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# The Arrival of Tradition: The Influence of the Tradition Concept on Missionary-Indigenous Interactions in the Nineteenth-Century Pacific Northwest Coast

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## ABSTRACT

Tradition is a paradoxical concept that, on the one hand, defines a set of practices as external or resistant to the dynamics of global modern society but, on the other hand, makes sense of these practices in references to modernity itself. Colonial scholarship has struggled with this paradox, taking the appearance of tradition as situated outside modernity at face value. By historicizing the logical form of the concept of tradition, this article offers a critique of its use in colonial scholarship. Examining the Oblate missionization of British Columbia in the nineteenth century as a case study, this article tracks how the logical form of tradition was articulated with the development of capital, how it defined Oblate ideology, how it was adopted by various Indigenous communities to make sense of their own social transformation in relation to broader global transformations, and ultimately how it was adopted as a critical analytic by colonial scholars.

In 1862 the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (Oblates), a French Catholic missionary order, established a mission at the isthmus of Sechelt, organized in the manner of the Jesuit *reducciones* in seventeenth-century Paraguay.<sup>1</sup> The mission was to be a self-sufficient oasis, separate from outside influence. However,

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1. Jacqueline Gresko, "Gender and Mission" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1999), 73.

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whereas the Jesuit *reducciones* functioned on a logic of separating local indigenous peoples from their communities in the hope of making conversion easier, the Oblates' mission functioned on a different logic: to separate the Shishalh from the forces of global modernity, free trade, and the vices of Euro-Canadian society.<sup>2</sup> The Oblates' goal, far from opening up the Shishalh to the wider world and civilizing them according to modern precepts, was to civilize them according to the model of prerevolutionary French peasants, as timeless anachronisms of morality and innocence. The Oblates did not want to make the Shishalh modern—they wanted to keep them traditional.

Beyond the apparent paradox of a French missionary group attempting to buffer Indigenous communities from the influence of European society, there is a more fundamental paradox at the heart of the attempt to preserve traditions. On the one hand, tradition denotes a set of practices that predate the dynamics of global modern society. On the other hand, tradition makes sense of these practices in relation to modernity itself. To preserve a practice as a tradition is also to transform the practice and to recontextualize it in relation to the dynamics of modernity. What the Oblates brought with them to the Pacific Northwest Coast was a missionizing ideology that took the promise of tradition at face value. In other words, the Oblates' desire to transform Indigenous religion and society was based on the presumption that practices predating modernity were essential to resisting modernity.

In the analysis of colonial situations like that of the Oblates, Northwest Coast scholarship has, to a large extent, made the same assumptions about tradition as the Oblates. That is, scholars have presumed that the maintenance of precontact traditions represents a form of resistance to the hegemonic dynamics of modernity. What both the Oblates and these colonial scholars presume, incorrectly, is the coterminous nature of modern Western society and modern capitalist societies. What both groups fail to take into account is the global nature of global capital. The structures of social interdependence that define life in the age of global capital do not function by replicating homogenous Western society throughout the world. Far from being representatives of "archaic" societies, by the 1860s, the Northwest Coast Indigenous societies that the Oblates arrived to protect from the forces of modernity had been part of the global capitalist economy for half a century.

Although ostensibly articulating a space external to modern society and the dynamics of capital, the logic of tradition is itself deeply mediated by categories of capitalist abstraction. The concept has been able to reproduce itself over time and spread

2. Jacqueline Gresko, "Roman Catholic Missions to the Indians of British Columbia: A Reappraisal of the Lemert Thesis," *Journal of Canadian Church Historical Society* 24, no. 2 (1982): 52–77.

across myriad populations and regimes of knowledge, not because tradition provided a position from which to critique capitalism and its related concepts of liberalism and rationality but because it was an essential aspect of global capital. Understanding practices as traditions, therefore, is not a way of describing practices at odds with global modernity but instead is a way of conceptualizing the contradictions that are themselves constituent in it.

This is not to rehash an old-school Marxist understanding of base superstructure or primitive accumulation. Instead, these old-school Marxist theoretical analytics often take for granted the central question of tradition itself. Through a reading of Marx, this article posits that the question is not “What kinds of traditions remain?” (as the salvage ethnographers of the early twentieth century would ask) or “Does tradition accurately denote practices with deep historical depth?” (as Hobsbawm and Ranger do in *The Invention of Tradition*), but “How did this understanding of tradition emerge and spread, not merely into colonial encounters, but within the academic study of colonial encounters as well?”<sup>3</sup> The drive to identify certain social practices as “archaic survivals” or “transhistoric” and to understand a continuity of these traditions as a form of resistance to modernity, capitalism, and colonialism emerged historically and is based on a specific understanding of how these universalizing forces act in the world.

Far from being tied to a single author, location, or lexeme, the concept of tradition emerged logically out of historical development of capital. Although first appearing in Europe, the logical form of tradition (not the specific content of the lexeme “tradition”) is not a Western concept in the sense of belonging to a uniquely Western structure of meaning. Instead, the concept of tradition is what historian Andrew Sartori calls a “global concept”: a concept (*a*) that emerged globally, through the global circulation of capital, and (*b*) that took the global as its object, making sense of the emergence of a unique form of global social interdependence that defined the dynamic of capital.<sup>4</sup> As a global concept, the logical form of tradition touched down across the world during the mid-nineteenth century, traveling across denotational registers and being embodied in myriad lexical signs.

As Sartori argues in his work on intellectual history, there is a fundamental antinomy that constitutes how life under capital can be conceptualized: the antinomy between the logics of liberalism and culturalism.<sup>5</sup> Both liberalism and cultural-

3. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

4. Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008): 21.

5. *Ibid.*

ism represent global discourses that spread over the nineteenth century, each with widely divergent contents, yet both organized by a basic logical structure that articulates with the fundamental categories of capital. Whereas liberal concepts (property rights, equality, liberty) embodied the arrival of modernity, culturalist concepts such as tradition and culture veiled their own interconnections with capital and appeared as external to it. This article answers Sartori's call for research on the global nature of the cultural side of such antinomy, through a historical analysis of one trajectory of the concept of tradition.

Through the case study of the Oblates and their missionary work in the Pacific Northwest, this article historicizes the logical form of tradition as a global concept that began to spread around the world during the eighteenth century. I track tradition logically and historically from its point of articulation with capital through the formation of the Oblate order and Oblate missionization, through the rise of "neotraditional" Indigenous political communities, and finally to its uptake in academic discourse concerning colonial relations. In doing so, I highlight the interconnections between tradition as the organizing principle of Oblate missionary activity and tradition as a form of analysis that colonial historians have used after the fact to understand the process of Indigenous subsumption into colonial regimes. By showing the historical and logical connections between the two instantiations of tradition, I argue two points: First, tradition was situated at the logical core of the Oblates' ideology and facilitated the articulation of their message to both Indigenous and European communities. As local Indigenous communities began to experience social crises that appeared global in scope, tradition provided a way of conceptualizing these crises in a manner that articulated the scale and logic of the crises themselves. Second, colonial historians and social scientists interested in colonial relations have—for the most part—taken for granted a relationship between the abstract and the concrete that fails to properly take into account the nature of social interdependence in a society organized by capital. The use of tradition as a concept in Northwest Coast studies, and colonial studies more broadly, is one example of this presumption.

#### TRADITION AND THE OBLATES

The notion of tradition has a long history in Western thought, referring to social practices passed on over generations. What emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a transformation in the logic of the concept in which its meaning became defined against those of liberal modernity.<sup>6</sup> The social and polit-

6. Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World* (London: Profile, 2011), 29.

ical transformations that accompanied the emergence of global capitalism during this period necessitated new concepts to comprehend and combat these upheavals. The logical form of the concept of tradition emerged as a way to make sense of the relationship between new and old social practices. In this context, “tradition” identifies a dense entanglement of people and practices that are marked as being different from (and predating) those that are global and modern and that maintain a particular relationship to the local and the intimate. According to the logic of tradition, it is the continuity of practice, this preservation of tradition, that anchors a community or culture outside, or in tension with, the abstracting powers of modern society and global capital. Furthermore, this understanding has a moral and political valence. Traditional practices, drawn from a period predating an amoral and impersonal modernity, represent forms of sociality that are ethical and personal and are held up simultaneously (*a*) as bastions against the tides of modernity and (*b*) as endangered knowledge, on the verge of vanishing. As the logics of liberal modernity (free trade, liberty, individual rights) spread globally, so too did antimodern logics, such as tradition, which were explicitly articulated against these universal values.

The Oblates were a French Catholic order founded out of the crisis of the French Catholic Church following the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon. From the order’s inception in 1815, the Oblates adopted the logic of tradition as both an underlying precept and a *raison d’être*. By that I do not mean to argue that the Oblates themselves situated the lexeme “tradition” or “traditum” at the core of their vocation, but instead that the basic logical framework of the concept of tradition served as the basis for their missionizing project. The Oblates were founded in 1815 as La Société de Missionnaires de Provence by Eugene De Mazenod.<sup>7</sup> Granted a papal approbation and a new name in 1826, La Missionnaires Oblats de Marie Immaculée were part of a concerted effort to reestablish Catholic influence in France after a violent and tumultuous quarter century that left the Catholic Church decimated. The son of a wealthy noble family forced to flee France during the revolution, Mazenod viewed the transformations the revolution had brought to France, the nationalizing reforms of the Catholic Church enforced by Napoleon, and the rise of urbanization and proletarianization in the lower classes as dangerous disruptions to the social order that required a concerted response.<sup>8</sup> Despite the weakened social position of the Church, Mazenod saw it as the last bulwark against the amoral tide of liberalization.

7. Robert Cooke, *Sketches of the Life of Mgr de Mazenod* (London: Burns & Oates, 1879), 70.

8. Robert Tombs, *France: 1814–1914* (New York: Longman, 1996), 132; Raymond Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel to the Indians and the Métis* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 2.

Mazenod's teachings, and the teachings of others who joined his order, adhered to the philosophy of ultramontanism, a conservative position in the Church that saw a marked revival in France from the early to mid-nineteenth century in the face of pressure to transform the Church into a national institution within the French state.<sup>9</sup> For Joseph de Maistre, one of the most influential intellectual proponents of ultramontanism and one of the most influential writers for the Oblates, the challenge of the fractured and increasingly liberal postrevolutionary society could be met only by a centralized and monolithic Church.<sup>10</sup> Opposed to the new bureaucratically ordered national governments, de Maistre proposed a restoration of the French monarchy, reestablishment of the old social order, and the establishment of the pope as the supreme earthly authority.

With ultramontanism, Mazenod and his followers were opposed by the liberal wing of French Catholic thought. This viewpoint, known as "gallicanism," viewed the Church as destined to disappear as an essential institution unless it situated itself within the institutions of the French state.<sup>11</sup> As Mazenod lamented in his diary in 1850, young gallican bishops were too willing to transform the Church to fit in with the state, "sacrificing one after the other all our privileges, all our most ancient and most venerable customs."<sup>12</sup> Although both ultramontanism and gallicanism testified to longstanding debates within the Church (the term "gallicanism" can be traced back to 1682 and "ultramontanism" even earlier), by the early nineteenth century both had been recontextualized within the broader global stakes of these rapid social transformations. For Mazenod and his fellow Oblates, gallicanism was merely a symptom of a broader, heartless, and seemingly inexorable "trend" that needed to be fought tooth and nail.<sup>13</sup>

In Mazenod's eyes, gallican bishops were not just abandoning ancient customs in favor of the "so-called liberties" of civil society, they were abandoning their sacred role as protector of the poor and simple populace that relied on the Church for direction.<sup>14</sup> The greatest threat posed by the social transformations of the early nineteenth century were those affecting the poor masses, specifically, the disinte-

9. Robert Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995): 3–5.

10. Rafael Tarrago, "Two Catholic Conservatives: The Ideas of Joseph de Maistre and Juan Donoso Cortes," *Catholic Social Science Review* (1999): 167–77.

11. Lynn A. Blake, "Let the Cross Take Possession of the Earth" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1999), 24.

12. Jean Leflon, "March 2, 1850," diary entry in *Eugene de Mazenod*, vol. 3, ed. Jean Leflon, trans. Francis D. Flanagan (New York: Fordham University Press, 1968), 325.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Eugene De Mazenod, "Letter to Forbin-Jansen July 1, 1814," *Ecrits Oblates* 16 (1995): 66.

gration of the feudal peasant way of life. Without the structures of the ancien régime, peasants were both socially and spiritually lost, increasingly drawn into cities and impersonal wage relations—relations Mazenod saw as no better than slavery.<sup>15</sup> The ancient customs of the Church and a revitalization of the ancient pastoral relationship between a priest and his peasant flock were necessary buffers to protect the defenseless and simple poor from the temptations and disorder of the heartless bourgeois world.

Mazenod saw his job as “reawaken[ing] the faith that is becoming extinct among the poor.”<sup>16</sup> The goal of early Oblate missionaries was to serve across the Provence countryside, to revitalize the relationship between the local peasantry and the Church that had existed prior to the revolution, and in general to remake modern French peasants in the mold of premodern French peasants.<sup>17</sup> Emphasizing the retention of local values and customs, the Oblates preached only in Provençal, not French, and would frequently come into conflicts with lay clergy and local elites over the Oblates’ rejection of bourgeois attitudes and institutions. Mazenod relished these conflicts, frequently pointing out how his missionaries were loved by the people, even while they were viewed with disdain by the parish priests and business and political leaders.

In the 1840s, Mazenod sent his missionaries beyond Provence, responding to requests by priests in both the British Isles and Quebec for help in revitalizing the faith in areas that were increasingly beset by the influence of liberal, Protestant, and Anglo societies. In Quebec, where a French Catholic minority was surrounded by English-speaking Protestants and governed by an English-speaking Protestant nation, the ultramontane preaching of the Oblates was well received. For the Oblates, it became further proof that the sins of Protestantism, liberalism, and the English language went hand in hand.<sup>18</sup> For the French-speaking Oblates, the preservation of ancient Catholic customs was not enough. As was the case with Provençal, the preservation of local languages and certain local customs was essential to stem the tide of abstracting modernity.<sup>19</sup>

The experience in Quebec transformed the orientation of Oblate activity. Although the order was founded on the idea of revitalizing the faith among Catholics who were besieged on all sides, Oblates working in Quebec became increasingly

15. Eugene De Mazenod, “Notes for the First Instruction in the Church of the Madeleine,” *Ecrits Oblates* 15 (1991): 33.

16. Eugene De Mazenod, “Letter to His Mother, June 29, 1808,” *Ecrits Oblates* 14 (1991): 38.

17. Leflon, *Eugene de Mazenod*, 217.

18. Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, xix.

19. *Ibid.*

focused on the great number of souls who would never be saved because they lived in areas colonized by the British or Americans. For the Oblates, the souls of myriad Indigenous communities were in danger, not only because of their ignorance of Christ's message but also because of the rampant expansion of Anglo-Protestant modernity. Asked by Bishop Bourget of Montreal in 1844 to aid in the preservation of Catholic life among the Métis in the northwest region of British North America, the Oblates began to see the whole of the massive region as requiring the direction and protection they offered. By 1853 Mazenod had officially amended the constitution of the Oblates and put forth a new set of "Instructions" detailing the purpose and goals of Oblates as foreign missionaries.<sup>20</sup> Rather than being a departure from the order's original purpose, Mazenod saw this development as the culmination of the order's nature. In the Indigenous communities throughout the Northwest, the Oblates saw an even more "childlike" and simple population than French peasants, a population that would be corrupted and destroyed by modern liberal society, that needed the sacred and ancient customs of the Catholic Church not merely to save their souls but to save them from modernity.<sup>21</sup> As Bishop Alexander Tache explained to Canadian government official Simon Dawson, direct contact with settler society and the free market would be the greatest misfortune for the Indians, and it would lead to their destruction.<sup>22</sup>

This is not to suggest that the driving force behind the Oblates' missionary efforts was not the conversion of Indigenous communities and the transformation of their way of life. Both were undeniably the goals of the Oblates. However, where the Oblates differed from earlier missionaries, such as the Jesuits of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was that they viewed this transformation as couched within the context of a much larger conflict between the Church and modern liberal society. The Oblates needed to spread the traditional values of Catholic civilization to these communities so that they could not be corrupted by the warped version of civilization that spread with merchants and settlers.

#### INTO THE NORTHWEST COAST

Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, the Oblates spread into the Northwest region, setting up numerous missions on the east side of the Rockies. In 1858, they arrived on the Northwest Coast, and by 1860 had established three missions on the British

20. Claude Champagne, "Instructions de Monseigneur Mazenod," *Kerygma* 9, no. 2 (1975): 164–77.

21. Vincent McNally, *The Lord's Distant Vineyard: A History of the Oblates and the Catholic Community in British Columbia* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2000), 135; Robert Choquette, *The Oblate Assault on Canada's Northwest* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1995).

22. Huel, *Proclaiming the Gospel*, 36.



Columbia mainland. The Oblates spread quickly to head off the encroachment of Protestant missionaries. By 1871, thirty Oblate priests had been sent to the province, establishing six major missions along the coast and in the interior. By 1878, there were nine major missions and three minor missions.<sup>23</sup>

Although the Oblates were not the first missionaries in the area, or even the first Catholics (a short-lived mission was established by two priests in the 1840s), they were the first to establish permanent missions on the mainland.<sup>24</sup> By entering the colony of British Columbia in the 1850s and 1860s, the Oblates were mirroring a trend of sudden interest in the area by settlers, gold prospectors, and Protestant missionaries. Situated as one of the most geographically remote and difficult-to-access parts of North America, the Pacific Northwest was one of the last major regions to be explored and exploited by incoming Euro-American settlers.

Until the mid-nineteenth century most of the Indigenous populations on the mainland of British Columbia had had few face-to-face interactions with Europeans, but the entire region had been deeply intertwined with the maritime fur trade for half a century. Starting in the late eighteenth century and continuing into the mid-nineteenth century, the maritime fur trade marked the first significant and sustained interconnection between the densely populated Indigenous tribes of the Northwest Coast and newly emerging global trade networks. Unlike the land fur trade in the Canadian interior, which was for most of its existence a regional, transatlantic affair, the maritime fur trade was truly global. Driven by the opening up of the Chinese market to European and American merchants and fueled by industrial manufacturing, the Northwest Coast became a central node in trade that literally circumnavigated the globe. During the trade's height in the 1820s, when independent American merchants dominated, merchants would leave Boston stocked with manufactured goods; round Cape Horn; stop along the Northwest Coast to trade for sea otter pelts; winter in Hawaii; trade the pelts in Canton for tea, silk, and porcelain; and return to Boston via the Indian Ocean.<sup>25</sup>

For the most part, this trade took place with limited interaction between the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast and the Euro-American traders. Although the British and Russian trading companies built a few trading forts along the coast, most trade happened without merchants setting up permanent settlements. A few

23. Gresko, "Gender and Mission," 143; Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: An Informal History of Native Indian Labour in British Columbia, 1858–1930* (Vancouver: New Star, 1978), 218.

24. A. G. Morice, *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1905), 224.

25. John Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships and China Goods: The Maritime Fur Trade of the Nineteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1999), 58.

key harbors along the west coast of Vancouver Island became accepted points of exchange. Other traders would simply sail along the coastline looking for Indigenous communities to buy furs from. In exchange, Indigenous communities received manufactured goods such as guns, blankets, and alcohol.<sup>26</sup>

The transformation of the Northwest Coast into a global trade hub also defined the subsumption of Northwest Coast Indigenous societies into the forms of social interdependence that define global capitalism. The daily lives of these communities were increasingly mediated by the price of manufactured goods in Boston, foodstuffs in Hawaii, and tea in China. Before this subsumption, the population of the Northwest Coast region had been defined by myriad language groups, densely concentrated populations, and incredibly rich and diverse social structures, ritual practices, and artistic traditions. Most of the peoples along the Northwest Coast were semisedentary hunter-gatherers who maintained large populations and strict social hierarchies through the incredible abundance of salmon, shellfish, and other marine life. Fishing, hunting, and gathering food took place predominantly in the summer, and important spiritual ceremonies such as elaborate potlatches and dancing ceremonies occurred in the winter.<sup>27</sup> Dances, which required elaborate masks and costumes, took place alongside potlatches, large-scale feasts and gift-giving events.<sup>28</sup>

Interconnection to the maritime fur trade transformed Northwest Coast society. Even communities that had traded furs through other Indigenous intermediaries and rarely interacted with Euro-Americans were affected through a reorganization of their time and effort toward a global, rather than regional, market. The access to cheap manufactured goods, and a general shift from hunting for subsistence to hunting for trade, led to florescence in artistry, increased social wealth and inequality, and increased rates of disease and alcohol abuse.<sup>29</sup> Lavish potlatches revolving around gifting hundreds of European trade goods became common practice by the 1840s, and metal tools facilitated the production of increased numbers of wooden and stone sculptures.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the subsumption of the Northwest Coast Indigenous societies did not result in the Westernization of their societies but what has been called a “flourishing” of their practices.<sup>31</sup>

26. *Ibid.*, 224.

27. Charles Hill-Tout, *The Salish People* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1978).

28. *Ibid.*

29. Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 272.

30. Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian–European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1977), 45.

31. *Ibid.*, 46; also see Michael Harkin, “History, Narrative, and Temporality: Examples from the Northwest Coast,” *American Society for Ethnohistory* 35, no. 2 (1988): 104.

By the 1840s and 1850s, these Indigenous communities were faced with another feature of being interconnected with the dynamics of global capital: an economic and ecological crisis due to the high extinction of the sea otter.<sup>32</sup> While merchant visits became less frequent, Euro-American settlers began showing up, first in a trickle, but by 1860, in a deluge. Drawn by ostensibly free land, untapped resources, and the belief that Indigenous populations had no right to the lands they had lived on for thousands of years, these settlers introduced another feature of the rapid circulation of humans, animals, and things: disease. In 1862 a smallpox epidemic decimated communities up and down the coast and into the interior, killing between one half and one third of the total Indigenous population.<sup>33</sup> At this point, from the perspective of the Indigenous communities, the crisis that emerged out of the structures of social interdependence consisted of the existential problems of invasion, disease, and the severe curtailment of access to the conditions of possibility of Indigenous life: land and access to resources. It was into this scenario, one defined by both the transformations and the crises endemic to the dynamic of capital, that the Oblates entered.

#### THE DURIEU SYSTEM

Established in three missions on the British Columbia mainland by 1860, the Oblates saw the crises that were wreaking havoc on Indigenous communities as, simultaneously, opportunities for missionization and proof of the threat that Indigenous societies were under from modern society. Administering smallpox vaccines to as many Indigenous people as they could find, and no doubt increasing their appeal to Indigenous communities with their promise of the vaccine, the Oblates saw the disease and the vaccine as superficial representations of a much deeper problem and solution.<sup>34</sup> For the Indigenous communities, which in some cases actively traveled to the Oblate mission at New Westminster to request assistance, the Oblates offered not just vaccines but also a new way of understanding the crises.

In the years directly following the smallpox epidemic, Oblate missionizing came to be in demand. In 1862, following a particularly destructive epidemic—with population loss estimated between 50 and 90 percent—the Shishalh traveled down to the Oblate mission in New Westminster to ask the Oblates for baptism and a church.<sup>35</sup> In the face of such terrible destruction, the traumatized Indigenous com-

32. Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 179.

33. Knight, *Indians at Work*, 48.

34. Joe Clarence, "Interview with Joe Clarence," interviewed by Imbert Orchard, CBC Radio, 1965.

35. William Brabender, "Mission de Seschelt Ses Penibles, Ses Epreuves, Ses Succes," *Missions des Missionnaires Oblates* 253 (1935): 37–41.

munities were faced with a conceptual paradox: the need to protect themselves from the crises that being interconnected with the global world produced and, at the same time, the need to better understand the global as a source of these crises. The concept of tradition, itself paradoxical in situating the particular within a universal context, articulated precisely with this problem. The ideology of the Oblates, in other words, provided both a global context for these crises and a logic of practical resistance to the source of these crises.

Nowhere was the Oblate ideology better represented in practice than at the Sechelt Mission, described by the Oblates as “the realization of all our hopes” and the prototype for all subsequent Oblate missions.<sup>36</sup> Established in 1867, following the entreaty to the Oblates by the Shishalh, the Sechelt Mission became the iconic site of the Oblates’ greatest success in the eyes of the Euro-American public. In Sechelt, Father Durieu attempted to reenact the seventeenth-century Jesuit practice of missionary *reducciones* by setting up a highly structured mission system that physically removed the Shishalh from the influence of European society.<sup>37</sup> Organized on the principles of self-sufficiency and insularity, Durieu’s goals were two-fold: (a) remove the corrupting influence of the outside world to preserve the innocent and vulnerable Shishalh and (b) use this insularity to train the Shishalh in both the duties of faith and the practical “first arts of civilization” (i.e., farming).<sup>38</sup> As in Provence, the Oblate ideal was that of the prerevolutionary peasantry: simple, God fearing, and obedient. Working for wages in the lumber industry, conversely, was considered the inevitable road to ruin. It was this combination of Catholic custom and self-sufficiency that would buffer and preserve these vulnerable communities in the face of modernity.

Although the Oblates were supportive of the maintenance of Indigenous languages and certain practices, their emphasis on ancient custom and the resistive power of tradition against modernity did not, in fact, extend to all Indigenous customs. As Bishop Herbomez wrote to the provincial government in 1871, he was “fully persuaded that the ancient ‘[t]raditional’ system, modified and put into practice by the Spirit . . . shall bring happy results.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, the combination of certain Indigenous practices with Catholic ritual and belief would produce a happy and industrious Indigenous population. Although “modified by the Spirit” sounds

36. Louis-Joseph Herbomez, *Missions des Missionnaires Oblates* 27 (1862): 385.

37. Gresko, “Roman Catholic Missions,” 52.

38. Champagne, “Instructions de Monseigneur Mazenod,” 175.

39. Louis D’Herbomez to H. L. Langevin, September 29, 1871, *British Columbia Report of the Hon. H. L. Langevin* (Ottawa: J. B. Taylor, 1872), quoted in Rodney Fowler “The Lemert Thesis and the Sechelt Mission,” *CCHA Historical Studies* 57 (1990): 60.

relatively innocent, the practice of modification was less sanguine. The “Durieu system,” as it came to be known, attempted to institute a harsh disciplinary system focused on eradicating any practices that were deemed representative of “weak” Indigenous natures.<sup>40</sup> The Oblates simultaneously wanted to transform and preserve the Indigenous communities—transform their “heathen” practices, but preserve the assumed innocence and purity that they embodied.

The Durieu system, with its focus on self-sufficiency and ancient traditions, may have been idealized as a self-contained world and may have appeared to resist the encroachment of modern society, but in practice, it was deeply mediated by the structures of global interdependence. The reproduction of the missions, and the reproduction of the Oblates themselves, was mediated by the interdependencies of global capital. While missions minimized direct contact and shut down the alcohol trade between settler society and Indigenous communities, they also survived by selling the fruits of their labor to settler society. The Oblates vigorously objected to wage labor, but the upkeep of the mission relied on financial resources drawn entirely from the Indigenous population. Annual taxes were levied on families, and fines were levied on individuals who broke mission rules. In Sechelt, every male was taxed \$100 a year and every female \$50.<sup>41</sup> At the Oblate mission for the Sliammon, for instance, one member recounts the punishments you could get for breaking the various rules of the mission: “If you didn’t want the punishment, you could pay a fine. The people who didn’t have any money would sell their jacket or shawl to get money for the fine. This money would go to the Church for repairs.”<sup>42</sup>

Far from establishing insularity, the infrastructural needs that Catholic practice necessitated relied on a steady stream of cash, and thus a steady stream of goods that could be produced and sold to the settlers. In the Okanagan, because of rich ranch- and farmland, the Kamloops Mission maintained the Oblate emphasis on farming. By 1871, the mission was producing and selling enough food to start financially supporting other missions.<sup>43</sup> Other missions were not so lucky, and their members relied on some combination of resource procurement or wage labor to keep up with mission taxes. In the Sechelt Mission, the Shishalh made a healthy profit selling timber to lumber barons and salmon to canneries.<sup>44</sup> In the Burrard

40. McNally, *Lord’s Distant Vineyard*, 134.

41. Clarence, “Interview with Joe Clarence.”

42. Dorothy Kennedy, *Sliammon Life, Sliammon Lands* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1983), 122.

43. McNally, *Lord’s Distant Vineyard*, 91.

44. I. W. Powell, letter 1893, RG10, volume/box number 3898, file number 98508, copied container number C-10157, Department of Indian Affairs Fonds, Library and Archives of Canada; I. W. Powell, letter 1874, RG10, volume/box number 3614, file number 4213, copied container number C-11063, Department of Indian Affairs Fonds, Library and Archives of Canada.

Mission, the Squamish made most of their money through wage labor, working in the Vancouver lumber mills.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the purported self-sufficiency of the missions, the reproduction of Oblate missionization was dependent on financial and political support of local European communities and likewise deeply intertwined with the mediation of capital. The Oblates could neither travel nor missionize without the financial and governmental support of Euro-Canadian supporters and local governments. This support was conditional on a belief in the Oblates' message and effectiveness. Once outside of Europe, their financial support was increasingly dependent on local settler populations that had little in common with the French missionaries and that in some cases were openly hostile to Catholics.<sup>46</sup> In western Canada, where the Oblates clashed frequently with the Protestant settler community, what provided the points of articulation between the Oblates and these settlers was not a basic theological agreement or a shared Christian faith but a shared understanding of Indigenous people as premodern holdouts in danger of disappearing. In other words, to properly raise funds both from the public and from the government, the Oblates had to effectively perform the success of their missions according to rubrics of success that were recognizable across audiences.

Through newspapers and public performances of Indigenous devotion, the Oblates raised funds in western Canada based on the argument and demonstration of Indigenous communities as innocent, traditional, and in need of protection from the ravages of modernity, which they were ill-equipped to handle. The highlight of this publicity came with a series of medieval-style Easter Passion plays performed throughout British Columbia by the Shishalh, a tour that was covered across North America and the British Empire. One New York reporter who saw the Passion play at St. Mary's Mission in 1892 claimed that it was both the best Passion play ever performed in North America and "one of the most important religious events in Western Canada."<sup>47</sup> The audience noted, as the Oblates had long argued, that the premodern innocence of the Indigenous people made their devotion to God even more pure. They appeared "naturally traditional," as it were, and therefore closer to the true meaning of traditional European practices than the modern Euro-Canadians.

45. Knight, *Indians at Work*, 60.

46. McNally, *Lord's Distant Vineyard*, 137.

47. "An Indian Passion Play," *New York Sun*, June 14, 1892.

### MISSIONS FALTER, TRADITION REMAINS

By the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, as settlers continued to pour into the region and as the access of Indigenous people to their lands and resources was significantly limited, the complex of customs and rules that organized mission life began to disintegrate. As it became clear that the Oblates could not deliver on their promises to insulate Indigenous communities from the disruption and violence that accompanied incoming settlers, Indigenous communities increasingly stopped following the strict rules of the Durieu system.<sup>48</sup>

The most commonly cited catalyst for disintegration is the scandal involving Father Chirouse at the Snohomish Mission, a scandal that epitomized the tension inherent in the mission system itself.<sup>49</sup> In 1892, Father Chirouse, a Lilloet chief, and four members of the Lilloet court council were charged and sentenced by the provincial government for overseeing the flogging punishment of a Lilloet couple charged with adultery in the missionary court.<sup>50</sup> Although the charges were eventually dropped, the case showed that for the settler government and public, the presence of an autonomous missionary court was becoming unacceptable. For Indigenous populations, the case showed that even ensconced in the trappings of Catholicism, they were still at risk of being deprived of their “immemorial rights to regulate the private life of their people.”<sup>51</sup> This fear convinced the Indigenous mission populations that, far from helping them retain self-government and organization, the mission system was going to undermine the effort.<sup>52</sup>

Most of the Oblate priests remained on Indigenous reserves and continued the administration of mass and other rites, but by the late 1890s the strict social structures of the Durieu system were largely rejected and ignored by Indigenous communities that had lost faith in the Oblates as essential to their own self-determination. Speaking to Shishalh members 40 years after the final dissolution of the Durieu system at Sechelt, anthropologist Edwin Lemert stated that several unnamed middle-aged Shishalh who lived through the last years of the mission claimed, “French priests filled suitcases with dollar bills to hoard and take back to France,” and “It was our money which built the church and the school—not the priests.”<sup>53</sup> By the end of the mission era, far from seen as aides to the preservation of Shishalh self-

48. Edwin Lemert, “The Life and Death of an Indian State,” *Human Organization* 13, no. 3 (1954): 23–27, esp. 26.

49. E. Palmer Patterson, *The Canadian Indian: A History Since 1500* (Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1972), 123–42; Lemert, “The Life and Death of an Indian State,” 26.

50. McNally, *Lord’s Distant Vineyard*, 135.

51. *Ibid.*

52. Lemert, “The Life and Death of an Indian State,” 26.

53. *Ibid.*

determination, in many cases the Oblates were seen as impediments to its reproduction. No longer identified as bulwarks against Euro-Canadian society, the elaborate practices of the mission were seen as merely another form of the exploitation endemic to modern society.

This transition in perception of the mission system was mirrored by a transition in the relationship of Indigenous communities to settler markets.<sup>54</sup> The small pastoral farms that the Oblates had helped establish could not compete with the large-scale mechanized farms of incoming settlers. The importance of subsistence self-sufficiency was replaced with wage labor in the canneries, mines, and lumber mills. The Sto:lo were paid in cash for picking berries and hops and in daily wages in the canneries.<sup>55</sup> The Shishalh and the Squamish worked in lumber mills. Kootenai and Shuswap men became involved in silver mining. On the one hand, traditional practices became ways of life that were viewed as external and in contrast to modern ways of life, but on the other hand, those ways of life were themselves becoming valorized from the standpoint of wage labor. During the height of the missions, the Oblates had considered Indigenous laborers primitive and unformed, needing guidance to teach them the “first arts of civilization.” By the beginning of the twentieth century, Indigenous traditions were seen as endowing Indigenous labor with an added bonus. To the resource-extraction economies of lumber and fishing, Indigenous labor was not just necessary but esteemed. Throughout the early twentieth century, the lumber, milling, and longshore industries considered local Coast Salish workers as “the best men that ever worked the lumber” and gave them the jobs that required the most knowledge and skill with wood.<sup>56</sup>

An increasing reliance on wages from settler industry led to further degrading of Oblate influence. However, the disintegration of the mission system did not correlate to an Indigenous dismissal of its core logic of tradition. The concept of tradition, although dressed in Passion play regalia by the Oblates, was not dependent on the specific content on which the Oblates based their missionization. Removed of solely Catholic content, the tradition concept could just as easily be used to understand the potlatch as it could to understand the Eucharist. As the mission systems disintegrated, local Indigenous communities began conceptualizing and revitalizing ancient customs and traditions, practices that defined shared local identity and that could serve as a bulwark against expanding settler society. An early example of this

54. Knight, *Indians at Work*, 245, 255.

55. Jacqueline Kennedy, “Roman Catholic Missionary Effort and Indian Acculturation in the Fraser Valley, 1860–1900” (BA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1969), 77.

56. *Man Along the Shore!* (Vancouver: ILWU Local 500 Pensioners, 1975), 27–29; Andrew Parnaby, “The Best Men to Ever Work in Lumber,” *Canadian Historical Review* 87 (2006): 53–78, esp. 64.



was seen at the Shuswap Mission in the late 1870s, where the Shuswap chiefs led their communities to reject missionary rules and instead revitalized Indigenous spiritual ceremonies. This ceremonial revivalism was meant to help resist the encroaching power of settler society and to facilitate the animation of a coherent community identity.<sup>57</sup>

While this ceremonial revivalism ebbed and flowed throughout the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the connection it highlighted among customary Indigenous practices, community identity, and resistance to settler society proved influential as some of the core logics of Indigenous political action. By 1900, Indigenous political protests against the loss of access to resources, economic marginalization, and institutional racism were becoming increasingly organized.<sup>58</sup> As Paul Tennant writes, within these political protests came a “new generation of community and tribal leaders” in the early 1900s who were “neo-traditional,” organizing political communities that articulated with the “white political system” through an emphasis on shared custom.<sup>59</sup> Preservation of these customs became not only an avenue for political mobilization but also an index of its success. In other words, these customs had been recontextualized as traditions.

Rather than relying solely on Oblate practices to resist the drastic upheavals that accompanied settler society, these Indigenous communities turned to their own customs as both the source of communal identity and the definitive source of social resistance against modern assimilation. These broader communities at once articulated with the settler political imaginary (nation, people, culture) and provided an organized logic of resistance against white settler society. In 1904, Chief Chilahitsa of Douglas Lake and Chief Louis of Kamloops traveled to England and then to Rome, securing an audience with Pope Leo XIII to lobby for rights for Catholic Indigenous communities in the British Columbia interior.<sup>60</sup> Two years later, an assembly of all coastal and interior Salish-speaking Indigenous groups (a wide variety of communities along the southern coast of British Columbia and in the interior, and a population that had been evangelized extensively by the Oblates) sent Joe Capilano of the Squamish, Charley Isipaymilt of the Cowichan, and Basil David of

57. Elizabeth Furniss, “Resistance, Coercion, and Revitalization: The Shuswap Encounter with Roman Catholic Missionaries, 1860–1900,” *Ethnohistory* 42 (1995): 231–63, esp. 247.

58. Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1911), 74–76.

59. *Ibid.*, 84.

60. Wendy Wickwire, “‘We Shall Drink from the Stream and So Shall You’: James A. Teit and Native Resistance in British Columbia, 1908–22,” *Canadian Historical Review* 79, no. 2 (1998): 199–236, esp. 210.

the Shuswap as representatives to England to lobby King Edward VII.<sup>61</sup> The unique characteristics of each community became articulable as not different for difference's sake but different for the sake of defining a way of life that was comparable, on a global scale, to other traditions, cultures, and nations.

### TRADITION IN COLONIAL STUDIES

The logic of tradition linked the early nineteenth-century Oblate ideal of ultramontanism to pan-Salish ceremonialism and political identity of the early twentieth century. However, this is a categorically different argument than the standard colonial studies argument that Indigenous structures of meaning were assimilated by Western ones. The longstanding academic argument about whether Indigenous colonial subjects became indoctrinated to European concepts or reappropriated them for their own purposes misses the importance of the emergence of global concepts that were logically tied to the development of global capital. Instead of the usual elision that identifies global capital as a Western phenomenon, this article delinks capitalism from a Western identity and challenges the fundamental idea that similarity to the ideal type of Western modern society is the definitive index of subsumption into the structures of social interdependence that define life under global capital.

By the mid-nineteenth century, Indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast were not "others" to global capital but essential components of its reproduction. Despite what the Oblates thought, and despite what many contemporary social scientists have assumed, the colonial encounter between the Oblates and Indigenous communities throughout the Northwest Coast was not an encounter between modern (Oblates) and premodern (Indigenous) but between two groups fully subsumed by the global logic of capital—two groups that were both, in some sense, modern. Any success the Oblates had in disseminating their message was linked to the global form of their ideology (oriented around the concept of tradition) rather than to its Western content.

The logic of tradition did not merely facilitate colonial interactions on the Northwest Coast but dominated how these interactions were perceived and eventually studied by Western academics. Since its genesis, the academic study of the Northwest Coast has been organized by the concept of tradition. For the early ethnographers that flooded the Northwest Coast during the early twentieth century—people such as Franz Boas, Marius Barbeau, Edward Curtis, James Teit, and Charles Hill-

61. R. M. Galois, "The Indian Rights Association, Native Protest Activity and the 'Land Question' in British Columbia, 1903–1916," *Native Studies Review* 8, no. 2 (1992): 1–34, esp. 1.

Tout—the Northwest Coast stood as one of the last bastions of vanishing premodern ways of life, and the goal of these ethnographers was to record and preserve the practices of Indigenous societies before they disappeared.<sup>62</sup> The recording of premodern traditions was seen not just as an academic interest but one with moral and political dimensions. For Boas, the study of non-Western, nonmodern cultural practices provided a critical perspective on modern Western culture. French sociologist Marcel Mauss took a similar approach, pointing to the Northwest Coast potlatch as definitive of an archaic way of life and economy that, through study, could denaturalize the heartless utilitarianism of modern capitalism.<sup>63</sup>

Even as Northwest Coast scholars became less convinced of the ability of Indigenous communities to reproduce “authentic” traditions, the logic of tradition maintained its pride of place as a concept—with the lack of traditions serving as an index of the effectiveness of the colonial project.<sup>64</sup> Scholarship from the past 30 years, and particularly scholarship from the past decade, has made the opposite move, showing the superficial nature of colonial transformation of Indigenous society by emphasizing the deep continuities that connect Indigenous practices through the contact period and into the present.<sup>65</sup> As with Mauss and the early salvage ethnographers, in contemporary scholarship, this continuity takes on political and moral dimensions. For these scholars, traditional practices serve as points of access to a premodern ethic and a way of life that have the potential to teach an out-of-touch, amoral, and environmentally destructive society.<sup>66</sup>

The basic presumptions that define the logic of tradition in Northwest Coast scholarship are common across colonial studies of the nineteenth century. At the core of the logic of tradition is an assumption about how liberal modernity and global capital spread in tandem throughout the world as the ultimate form of Western society. In this view, the universals of post-Enlightenment European society (liberty, rationality, and free trade) slowly and inexorably standardize the particular and intimate life worlds of the nonmodern—a process frequently and impre-

62. Franz Boas, *Kwakiutl Ethnography*, ed. Helen Codere (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Marius Barbeau, *Medicine-Men on the North Pacific Coast* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1958); Hill-Tout, *The Salish People*; James Teit, *The Shuswap*, ed. Franz Boas (Boston: E. J. Brill, 1909).

63. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (London: Cohen & West, 1950).

64. Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia* (Victoria: Province of British Columbia, 1965); Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*.

65. Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002); Sarah Neylan, *The Heavens Are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missionaries and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2003).

66. Bruce Granville, ed., *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007).

cisely referred to as “subsumption.” Tradition appears to identify and articulate the contours of a space that modernity has failed to standardize.

Guided by this presumption, a central focus in this scholarship has been on the success or failure of colonial projects.<sup>67</sup> To what degree were various forms of colonial governance, market forces, or missionary indoctrination effective in reorganizing Indigenous ways of life and subsuming them into modernity, and to what extent can we trust the claims of success that order the colonial archive? Although tradition represents perhaps the most enduring way of conceptualizing and articulating the limit of subsumption, scholars have used a variety of logical forms other than tradition to articulate the same space. At the same time, these scholars have ultimately failed to interrogate the history of the space itself.

Early scholarship on colonial interactions emphasized acculturation, exploitation, and assimilation, suggesting the complete transformation of Indigenous societies by European society. However, more recent postcolonial scholarship has argued that to presume the accuracy and authority of colonial categorization and claims of transformation is to take colonial claims of power at face value and that equal attention must be paid to the limits of that power and the manners in which Indigenous societies resisted and exceeded colonial attempts to transform them.<sup>68</sup> This form of scholarship has predominantly taken two forms: what I term “structure versus agency” and “the contingency of structure.”

*Structure versus agency* describes colonial historians and anthropologists broadly influenced by theorists such as Bourdieu and De Certeau who have taken the concepts of structure and agency and situated them in colonial situations, broadly aligning colonial authority with structure and Indigenous subjects with agency.<sup>69</sup> In other words, colonial authority stands in as the historically specific abstract structure, and agency stands for the transhistoric nature of humanity to simultaneously reproduce the structure and exceed the control of structure itself. As archaeologist Kent Lightfoot writes concerning Catholic missions in Northern California, Indigenous “neophytes employed strategies of social agency to cope with the repressive and overly structured regime of the Franciscan mission system. By focusing on the daily practices of neophytes we see how native peoples negotiated the padres’ ‘in-

67. Adele Perry, “From ‘Hot Bed of Vice’ to ‘Good and Well-Ordered Home,’” *Ethnohistory* 5, no. 4 (2003): 587–612; Kent Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

68. Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

69. Andrew Sartori, “Global Intellectual History and Political Economy,” in *Global Intellectual History*, ed. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 111.

tended' colonial structures."<sup>70</sup> In short, agency exceeds the ability of the structure to structure it, and it is in the complex particularity of daily life that agency is embodied and revealed. Although it does not perfectly map on to the logic of tradition, in practice, the logic of agentive daily life shares significant overlap with that of tradition. For instance, because of the methodological problem of identifying agency in the past, Lightfoot identifies the "persistence of native activity" of non-European practices as the embodied proof of Indigenous agency.<sup>71</sup>

In opposition to this structure-versus-agency literature is the perspective that I term "the contingency of structure." By the late 1990s, scholars such as anthropologist Ann Stoler and historian Frederick Cooper emphasized that the appearance of stable colonial authority was itself a fiction proposed and reproduced by the colonizers themselves and that the impact of colonial authority was much more limited than the colonizers assumed. As Frederick Cooper argues in his critique of the Comaroffs' work on English missionaries among the Tswana, it is unclear how far the "colonization of the mind went beyond the minds of the missionaries."<sup>72</sup>

This approach to colonial studies was invested in challenging the appearance of colonial governance as a rationally ordered and totalizing machine that bureaucratically extracted generalizable information. As Stoler argues in *Along the Archival Grain*, not only must scholars of colonial interactions question the impact of the structure (colonial governance) on its subjects (local indigenous agents), we must also take a hard look at the nice, clean, abstract lines that appear as the structure.<sup>73</sup> Instead of linking colonial rule to the abstract ideals of Western modernity, Stoler reveals colonial authority as tied to the contingencies of intimacy and desire, itself resting upon the bodies, whims, desires, and paranoias of petty colonial officials and mixed-race bureaucrats. Far from totalizing, colonial authority is always local, and therefore subsumption into it was always partial.

For Stoler, the source of this partiality, the kernel that resists external influence, is the intimate and textured site of human desire and affect. As she writes in *Race and the Education of Desire*, human desire exceeds the ability of abstract power to structure it: "while it is clear that production of . . . desires was not indifferent to the taxonomies of rule, they did not always uphold them."<sup>74</sup> For Stoler, scholars of colonial interactions should "explore" this "space for individual affect structured

70. Lightfoot, *Indians, Missionaries, and Merchants*, 111.

71. *Ibid.*, 112.

72. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 48.

73. Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 47.

74. Ann Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 192.

by power but not wholly subsumed by it.”<sup>75</sup> Whereas Stoler destabilizes the appearance of structure by revealing the contingencies beneath it, she also leaves the transhistoric space of agency transformed but ultimately unchallenged, situating the analytic of affect where agency once was. Instead of the transhistoric strategic individual of De Certeau, Stoler gives us the transhistoric desiring and desired individual, acting in a world that is contingencies all the way down.

### THE ABSTRACT AND THE CONCRETE

Although representing contrasting viewpoints, early Northwest Coast scholars of Indigenous tradition, the structure-versus-agency theorists, and the contingency-of-structure theorists share an assumption that colonial relations are defined by a specific understanding of abstraction and its relation to the concrete world. The transhistoric space of the concrete, whether identified as tradition, agency, or affect, always exceeds abstraction and can be used as a site from which the local Indigenous peasant or the critical historian can puncture claims to authority.

Structures of authority (or claims to authority, in Stoler’s case) function in the realm of abstraction; they abstract taxonomically, attempting to order the world based on generalizations. Abstraction may succeed, to some extent, in constructing a world of standardized objects and subjects. However, it will ultimately run up against a world that is transhistorically irreducible to this kind of abstraction. Based on this type of abstraction, critical investigation can puncture colonial claims of power and the abstract categories that constitute them by focusing on the concrete to reveal the limits of the abstraction.

Beyond the field of colonial studies, many critically engaged fields of scholarship presume this basic relationship between the abstract and the concrete—indeed, it may be considered a foundational tenet of anthropology.<sup>76</sup> Founded on the irreducible rock of everyday life, intimate social relations, kinship relations, and pre-modern traditions stand as the concrete to the global and historic abstraction of capitalism, universalism, liberalism. Scholars inspired by different readings and interpretations of Marx, especially those emphasizing early Marx, have highlighted different versions of this abstract-concrete antinomy, idealizing the space of the individual, the traditional, and the local as concrete places that are oppositional to the abstracting power of capital.<sup>77</sup> Henri Lefebvre’s comparison between abstract space

75. Ibid.

76. Making the “the world a safe place for difference.” Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), 15.

77. Jose Mariategui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Harry Vanden and Marx Becker (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1928); Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New

and the everyday serves as one of the most influential examples of this. For Lefebvre, abstract space, as homogenous and empty, spreads throughout the world along with the logic of capital. Abstract space colonizes the rich tapestry of everyday life.<sup>78</sup> Yet, in a self-consciously romantic move, Lefebvre also argues that everyday life is constantly producing novelties and particularities that themselves escape the spread of abstract space, serving as the potential space from which a postcapitalist society may spring. In colonial and postcolonial scholarship influenced by Marx, this idealization of the excess of everyday life has also proven influential. For instance, in Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, the space of everyday lived life is identified as productive of excesses that capital "can never control or domesticate" and serves as the locus for the resistance against capital as an abstracting force.<sup>79</sup> Life, and the particular practices it engenders to places and people—what Chakrabarty terms "dwelling" and "belonging"—exceed complete abstraction by the forces of capital.

#### TRADITION AS GLOBAL CONCEPT

Grounded in a theorization of the transhistoric relation between abstract and concrete, these colonial theories run into an impasse in their attempt to explain the role of tradition in facilitating missionization, the sale of Indigenous labor, and the rise of neotraditional Indigenous political leaders. With this presumption of the relationship between abstraction and the concrete world, three theories of tradition are possible: (1) tradition is a transhistoric facet of human nature, (2) tradition was an ideological ruse of imperial Western capitalism that was adopted by Indigenous communities, and (3) tradition is the result of a million local historical contingencies. None of these explanations can make adequate sense of the global and historical emergence of the logic of tradition in the nineteenth century, the global appeal of a logical form that identified and valued particular local practices as antagonistic toward the global.

The conditions of possibility for the emergence of a concept such as tradition and the object that it describes, a concept-object articulation that is explicitly historical in its self-understanding, are necessarily historical and cannot be based on human nature or the intrinsic nature of the material world. Furthermore, the appeal of a concept such as tradition, which extends far beyond the limits of any particular lo-

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York: Vintage, 1957); Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 2001). In the vein of "all that is solid melts into air." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Samuel Moore and David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

78. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*.

79. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2007), 60.

cale, must subsequently not be based out of a specific institution or language and cannot be written off as merely a form of diffusion or imperialism. Instead, the concept of tradition is dependent on a constellation of social practices that are at once historical, global, and abstract.

A different theoretical framework is required to explicate the global appeal of tradition while simultaneously explaining the particular history of Oblate missionization on the Northwest Coast. Such an approach would necessarily take into account the paradoxical core at the heart of tradition, being simultaneously global, historical, and local, and identify it as dependent on a historically unique form of global abstraction.

For this framework I draw on a Postonian-inspired Marxist approach that identifies capital as precisely this form of historically unique and global form of social abstraction.<sup>80</sup> The framework rejects traditional Marxist transhistoric arguments such as base-superstructure or the ontology of labor and instead understands capital as a historically specific, totalizing, interconnected web of social practices specifically grounded in the practices of commodity production and exchange.<sup>81</sup> The global and historical reach of a concept such as tradition is grounded in its intimate connection to these practices. Although certain necessary conditions of possibility for the emergence of global capital were located in Europe, capital is essentially global in scale and is not constituted by uniquely Western practices or structures of meaning. Furthermore, capital mediates everyday life not through measures of abstraction as a form of generalization, but through the global equivalency of concrete practices that are themselves also abstract, namely, abstract labor.

In a world organized by capital, the ability to live and reproduce your way of life (both on individual and collective scales) is necessarily dependent on anonymous and interdependent relations with complete strangers. These interdependencies permeate and structure daily life while being defined in relation to the totality of global levels of production and exchange via the equivalency of human labor. In other words, every specific local act is mediated globally through its relationship to every other local act. These interdependencies, as social relations between complete strangers, are themselves abstract, defined by the global and abstract nature of labor as the creator of value.

The mediation of the totality of labor, however, does not appear as it actually is, but instead veils the interdependence of local practices and the global totality.

80. Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

81. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997); Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin, 1971); Karl Kautsky, *Marxism, Revolution, and Democracy* (London: Transaction, 1994).



From the perspective of every concrete act of exchange or production, the abstract mediation of labor appears as alien, as the objective property of an external force. The appearance of the totality of labor as alien to the individual highlights an antinomy between the individual and society. This antinomy is expressed through a duality of broad logics that conceptualize this tension between the individual and society and the social practices that constitute it. Sartori identifies these two broad logics as liberal and culturalist.<sup>82</sup> On the one side, liberal logics (property rights, human rights, liberty, etc.) ascribe practical activity to individuals and their private interests. On the other side, culturalist logics (culture, tradition, society, etc.) ascribe practical activity to the collective and the subsumption of individual subjects into the social totality. Contrary to their appearances, the concepts and practices associated with culturalist logics are just as fundamentally tied to the reproduction of capital as those associated with liberal logics. Tradition, for instance, is representative of the culturalist side as a logic that identifies the reproduction of premodern practices as essential for the reproduction of a collective group and its identity within a modern context. The concrete practices and conceptualization of premodern activity as traditions not only facilitates this reproduction conceptually but also is a constituent part of the production of abstract labor that reproduces this community materially.

In the context of Oblate missionization in the Pacific Northwest, as a culturalist logic, tradition served as the framework through which precapitalist practices could be recontextualized in a manner that facilitated rather than resisted the reproduction of both Indigenous communities and capital. On the one hand, tradition became the founding logic for the establishment of missionary activity to resist modernity, the preservation of premodern Indigenous practices, and the rise of pan-Salish political identities to resist the encroachment of Euro-Canadian settler society. On the other hand, tradition facilitated the increasing integration of Indigenous communities into settler markets, the sale of Indigenous labor, and the promotion of missionary activity to settler communities and increased the legibility of Indigenous political structures to Euro-Canadian political institutions.

Despite its global appeal across populations, the global form of tradition did not produce a standardization of local practices among the Oblates, Indigenous communities, and Euro-Canadian settlers. Instead, it mediated and contextualized local practices in a globally articulable way. The variegated and often contradictory uses of tradition in the history of Oblate missionization is proof of how a global concept, while maintaining its fundamental coherence across populations and places,

82. Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, 50.

touched down and became useful in particular places at particular times in particular ways. Therefore, the interesting question for colonial studies is not, "To what extent has a society been subsumed into the structures of abstract interdependence that define capitalist society?" but rather, "After a community was subsumed, how were the concrete activities of daily life conceptualized and practiced in a manner that articulated with the real abstractions of capital and that facilitated the reproduction of these communities and the reproduction of capital itself?" In colonial situations such as those of the Oblates and the Indigenous communities of the Northwest Coast, where the reproduction of Indigenous life was under an existential threat by invading settlers, this question becomes especially poignant.

### CONCLUSION

During the same period that Indigenous chiefs were highlighting the value of pre-colonial customs and ceremonies as a source of resistance to settler society, another group was finding a different value in those same practices: ethnographers. Among Indigenous communities missionized by the Oblates, Charles Hill-Tout studied the Sechelt, Sliammon, Sto:lo, and Squamish, and James Teit studied the Lilloet.<sup>83</sup> Following the urge to salvage the few premodern practices that remained, Hill-Tout and Teit went out to photograph, collect, and record every vestige of Indigenous tradition in the midst of communities just removed from the mission system. As ethnography, these traditions provided insight into the diversity of the human experience and facilitated a critique of the shackles of modern society.<sup>84</sup>

However, what the ethnographers found were not the authentic windows into the premodern world for which they searched but practices already understood as traditions by the people who practiced them. Practices were defined that way not because they represented the form of an economy foreign to capitalism but precisely because of the mediating presence of the dynamic of global capital. While the shared understanding of the logic of tradition facilitated the ethnographic endeavor, it also indexed the opposite to the ethnographers' vision: these traditions were not the outside to global dynamics of capital but merely the veiled side. They were reproduced by, and in turn helped to reproduce, the very structures of social interdependence that had emerged as modernity, the real abstractions of capital.

In Northwest Coast studies, the uncritical and ahistorical use of the tradition concept remains highly influential in both historical and anthropological scholarship. In continuing to use the logic of tradition as a concept with both analytical and po-

83. Hill-Tout, *The Salish People*; Teit, *The Shuswap*.

84. Franz Boas, "An Anthropologist's Credo," *Nation* 147 (1938): 201–4.

litical weight, this scholarship fails to understand how the global dynamic of capital structures and abstracts daily life. It also relies on an uneven and biased temporal geography in which non-Western Indigenous communities are defined through their unique and pure relationship to the precapitalist past and Western society is defined through a unique and pure relationship to history and capital. In doing so, scholars not only perform what Lucien Fabien would call the “denial of co-evalness,” but they also set up these “traditional” Indigenous societies as possessing a resource to be researched and exploited for progressive politics.<sup>85</sup>

The argument in this article is not that Indigenous lives were dominated and subsumed by European concepts but rather the opposite: to show how concepts that appear European are, in fact, global. The logic of tradition that permeated Oblate ideology and later defined Shishalh understandings of collectivity was the same core logic that developed from the abstract practices of capital. In taking up the core of this logic to reorganize and reconceptualize their own societies as resistive to modernity and Euro-Canadian society, Indigenous communities on the Northwest Coast adopted not an Oblate concept but a global one. The resistance that the logic of tradition engendered—although not resisting the dynamic of capital—enabled the reproduction of Indigenous community lifeways through a period of intense existential crises.

The permeation of global concepts worldwide does not symbolize the end of difference and the standardization of the world, and the reproduction of Indigenous and non-Indigenous lifeways within the structures of global social interdependence does not explain away or justify the horror and violence that Euro-American colonial projects exerted to expropriate Indigenous labor and land. An acknowledgment of the global reach of these structures does not remove the need for the particular study of lifeworlds or the effects of colonization in particular places at particular times, but it does necessitate an understanding of how these lifeworlds, even at the most intimate scale, are mediated globally.

85. Lucien Fabien, *Time and the Other* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 31.