

Chapter 1: Becoming indigenous: an eco-social-spiritual community

1.1 Introduction

Becoming indigenous indicates how people arriving in a new territory move from initial encounters with unfamiliar attributes to stable relationships. The process of establishing such a relationship is fraught with peril, which begets what has been described as an “ethics of attention” or “ecological literacy”, a process of socialization and attunement to the movement and growth of plants and animals through territory, seasons and weather. This attention includes the individual beings or things, the connections between them and the spaces between where unknown and unseen faunas and floras flourish. Learning to live within limits forges relationship and a sense of “belonging” to a “place” in the deepest sense of relating to other beings and forces that “co-construct” our world (Latour 1993:6, 106). Over time, the dance of matter in space and time, the return of the eulachon and salmon, the ripening of camas are encoded in the mix of dance, art, myth, stories, teachings and celebration and mourning which we term ceremony. The dedicated attention, practice, stories and ceremonies through which young people become socialized and attuned to the web of relationships which constitute ‘place’ or ‘territory’ and which continues throughout their lives, is here termed ‘spirituality’. Tim Michel of the Secwepemc people in the interior of BC describes the spiritual practice of *letsxe ʔ*, a regime of fasting, meditation and prayer that attunes you to your own guiding spirit *ʔne7e* and the spirits of the land, or equally of the city¹ (*pers. comm.* November 2011). The diversity of ecological contexts and human experience gives rise to an enormous number of ‘eco-social-spiritual communities’.

¹ This practice, loosely termed a ‘vision quest’ is analogous to retreats of fasting, meditation and prayer in other spiritual and religious traditions.

1.2 Eco-social-spiritual community

The term community acknowledges relationship. It is not created by measurement or from some outside or objective stance. The term eco-social-spiritual community explicitly includes the sacred or spiritual as an integrative dimension of human experience as worthy of articulation as the measurements of science and economics. Figure 1.1 presents a conceptual view of how communities are formed at timescales from 100s to 1000s of years.

The extent to which people, species and landscape have shaped and reshaped each other is only beginning to be understood (Turner 2004; Anderson 2005; Mann 2005). After hundreds to thousands of years, none of these are what they were at the beginning and marine species are no exception (Harper *et al.* 1995; Haggan *et al.* 2006; Williams 2006; Rick and Erlandson 2008). Lands, waters, their creatures and humans have nurtured and

sustained each other since the dawn of time. Archaeological records of human dependence on Pacific Northwest marine ecosystems go back almost 13,000 years to the end of the last Ice Age

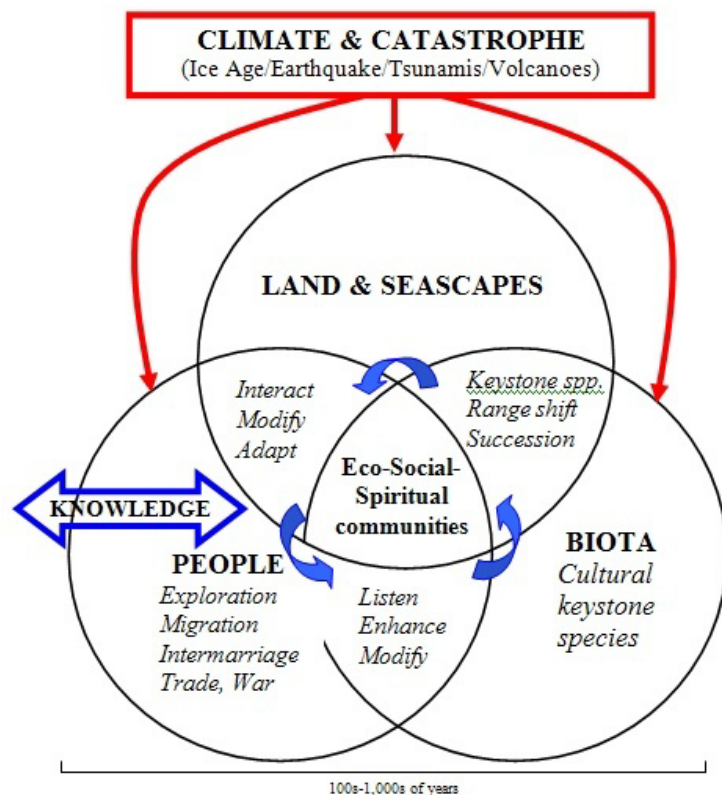


Figure 1.1 ‘Conversations’ between people, biota and environment give rise to ‘eco-social-spiritual’ diversity at individual, family, community and regional levels. The curved arrows represent the exchange of information. The double-ended arrow represents the flow of knowledge between neighbouring and distant places. (Adapted from Haggan 2011).

(Fedje *et al.* 2004). Some Pacific Westcoast societies have an 8-10 thousand year record of sustainability (Erlandson *et al.* 2008; Campbell and Butler 2010). Principles and practices that ensure sustainability are at least 3,000 years old (Trosper 2009). This is by no means to suggest that all previous societies were sustainable, just that it is well worth paying attention to those that were and are.

Understanding relationships leads to the cultivation of those that contribute to individual and community well-being. This is practical, in that it contributes to understanding and conserving our world. It is also a source of intellectual satisfaction and of joy in the flourishing of the people, lands, waters and creatures. Understanding relationships contributes to a feeling of harmony and belonging and alerts and energizes us when they are eroded or threatened, as with climate change today. Figure 1.1 can also be read as a metaphor for the totality of a formative or career-shaping experience, or the flow between human and non-human beings and events represented in the graphic, plastic and performative art and literature (stories) of traditional societies. The names, spirits and crests of ancestors are entangled with lands and waters in a “recursive epistemology” (Bateson 2000; Rose 2007), or person to person relationship (Buber 1937). The notion that learning is reciprocal “...seems at hopeless odds with the distinction of subject and object considered essential to science.” (Le Guin 1985:275). This concept of becoming indigenous through encounters with limits sets the stage for a journey from the rich human societies of the Pacific Northwest prior to European contact through an increasingly crowded and contentious coast and ocean to a conclusion that adding the immeasurable values of cherishing and protecting the sea are as necessary to marine ecosystem-based management as the measurements of science and economics.

This thesis combines concepts and insights from science, religion and spirituality to develop and test a set of principles with which to address the marine ecological crisis as it affects the seacoast of British Columbia (BC). It thus bridges Einstein's separate realms of "*is*" (science) and "*should*" (religion) (Einstein 1954:42) and Stephen J. Gould's "non-overlapping magisteria" (Gould 1997), both of which leave moralizing to the moralists (Latour 2004:98; Mackey 2007:19). Mainstream religion and theology are increasingly vocal on the spiritual and moral questions raised by global ecological and human poverty, but the same cannot be said for the voice of mainstream religion in the Pacific Northwest². This silence leaves the emerging field of marine ecosystem-based management dominated by the voices of natural and social science (mostly economics) with concessions to Aboriginal people as the major holders and spokespersons for spiritual values.

That racial stereotyping puts Aboriginal people in the invidious position of speaking for spiritual values while also having to negotiate for material needs. Religious leaders in BC need to connect global declarations on the ecological crisis as "crimes against creation" (Sagan 1990) or a "moral crisis" (John Paul II 1990) with growing human and ecological poverty in the Pacific Northwest. Declarations from all the faith traditions demand attention to environmental, ecological and human injustice. For far too long, BC Aboriginal people have been the sole voice for the spiritual dimension of our relationship to this beautiful and fragile place. It is time for mainstream religious leaders to work with scholars and communities seeking not only ecosystem-based management but also a more harmonious, happy and just relationship with the people, places and creatures they love. This is vital since the depletion and extinction of fish

² Exceptions include a statement on the Columbia River by Roman Catholic bishops (WSCC 2001) and a 2012 letter from the Anglican bishops of BC and the Yukon calling for fair and inclusive process in hearings on the Enbridge pipeline (Hager 2012).

populations compromises marine ecosystem structure and impoverishes human communities. It means, in effect, that *everyone should become indigenous*.

Scientific literature and media articles agree that that the ocean is depleted of fish, threatened by climate change and sadly undervalued (please see section 2.4). In short, "...our entire mode of interaction with the sea is wrong..." (Pauly 2009). Industrial fisheries move from coastal waters to the continental shelf and seamounts (Longhurst 2006; Pitcher *et al.* 2007) and as sequential depletion drives us to eat 'new' species. Efforts to revalue nature by attaching monetary equivalents to the 'ecosystem goods and services' that underpin human life and economy are vital to a sustainable economy. To many people, their emotional and spiritual connection, their moral beliefs and ethics, respect and community standing are equally if not more important. There is evidence that these 'intangible', 'unquantifiable', or 'incommensurable' values matter to a surprising cross-section of people, including those who live and work in the BC coastal and ocean environment.

This dissertation argues that scientists and others need to take spirituality seriously. This can be done *first*, by thinking of the wonder that fuels their fascination as a spiritual gift; *second* by recognizing that their dedication to understanding the world is a spiritual practice inspired by love for people, places, plants, animals and phenomena; and *third*, by inviting those knowledgeable in the religious and spiritual traditions along with artists to collaborate in 'ecological' and 'social-ecological' research. Love in this context means cherishing and protecting that about which we care. As radical as this may sound today, it is I suggest no more so than the first suggestion that social science had a role to play in fisheries management.

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