

Indigenous Cultural Dynamics: Reclaiming Land and Marine Life

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The Kinder Morgan Pipeline is a travesty of colonialism on unceded traditional territories of the Indigenous communities. Colonialism has adopted forms of violence against Indigenous rights to land, culture, and food security. Resistance and resurgence are two themes in Tawahum Bige's poem that confront colonialism, the power of unity tackles injustices to Indigenous communities. The battle is not only the physical pipeline running through Indigenous land, but also the societal traditions that are heavily impacted. Salmon continues to play a leading role in Indigenous ceremonies and diet; however, the threat of the Kinder Morgan Pipeline hinders their ability to have accessibility to fresh Salmon. This poem analysis demonstrates the impact of colonialism on Indigenous land and marine life.

Though the Kinder Morgan Pipeline pushes gasoline and crude oil, it is Indigenous territorial land that feels despoiled. The pockets of shareholders and government's increasingly grow, as the salmon experience the decrease of natural flow. As the pipeline begins to start, the salmon feels a heavy heart. In the event of a pipeline leak,

the call for salmon will turn bleak. The exposure to oil will cause the salmon to toil. As the petroleum leaks, fin erosion sneaks. Colonizers and oil defeats, while salmon breeding becomes incomplete.

Indigenous societies have felt the brunt of colonization, industrialization, and capitalism, and
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their cultures have been heavily disrupted by the Kinder Morgan Pipeline in BC. The Government of Canada acquired the Trans Mountain pipeline system In August 2018 from Kinder Morgan, the motive behind the purchase was for Canada to complete the Trans Mountain Expansion Project¹. The project works to expand oil transportation by developing two pipelines². The current operating capacity is three hundred thousand barrels per day, whereas the expansion project will yield eight hundred ninety thousand barrels per day³. Heavy and light crude oil will travel through twenty-inch pipelines, crossing over seven hundred eighty-five watercourses in British Columbia¹. The impact of this pipeline affects Indigenous territories as it displaces their rights to food security. Tawahum Bige's poem III in *Cut to Fortress* feature's themes of resistance and resurgence regarding the protection of tradition salmon from the Trans Mountain Expansion Project.

The Indigenous relationship with place is a crucial factor which derives from Indigenous Peoples

foundational belief systems. Colonialism on Indigenous land has threatened their ability to practice traditional rights. The Canadian government has adopted a false narrative on one end they characterize themselves as fighters towards climate change, yet they expand Canada's oil exports despite wide resistance. Bige upholds individual and collective Indigenous resistance and resurgence as actions against colonial authority, resurgence which involves reclaiming Indigenous practices of life.

Bige mentions Indigenous land protectors in his second stanza as "our medicine men as conduit, drummers, timekeepers, dancers, summoners, alongside elders as strategists;"⁴ the cultural dimension in this is the element of strength. The power of unity and resistance towards colonizers speaks volumes that minimize the narrative of colonizers. Established power structures seek to dismantle Indigenous groups and cultures. The power derives from Bige's inclusion of Indigenous land protectors who demonstrate

¹ Thomas, Gunton, et.al. 'Evolution of the Trans Mountain Expansion Project' in *School of Resource and Environmental Management Simon Fraser University*. (2021) 1. <https://rem-main.rem.sfu.ca/papers/gunton/TMX%20CBA%20Report%20Ofinal%20march%2021.pdf> (Accessed 21 November 2022)

² Compare Thomas, p. 1

³ Compare Thomas, p. 1

⁴ Tawahum, Bige, "Cut to Fortress", (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 33-34

resurgence by reviving traditions and practices. Medicine men act as “stewards”⁵ who help oversee and support the voices of Indigenous Peoples through engaging in “ceremonial activity and prayer”⁶. The strength is acquired from land protectors and Indigenous Peoples who engage in resurgence practice to strengthen their voice and solidify the existence of their Peoples and culture⁷. Tawahum highlights unity through this poem; the continuous road to justice is strengthened by members of the community creating a collective voice. The representation of Indigenous Peoples is a broad spectrum, Tawahum touches base on important figures with backgrounds in arts, wellness, and wisdom. The importance is that these cultural figures are protectors; as a collective effort everyone's aim is towards protecting their Indigenous lands against the harm of colonizers and political figures. Resistance is strength, and unity in numbers helps to instruct change to hold the government accountable.

Symbols of Indigenous culture are proudly represented and connected to respect and courage in Bige's work His fifth stanza suggests resurgence as the power behind Elders and other important cultural figures. They are not armed with weapons, but traditional cultural items like “feather | in hand”⁸ as they assert their Indigenous identity's. Their cultural identity acts as a weapon that is powerful and strong to demand for justice. The strong representation of cultural symbols conveys the message that Indigenous Peoples are being represented. Drums and feathers are both cultural symbols to Indigenous heritage, and the active practice of engaging in Indigenous items represents resurgence. By engaging in act of resurgence, society and future generations will recognize Indigenous Peoples to the land.

Traditional foods such as salmon are under the threat of decline due to the Kinder Morgan Pipeline. Established power structures dismantle Indigenous land, disrupting food security. For Indigenous communities, salmon is a crucial part

⁵ Tawahum, Bige, “Cut to Fortress”, (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 33-34

⁶ Tawahum, Bige, “Cut to Fortress”, (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 33

⁷ Hill, Martin Dawn. ‘Traditional Medicine in Contemporary Contexts: Projecting and Respecting Indigenous Knowledge

and Medicine’ in National Aboriginal Health Organization. (2003), 8. https://epub.sub.uni-hamburg.de/epub/volltexte/2013/15417/pdf/research_tradition.pdf [accessed 25 November 2022]

⁸ Tawahum, Bige, “Cut to Fortress”, (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 34

of diet. Indigenous communities have exercised their rights to fish generation to generation. Food security is not only the abundance of food that is available, but it is also the ability to access it. The pipeline hinders Indigenous rights to access their traditional food, and the possibility of a leak can severely impact the health of salmon. The Trans Mountain Pipeline Extension carries crude oil that reduces salmon's cardiovascular health and heart development⁹.

The pipeline violates Indigenous land, all to derive profit to shareholders and political figures. The pipeline is a deterrent for Indigenous communities to practice traditional ceremonies and have accessibility to their diet. Tawahum's eighth stanza describes how salmon is the "last traditional food source"¹⁰ for Indigenous communities on the West Coast of what is now called Canada. colonization endangered a significant amount of traditional Indigenous food sources. Salmon, being the last traditional food is already threatened by the exposure of climate change, and industrial changes like the pipeline

can significantly affect Indigenous capabilities to access their traditional food sources.

Colonization through history has minimized the needs of Indigenous communities and altered their lifestyle in ways that hinder their traditional values. The shareholders and political leaders behind the pipeline do not take into consideration the damaging societal effects it will have on the Indigenous community. Indigenous Peoples voice has been minimized by infrastructural changes to benefit the pockets of authoritative figures, while they have freedom to exercise their own practices it is the cultural Indigenous societies that are neglected where they do not have the chance to exercise their culture like others do.

Authoritative figures behind The Kinder Morgan Castle neglect the rights of Indigenous communities. The crux of the issue lies in colonizing efforts to dictate and manipulate Indigenous land and marine life. Kinder Morgan represents wealth and dominance; their ability to create a multinational business is supported by higher authorities who control aspects of oil

⁹ Incardona, John. P. et, al. 'Very low embryonic crude oil exposures cause lasting cardiac defects in Salmon and herring' *In Scientific Reports*. (2015) 1.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4561892/pdf/srep13499.pdf>

¹⁰ Tawahum, Bige, "Cut to Fortress", (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 34

industries and mining. Indigenous territories and Indigenous land rights have been neglected throughout the process of colonization and the threat of pipelines. Tawahum highlights the strength that Indigenous communities carry, their cultural practices and traditions represent their commitment to protecting territorial land and marine life. Tawahum's tenth stanza is powerful; he uses Indigenous ceremonies to act as a defence against the pipeline. Resurgence repairs cultural degradation to Indigenous land, it is beneficial to making a political statement to the masses about issues surrounding the violation of their territorial land. The power of resurgence strengthens the Indigenous community, with revitalizing cultural aspects they are able to develop a solid foundation without conforming to assimilation. The refusal to assimilate allows Indigenous Peoples to confide in their own community for revitalization based on their own terms.

Tawahum amplifies Indigenous cultural practices as defence against the Kinder Morgan Pipeline that will disrupt traditional lands. Sacred elements

like fire and water have been amplified by Tawahum to describe the desire to reclaim Indigenous territories. Tawahum makes reference to "tsunami tidal waves"¹¹, their wave lengths are extremely long compared to normal currents and waves. The tsunami tidal wave represents the growing numbers of Indigenous communities uniting through resurgence. The power in numbers represents the tsunami tidal wave. Tawahum encourages a strong line of defence against colonial powers. Tawahum mentions how the fire is sacred, meaning it is a culturally essential tradition of Indigenous Peoples. Tawahum's tenth stanza, line five says "until inferno,"¹² meaning an uncontrollable flame. Like an "inferno"¹³, the driving force behind the big fire is the Indigenous community, their efforts in resurgence and their resilience will stand tall against colonization. The strength of the Indigenous community is a strong flame, "inferno"¹⁴ signifies their abilities to defend their community and land against colonial projects like the Kinder Morgan.

¹¹ Tawahum, Bige, "Cut to Fortress", (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 33

¹² Tawahum, Bige, "Cut to Fortress", (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 34

¹³ Tawahum, Bige, "Cut to Fortress", (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 34

¹⁴ Tawahum, Bige, "Cut to Fortress", (Nightwood Editions: Gibsons BC,2022), pp. 34

Through resurgence and resilience, Indigenous communities are able to preserve their rights and challenge colonial projects like the Kinder Morgan Pipeline. Tawahum's poem expresses the effects of colonialism on salmon and awakens a demand for justice and resilience against the threat of a pipeline on unceded territories. The constant threat of colonialism jeopardizes cultural dimensions; through resistance and resurgence Indigenous voice are amplified to change disruptions caused by colonial efforts.

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