jack was talking about land claims and the Mohawk blockade at Oka, Quebec: "These god-damn fucking Indians get too many freebies from the government, what's their problem?" Jack described a situation in which it seemed to him that lawless layabouts used violence to get something they did not really deserve. Special derision was reserved for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) television newscast of the preceding evening: "That fucken bitch," he said, "the one on the Journal, not Barbara Frum, some other dame. She had a French councillor from Oka and some left-wing freak hippy university prof." According to Jack, the CBC is biased, "left-wing socialist crap." He told us how the interviewer did not give the councillor, who spoke "broken English" a proper chance to express himself, while the "NDP [New Democratic Party]¹⁵ freako" was allowed to occupy most of the time claiming the "poor Indians had lost their land to the white people. Well I don't give a fucken damn, it's been done and it's time we did something more! Blockading the harbor is a good idea, its a good start."

"What blockade is this?" I asked.

"The Alliance is going to shut down the harbor tomorrow," Jack said. "There's enough boats in the harbor to really do it."

The next morning my friend and I were up and at the dock by 6:30 a.m. A large fleet had already gathered in front of the government ferry dock. We wasted little time in putting the seine skiff in the water so we could go out to observe the blockade firsthand. Just as we were about to leave the dock, Jack Wick and his son came down the gangplank, asking, "Can we catch a ride out to the boat?"

"No problem, hop aboard," I said. In their eagerness to join the blockade, Jack's crew had left the dock with his seiner before he had arrived. "He can look after himself," one crew member had said as they had left.

From our vantage point in the skiff, we were able to move freely amongst the flotilla of boats and talk with blockade participants.

"It is about time we did something. This is all I know how to do. We can't be lawyers; we just can't let the government give our fish away," a skipper told me.

A crew member on the nearby *Angel Wing* agreed: "This blockade is a good idea! It is about time we did something. We should stay out here all day and all night!"

At 9:00 a.m., the blockade came to a peaceful end when the organizers instructed the fleet to return to the dock. The assembled fishboats made one final steam past the bow of the government ferry *Queen of the North* at top speed. "We're not out of control like the Indians," a fisher said over the radio phone. "We don't need guns."

That afternoon local First Nations people marched through the streets of Prince Rupert to demonstrate their support of the Kanesatake Mohawk's blockade at Oka, Quebec, and to advance their own local land claims. More than three hundred people—aboriginal and nonaboriginal—participated. My friend and I also joined the march. I took pictures, and we spoke with participants. However, my participation in the march was interpreted by my Euro-Canadian co-workers as an unequivocal repudiation of their way of life, despite explanations about my research and my status as an "anthropologist/professional student."

The following day, I was accosted by a fellow fisherman as I headed down to the boat after lunch at the cafe. "I heard what you've been doing," he said. His accusation included no details. "What do you mean?"

"You were marching with those Indians."

"I was also at the blockade in the morning, you saw me there."

"There is only one side." He raised his hand above my face, his fingers held in the shape of a gun. He cocked the "gun" and touched the muzzle to my forehead—BANG. Silenced, I watched him turn and walk away.

two worlds collide

The opposition of Euro-Canadian fishers to First Nations' causes is not always so violently stated. During a halibut trip in the late 1980s, these two worlds came together within the confines of a fishing crew. Two *conversations* occurred simultaneously. The dominant one set the agenda of interaction but was briefly destabilized—halted—by the subordinate voices of the second.

We were fishing in the middle of Hecate Strait, a large body of water between Haida Gwaii (the Queen Charlotte Islands) and the British Columbia mainland. Halibut are caught by hook and line, which are baited and then set out along the ocean floor. The fishery is peculiar on the west coast in that it is the most craftlike; it requires a specialized set of skills acquired through an arduous apprenticeship.

As the last hook was hauled onboard, the skipper, looking down at us from the wheelhouse, said, "Don't bait any more gear. We'll set back what's on deck, then go for bait." The gear was quickly reset and the boat turned toward the nearest bait pond. We appreciated a break in the long halibut trip.¹⁶

Five hours later we entered the little cove in which the bait pond was located. The stench of blood, slime, and oil that typifies a fish boat was overwhelmed by the smell of the land. The bait pond is operated by a man from a nearby Indian village. The skipper had radioed ahead to tell Tom we were coming into his bait pond. He and his son were waiting when we arrived.

The dominant conversation, between skipper and businessman, began as the boat was made fast to the bait pond.

"How much bait do you have?" the skipper asked. He had come down from the wheelhouse and stood watching the live herring swimming in the bait pond. "Our last bait was pretty small, not very good."

"How much do you need?" asked Tom.

We (the crew) waited for the skipper and Tom as they dickered over the price and quality of the bait. Clad in our heavy oilskins, we waited for the word from the skipper to begin loading bait. Though we share in paying for the bait and gear the skipper has complete control over decision making. Finally, the skipper said: "Fourteen barrels, that should do it."

The second, subordinate conversation did not emerge until the work of loading the bait ended. Bill, one of the three First Nations fishers in our crew of seven men,¹⁷ had said hello to Tom and his son when we arrived but had not spoken since then. After he finished tidying up the deck, Bill went to the side of the boat closest to Tom and began talking with him. Their conversation shifted between English and Tsimshian, rendering what they said incomprehensible to the rest of the crew. Meanwhile, having just paid Tom for the bait, the skipper went up to the wheelhouse and started the engine in preparation for returning to the fishing grounds.

Bill and Tom's conversation occurred in the interstices of the dominant communication during the pause between finishing with the bait and leaving the bait pond. Nonetheless, their conversation did arrest the progress of the boat. Their conversation began as the skipper told us to untie the boat from the bait pond.

Even though the order to let the lines go had been given, we waited for Bill to finish. Luke stood waiting at the bow. I was on the stern.

Bill asked Tom something in his language. Tom first replied in English and then in Tsimshian. "I might have something," he said, "let me check." He dashed off across the bait pond to a small storage shed. All through this conversation, Bill said nothing to us, nor had anyone said anything else to him, and, despite the skipper's order to "let the lines go," nobody moved until Bill and Tom finished their transaction. It was not that we were unaware of what was happening between Bill and Tom, but rather that the predominately nonaboriginal crew were momentarily silenced and, in their hesitation to cast off, acknowledged, in the only way they seemed able, their crewmate's "Indian" conversation with the owner of the bait pond. As we had earlier waited in silence for the skipper and the bait pond owner to complete their transaction, we now waited for Bill and Tom to complete their transaction.

A few minutes later, Tom came back. He handed Bill a large ziplock bag of what appeared to be burlap. Bill put it away in the baiting claim¹⁸ at the stern of the boat and proceeded to untie one of the mooring lines. The skipper put the boat in gear. Luke and I slipped our lines from their moorings and we left.

No one said anything to Bill about his conversation until he brought out the bag and asked if anyone would like a piece of herring roe-on-kelp, "Indian candy" he called it. We all tried the "Indian candy." The Euro-Canadian crewmembers, almost to a man, stated emphatically that they did not like the dried seaweed. "I don't know how anyone could eat this stuff and not puke," one crew member said.

Both conversations involved a transaction. One occurred within the circuit of commodity exchange; money for bait. The other existed within a nonmonetary system of exchange that relied upon symbols of a common ethnic identity. Both conversations were exclusive. The skipper's conversation excluded the crew;¹⁹ Bill's conversation excluded the non-Tsimshians. Yet, it is the latter conversation that, for Euro-Canadian fishers, is most threatening (that is, in terms of First Nations' land claims). The incomprehensibility of Bill's conversation parallels what is, for Euro-Canadians, an equally incomprehensible discourse; the discourse of First Nations' claims for recognition of aboriginal title, rights, and control over their traditional lands.

There is also a third conversation; a conversation between Bill and his fellow crewmates concerning the "Indian candy" that offers a glimmer of hope. Implicit in his offer of roe-on-kelp is his recognition that, as crewmembers, First Nation, Euro-aboriginal, or Euro-Canadian, we all shared a common situation. For a brief moment, the potential for rapprochement seemed possible in the space created by the silence of the Euro-Canadian crew members. Yet the incomprehensibility of the First Nation crewmember's "conversation" and, ultimately, the

rejection of his offer subverted the space for rapprochement and created instead yet another moment of misunderstanding. After the crew accepted Bill's gift, tried it, and then impolitely rejected it, he quietly put his Indian candy away and nothing more was said of it on the boat again. Back on shore, other Euro-Canadians, when offered similar "gifts," all too often share the crewmember's sentiments who said, "I don't know how any one could eat this stuff and not puke."

This is certainly the story of an idiosyncratic event. But it can also be read as a metaphor for the current relations between First Nations and Euro-Canadians within British Columbia's fishing industry. Euro-Canadian fishers are members of the dominant society. They have control; their "conversations" set the agenda. However, though they may be part of the dominant society, very few ordinary Euro-Canadian fishers have any real control in their society; they are excluded from the real centers of power and control (for example, the boardrooms of the large companies that dominate the economy). Thus, even though the crew may pay for its "share of the bait," they have little control over the actual business transaction. The second, subordinate conversation is incomprehensible to the Euro-Canadian fishers. Their lack of comprehension is compounded when the subordinate (First Nation) conversation intercedes in the passage of their everyday lives. Just as Bill's conversation delayed the process of leaving the bait pond, so, too, do the political actions of First Nations within the wider arena disrupt the dominant agenda of monopoly capital. The crewmembers are excluded from both the dominant conversation and from the subordinate conversation. In the first, they are knowledgeable bystanders, but in the second, they are outsiders standing by in ignorance.²⁰ The growing expectations of First Nations are pushing their conversations, whispered to each other in their own language at the periphery of the deck, into the center of the wheelhouse.

implications for Euro-Canadian fishers

Neither group, First Nation or Euro-Canadian, really seems to "hear" the voices of the other. Nonaboriginal supporters of land claims I met in Vancouver continuously instructed me to "listen to what they (First Nations people) have to say. As members of the dominant society, we must stop and listen to the voice of the oppressed." In the Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en territories, aboriginal leaders told me that "white people don't listen to us. We have to force ourselves into their living rooms in newscasts." Nonaboriginal fishers in Prince Rupert expressed similar complaints. They felt excluded from a land claims process that "makes us second-class citizens in our own country." As one nonaboriginal Co-op fisher said, "I haven't got a homeland to return to—this is it."

First Nations and Euro-Canadians lay claim to the land and its resources in very different terms. Euro-Canadian fishers refer to the resource as common property.²¹ One Co-op fisher told me in 1989:

My father was recruited to this country because the resources were available to all. Back in Norway he couldn't catch a salmon in a river because it was owned by some British Lord. All the rights to fish had been sold. But in Canada all you had to be was Canadian. Everyone had an equal chance. What the Indians want is a backward step. If they want to fish, they just have to join the industry. All it takes is a little hard work, but they don't want to do that. They want it the easy way.

First Nations correctly point out that they have been excluded by law and disadvantaged economically, and they argue that their access to the resource should have priority over other users and that they have the right to manage it and the right to exclude others from it (see, for example, Cassidy and Dale 1988). First Nations are, thus, arguing for the privatization of the fishery, albeit not on an individualist basis.

It may be as one commentator said that equating the reestablishment of First Nations' control over their traditional resources and land bases with a form of privatized property "is a very

narrow and inaccurate view in that, traditionally, rights to resources including fish were owned by corporate kinship groups.”²² However, while it is undeniably true that resources were traditionally held and managed by kin-based groups and, leaving aside for the moment the fact that not all northwest coast peoples had equivalent or equal access to these resources, the point remains that when ownership is vested in the hands of a “corporate group,” be that group shareholders in a transnational corporation or members of a house lineage among the Gitksan, for example, this form of ownership still accords some individuals privileged access and excludes others. While one may fruitfully argue over the terminology used (perhaps a better term than privatization is “privatized-collectivization”), the actual impact on those excluded from the resource is the same, irrespective of whether control over the resource is vested in a transnational corporation or a First Nation.

The different perceptions of the future held by First Nations and Euro-Canadians arise out of a particular intersection of culture, class, and historical process. First Nations and Euro-Canadian fishers are situated “on the opposite sides of a history of interaction” and are divided “by an unequal knowledge of each other” (Dyck 1986:33). Aboriginal peoples of British Columbia have been engaged in a struggle to regain aboriginal lands since the late 19th century (Raunet 1984). However, land claims have only become a concern in the dominant Euro-Canadian society during the past two decades; “particularly since the White Paper controversy of 1969–70, when the federal government sought unsuccessfully to terminate its administration of Indian affairs” (Dyck 1986:32). Euro-Canadian awareness of First Nations’ land claims was heightened in the late 1980s by two events: (1) the blocking of the Meech Lake Accord by Elijah Harper, a Cree member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, and (2) the Kanesatake Mohawks’ blockade at Oka, Quebec, and the sympathy blockades organized by British Columbia First Nations. The first event highlighted aboriginal concerns in the context of an important national debate on Canadian unity, while the second struck a deep cord of reaction and anger among Euro-Canadian primary resource workers.²³

The claims initiated by First Nations have the potential to radically restructure British Columbia’s resource-based economy. Workers in resource industries other than fishing, most notably in the forest industry, have also acted in opposition to First Nations. Consider a recent logging dispute in the Chilcotin region of British Columbia. Leave aside the specifics of this case; it could be almost anywhere in the province:

It’s about power, land, jobs and government inaction. Loggers and Indians, mill workers and environmentalists are choosing sides and weapons for control of the Chilcotin. There’s talk of violence. People on all sides wonder if the next native blockade of a logging road will end in violence, with some hothead taking the law into his or her own hands. [Rasmussen 1990]

This vignette captures some of the tension and potential violence of the contemporary land claims struggle. The lines of cleavage are clearly drawn between “loggers and Indians, millworkers and environmentalists” (Rasmussen 1990). During the summer of 1990, groups of independent truck loggers banded together and formed their own counter-blockades in response to the numerous First Nations blockades that sprang up in the wake of the attack on Oka by first the Quebec provincial police and then the Canadian Armed Forces.

Forest workers have been particularly hard hit during the 1980s. The transnational companies that control the forest industry have gone through a period of reorganization that has reduced the number of those employed in the forest industry by almost half. Furthermore, British Columbia’s predominance in the softwood fiber and lumber markets has been supplanted by the American sunbelt and new technologies that make pulping of tropical hardwood fibers economically viable (see Marchak 1991:3–24). All these factors have contributed to, but do not excuse, the at times violent opposition to First Nations’ claims expressed by resource workers.²⁴

In terms of the nonaboriginal commercial fishery, First Nation claims are perceived by Euro-Canadian fishers as akin to an enclosure of the fishery, a move that they believe would

result in a further restriction on their access to the resource. Many of the Euro-Canadians I fish with are afraid they will lose their way of life as a result of the settlement of First Nations' land claims. Irrespective of the Euro-Canadian fishers' apprehensions, *it is clear that First Nations have a strong legal and moral claim against the government of Canada*. And, it is unreasonable to assume that Euro-Canadian fishers will not be affected by a just settlement of indigenous grievances. In fact:

Displacement from the fishery is a possibility which British Columbian vessel owners, crews and shoreworkers have just cause to fear. Except in the case of currently under-exploited stocks, there simply are not surpluses that could suffice to augment native catches. New allocations will be reallocations in the foreseeable future. [Cassidy and Dale 1988:80]

Euro-Canadian fishers' opposition to native claims is motivated by a fear of losing their livelihood. Of the claims in the Prince Rupert region, the claims of the Gitksan's and Wet'suwet'en's hereditary chiefs are likely to have the greatest impact both on Euro-Canadian fishers and coastal First Nations' fishers since they incorporate a plan to create an entirely new upriver commercial fishery.

The Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en seek a declaration from the courts confirming their ownership and jurisdiction over their traditional territories and resources in northwestern British Columbia.²⁵ Fifty-four hereditary chiefs from 76 houses launched a land title action against the province of British Columbia and the government of Canada in October 1984. In a major break from previous court rulings on aboriginal rights,²⁶ the first stage of their court action ended in defeat in British Columbia's Supreme Court March 8, 1991. In his ruling, Chief Justice McEachern denied the existence of aboriginal rights in British Columbia and said "that the discovery and occupation of this continent by European nations, or occupations and settlement gave rise to a right of sovereignty" (Still 1991). According to First Nations' leaders, however, the struggle for recognition of aboriginal title is not over yet: "We're going to have to be really aggressive," said Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Tribal Council president, Don Ryan (Glavin 1991).²⁷

The strength of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en claim rests on the assertion that a large portion of their traditional system of property rights still exists. "Although the traditional conceptualization has been eroded by acculturation; they still retain many of the more concrete features. . . . Gitksan involvement in the land claims movement can be seen as an attempt to reestablish in a more complete way their relations to [their traditional] territories" (Cove 1982:14). Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en leaders maintain they "have defended the boundaries of their territories . . . for centuries. . . . Here, a complex system of ownership and jurisdiction has evolved, where the chiefs continually validate their rights and responsibilities to their people, their land, and the resources contained within them" (Sterritt 1989:277).²⁸

The Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en rightly identify the coastal fishery as having "a profound effect on the up-river fishery. The most obvious effect is that coastal fishers intercept the spawning runs before they reach Indian fishing grounds" (Morrell 1989:235). Under their management plan, "the increased Indian share of the salmon harvest [would form] the basis for an inland commercial fishery controlled by the hereditary House Chiefs. This would be an important step in the restoration of the economic base of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en system" (Morrell 1989:245). A corollary result would be the disruption of Euro-Canadian fishers' ability to make a living. The impact of native claims on the major processing firms, however, is likely to be minimal. Their profitability rests on having raw fish products to process. Euro-Canadian fishers require access to fishing grounds. Despite any claims to the contrary, the processors do not really care who catches the fish as long as they have fish in their plants to process.

Euro-Canadian fishers are caught between the oligopsonistic structure of the current fishing industry and their potential exclusion from a privatized fishery under First Nation administration. Much of their rhetoric surrounding the issues of land claims arises from this dialectic of

exploitation. Thus, Euro-Canadian fishers' opposition to land claims steeped in an apparently racist language of the colonizer finds its roots in the fundamental transformation of property rights embedded in the assertion of aboriginal title. Though access to the fishery is limited, it is not a completely private property resource.²⁹

It is unlikely that the Canadian state has either the willpower or the desire to effect a restructuring of British Columbia's fisheries that is at once a just settlement of First Nations' land claims and also sensitive to the economic fragility of the Euro-Canadian fishers.³⁰ What is more likely is that the Canadian government will sign land claims agreements that neither fully solve First Nations' aspiration for self-determination nor truly take into account the nonaboriginal fishery.

There is another possibility, one in which the control of the fisheries would be transferred to regionally based co-management organizations involving First Nations' and nonaboriginals. Aboriginal title and Euro-Canadian fishers' livelihood could both be affirmed. Co-management systems in other parts of the world (see, for example, McGoodwin 1990; Pinkerton 1989) have shown remarkable success, not just in balancing antagonistic forces, but also in enhancing fish stocks and thus increasing the fisheries eventual productivity.

epilogue

This article began with a personal story about my background, about growing up in a fishing family. In this sense, it is an autoethnography: "an account of a culturally and socially defined group to which I—both as author and subject—also belong" (Knutson 1987:4, 1991). Each subsequent section, as threads in the narrative's web, formed different kinds of stories. Here my presence sank below the story's surface and only periodically reemerged. As I bring this story to a close, I am miles away from the place where I grew up, from the people and events about which I have written. The apparent openness and freedom of the sea has given way to an urban horizon marked by tall buildings and the ubiquitous presence of pavement. I write in a "world of lecterns, libraries, blackboards, and seminars. . . . This is the world that produces anthropologists, that licenses them to do the kind of work they must do, and within which the kind of work they do must find a place if it is to count as worth attention" (Geertz 1988:129–130).

Yet, the voices, faces, boats, places—all of these memories—are with me now as I pull together and force an order upon the multiple strands of my fieldwork experience. Unlike the "outsider" anthropologist, whose leave-taking has a note of finality to it, my leave-taking has always been temporary. I am tied by my family into the life of the west-coast fishery. Each summer I end my sojourn in the metropolis and return home to fish. Because of this, and despite my separation, the world of the Co-op, the impact of First Nations land claims or fisheries regulations are, paradoxically, as much a part of my world as are the classrooms and lectures of the university and the din of the city.

notes

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1. The designation "First Nation" is used by aboriginal people in Canada to signify their existence prior to the arrival of European settlers and to highlight the fact that they are sovereign political entities in their own right with the attendant rights and responsibilities.

2. I use *story* here, and throughout the text, to denote the imposed narrative order I, as author, place on my experiences as a field worker and fisher. I do not, however, mean to imply that what follows has no basis in an objective reality, only to emphasize the contingent and constructed aspect of any anthropological text.

3. For a detailed analysis of the macrostructure of British Columbia's fishing industry, see Marchak et al. (1987). This book, the product of a three-year research project, is to date the most extensive study on British Columbia's fishing industries.

4. Wallace Clement's book, *The Struggle to Organize: Resistance in Canada's Fishery* (1986), is a thought-provoking examination of the nature of the social relations of production in fishing and how they lead to organizational resistance and social action. Though I disagree with certain aspects of his analysis of the PRFCA/UFAWU conflicts—it is as though he only took seriously the stories of UFAWU members—his general conclusions are consistent with many of my own experiences growing up in one of the fishing communities of which he speaks.

5. Seine: a fishing net with floats on the top and weights on the bottom that is used to encircle fish. Once surrounded by the net, the bottom is pursed together and the fish are hauled on board the seiner, or seineboat. Gillnet: a fine, almost transparent net suspended in the water into which fish swim and then become entangled.

6. For an expanded discussion of the impact and implementation of the Boldt decision see: Knutson 1987, 1990; Cohen 1986; and Cohen and Bowden 1988.

7. Ironically, as Co-op fishers looked to First Nations' land claims settlements as the primary threat to their organization, changes in the global economy and misguided management practices during the past decade or so have had a much greater impact on the economic viability of the Co-op.

8. There are a few exceptions to this: Treaty 8, which extends into the Peace River area of northern British Columbia, and several small treaties established by Governor James Douglas on Vancouver Island during the 19th century.

9. The reader interested in a more extensive discussion of the issue of aboriginal title is referred to Brian Slattery (1987).

10. The respective capitals of British Columbia, Canada, and Great Britain.

11. In keeping with standard anthropological practice, I have used pseudonyms to refer to my sources and the names of fishing vessels unless explicitly noted in the text. The only other exceptions to this occur when I refer to individuals already in the public domain, such as important national leaders or newscasters.

12. Luke, like many of the fishers I work with, is aware of my own *Indian* ancestry. With increasing frequency during the past few years, an increasing number of my Euro-Canadian shipmates have switched from general condemnations of First Nations people to what have become increasingly personalized *jokes/insults* (racial insults is a more appropriate label) in which my behavior is said to be "indianlike."

13. Gear-type refers to the particular technology a fisher employs on her or his vessel.

14. In 1992, the Pacific Fishermen's Defence Coalition dissolved itself into a new organization called the Fishermen's Survival Coalition. The "new" coalition is comprised of most of the nonaboriginal fishers' organizations including the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union. The Survival Coalition was formed in response to the establishment of a commercial river-based aboriginal fishery in 1992. During the 1992 salmon season, close to 500,000 sockeye salmon "disappeared" from the Fraser River salmon run. The all-citizen commercial fishery was shut down, and many Euro-Canadian fishers accused the up-river aboriginal fishers of over-fishing (See Pearse 1992 for a detailed discussion of "what actually happened").

15. The New Democratic Party is a political party with a left-of-center orientation.

16. For a more detailed description of the halibut fishery see Menzies 1991.

17. The crew complement on this trip included three Euro-Canadians, three First Nations fishers (one Haida, two Tsimshian, only one of whom was fluent in the Tsimshian language), and myself.

18. A baiting claim is shelter on the stern of a longliner under which the crew overhaul and bait the fishing gear.

19. In general, the relationship between skipper and crew is relatively cooperative. "The impersonal work relations of the shop floor are the reverse of the personal relationships and obligations felt in fishing" (Guppy 1987:191). Despite working in close proximity to each other and under similar conditions, the skipper and crew represent different social interests; they are members of different social classes. The skipper, who owns the fishing vessel, controls the means of production. The crew comprise the labor power by which the vessel is able to operate. The tasks the skipper chooses to perform create a social distance between her or him and the crew. This is accentuated, for example, by the skipper's having a stateroom set apart from the rest of the crew (see, for example Menzies 1990, 1992).

20. The simultaneity of bystander/outsider, knowledge/ignorance was pointed out to me by Karen Blu. This distinction raises an important point about the crewmembers' exclusion from the two conversations. In the first, they hear and clearly understand what is happening. As none of the crew are new to fishing, there is nothing surprising or unexpected about the conversations concerning the purchases of bait; they have all witnessed many similar conversations before. The second conversation, however, is different. While the crew hears this conversation, they have not a clue, except in retrospect, about what is happening. In the same manner, capitalism silences working people and the aboriginal claims process excludes them.

21. As Marchak points out, the assertion that the fishery is a common property resource is one that "confuses the state with the commons" (1988–89:3). The fishery in British Columbia is heavily regulated, and access is limited to those who own government-issued permits. This has been the case in one form or

another since the inception of the cannery-based commercial fishery in the province. "Once fishers themselves are licensed, fishing becomes a privileged activity and the ownership of a license delimits the rights of non-licensed individuals to fish. [Thus], fish cannot be regarded as common property" (Marchak 1988–89:21). The use of the rhetoric of the commons by Euro-Canadian fishers and the assertion of "ownership" by First Nations are ironically linked in their common acceptance of systems of ownership based on the exclusion of many for the benefit of the few. If the resources in this province could truly be held in common, Euro-Canadians and First Nations people alike would all be better off.

22. Personal communication, anonymous, 1992 (in author's files).

23. The Meech Lake Accord was a constitutional agreement between the federal government of Canada and the ten provincial governments, which recognized the province of Quebec as a "distinct society" with its own language and unique culture. Many First Nations' people were opposed to the accord as it did not address their concerns for self-determination. Elijah Harper became a focal point of their opposition to the accord when he was able to prevent the accords passage in the Manitoba Legislative Assembly.

The "Oka Crisis" involved an armed confrontation between the Quebec provincial police, the Canadian Army, and Mohawk people. The dispute involved an ongoing land claim and the attempt by the town council of Oka, Quebec, to develop land, held sacred by the Mohawk Nation, into a golf course.

24. It is important to note that not all Euro-Canadians are opposed to First Nations' claims. During First Nations' protests throughout the 1980s, "the support of white groups was sought and provided during the protests. Spokesmen for each of the major churches urged the province to negotiate, as did the interchurch group Project North. Various local and provincial environmental groups raised money for the Indians and lobbied the provincial government. . . . The linking of the Indian land question with wilderness preservation and environmental protection, which had strong support among whites, was a critical new political development" (Tennant 1990:200).

25. The opening statement, history, and overview of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en court case can be found in Gisday Wa and Delgam Uukw 1989.

26. In the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada in *R. v. Sparrow* (May 31, 1990), the court ruled that aboriginal rights take precedence over all other resource uses; the sole exception is for conservation purposes. While the court did not rule on the Sparrow case itself, in sending the case back to the lower court, the Supreme Court decision stated that aboriginal rights must be interpreted liberally, and, unless such rights have been explicitly extinguished by act of law, they are protected under section 35(1) of the Canadian constitution.

27. For a detailed discussion of the court case and the role of anthropologists, see Cruikshank 1992, Culhane 1992, Miller 1992, and Ridington 1992. An overview from the perspective of a Gitksan hereditary chief of the land claim and Justice McEachern's decision can be found in Wilson-Kenni 1992.

28. For an expanded discussion of alliances between non-Indians and First Nations in British Columbia, see M'Gonigle 1989–90, Miller 1991.

29. See Marchak et al.'s discussion of state versus common property rights (1987:3–14, 1988–89:3–23).

30. In the spring of 1992, the federal government introduced a new policy on aboriginal fisheries, the Aboriginal Fisheries Strategy (AFS). According to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, John C. Crosbie, the AFS "focuses on reaching negotiated agreements with Aboriginal peoples on the management and use of the resource, including quantification of Native fisheries, and the manner in which they exercise their priority fisheries" (personal communication, April 15, 1993, in author's files). Under the AFS, three test projects were undertaken during the 1992 salmon season in which aboriginal people sold the fish caught. According to the minister "no reallocation occurred. . . . Amounts allocated for sale were within recent harvest levels of past years for the Aboriginal groups involved. In total, the Indian fishery accounts for about 3.4 percent of the total catch of salmon in B.C." (This figure excludes fish caught by First Nations license holders who fish in the coastal commercial fishery on the same basis as other Canadian citizens.) Another aspect of the AFS that applies to nonaboriginal fishers is a voluntary license retirement program, the objective of which is "to retire catching capacity on a fair and cost-effective basis" (Crosbie 1993). However, there are no provisions under the plan to deal with displaced crewmembers.

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