

Is it Colonial Déjà Vu? Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice

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Introduction

Indigenous peoples are among the most audible voices in the global climate justice movement. Yet, as I will show in this chapter, climate injustice is a recent episode of a cyclical history of colonialism inflicting anthropogenic (human-caused) environmental change on Indigenous peoples (Wildcat). Indigenous peoples face climate risks largely because of how colonialism, in conjunction with capitalist economics, shapes the geographic spaces they live in and their socio-economic conditions. In the North American settler colonial context, which I focus on in this chapter, U.S. settler colonial laws, policies and programs are 'both' a significant factor in opening up Indigenous territories for carbon-intensive economic activities and, at the same time, a significant factor in why Indigenous peoples face heightened climate risks. Climate injustice, for Indigenous peoples, is less about the spectre of a new future and more like the experience of déjà vu.

Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Change

'Indigenous peoples' refer to the roughly 400 million persons worldwide who, prior to a period of invasion, colonisation or settlement, exercised collective self-determination according to their own cultural (cosmological) and political systems. Indigenous peoples continue to exercise collective cultural and political self-determination today within territories in which they live as non-dominant populations in relation to nation states, such as the U.S. or New Zealand. Problematically, most people in the world assume it as fact that nation states such as the U.S. and New Zealand have cultural and political primacy over Indigenous peoples (Anaya).

Consider the Indigenous people to which I belong, the Potawatomi, who have lived since time immemorial as an ecologically mobile (i.e. moved often within and across ecosystems for sustenance), culturally distinct, and politically independent society that has maintained kinship and harvesting relationships with hundreds of particular plants and animals, and stewarded their

habitats and cultivated crops across an area of 30 million acres in the Great Lakes region of North America. Potawatomi people organise themselves through diverse cultural and political institutions, from families to villages to winter/summer houses to ceremonies to bands to clans, each of which is designed to relate to plants, animals and ecosystems in some way.

Potawatomi society is ‘multispecies’ in the sense that it has its own conceptions of responsibility, agency and value for the hundreds of plants and animals that humans interact with in the Great Lakes region. Potawatomi and closely related Anishinaabe/Neshnabé (including Ojibwe and Odawa) peoples usually identified themselves in environmental terms based on where they resided (e.g. a river valley) (Secunda) and in clan animal (e.g. crane) or plant (e.g. birch) terms that referred to large kinship networks centered around those particular animals or plants (Bohaker).

Potawatomi people engage in political alliances with other groups, such as the Three Fires Confederacy involving Odawa and Ojibwe peoples. We have a legacy of trading with numerous other Indigenous peoples across the region and continent. As the result of French and British colonisation during the fur trade, starting in the 1600s, and then subsequent U.S. and Canadian settlement, which fragmented and relocated our society, we are now 7 distinct Tribal nations on the supposed U.S. side; and there are several Potawatomi communities living within First Nations on the supposed Canadian side.

Today, each of these communities exercises self-determination in different ways, from having their own governments to continuing to identify distinctly as Potawatomi to practicing certain ancient or more recently developed cultural practices associated with being Potawatomi or Indigenous North American. Potawatomi participate in numerous trading and business transactions, diplomatic relationships, and cultural exchanges with many Indigenous peoples as well as with settler and other non-Indigenous societies. There are thousands of Indigenous peoples living in the world today who share comparable histories of continuing their self-determination in spite of invasion, colonisation, or settlement, such as the Saami in the Arctic, the Maasai in Africa, the Maori in the Pacific and the Mapuche in South America.

Importantly, it is here, at the point where we are discussing what it means to be Indigenous, that environmental change and climate change come to the fore as significant topics. For many Indigenous peoples today, the concept of societies’ having to adapt constantly to environmental change is not new. Potawatomi peoples and the larger Anishinaabe/Neshnabé group have long traditions of cultural and political systems that are based on designing institutions that have capacities for adapting to seasonal and inter-annual change. The ‘seasonal round’ refers to such a cultural and political system. In the seasonal round, the purpose, organisation and size of cultural and political institutions (from ceremonies to villages to bands), changed throughout the year depending on what plants and animals needed to be harvested, monitored, stored or honored.

According to my own knowledge, the institutions of the seasonal round are organised differently depending on what plants and animals need to be monitored, harvested, stored or honored. For example, during sugar bush (maple syrup) harvesting (coming out of the winter), a small extended family unit might be the primary organisation; in the summer during berry harvesting and fishing seasons, larger bands are formed; during wild rice season (late summer, early fall),

larger rice camps convene as coordinated organisations of multiple families. Complex clan, gender, and intergenerational norms over-lay institutions such rice camps or sugar bush camps, mediating each person's leadership authority and particular responsibilities to plants, animals and other humans.

In a seasonal round, Potawatomi peoples do 'not' have the same political and cultural institutions all year round, which is very different from how, say, U.S. governmental institutions operate, such as the senate or Environmental Protection Agency. The expansion and contraction of institutions throughout the year attempts to order society to be as responsive as possible to environmental change in ways that respect how little humans ultimately comprehend of the dynamics of ecosystems. In the seasonal round, we have an example of anthropogenic activities that are not in themselves ignorant of the tight coupling of human cultural and political systems with ecological conditions. In fact, cultural and political institutions are designed to approximate, as best as can be known, the dynamics of changing ecological conditions.

A key point I want to highlight is that Potawatomi cultural and political systems are structured rather 'explicitly' on the concept that society must be organised to constantly adapt to environmental change. So the importance of being mindful of how to adapt is not a new one to Indigenous peoples such as the Anishinaabe and others. This shows that 'Anthropogenic' environmental change is not new as an idea nor does it date to the invention of Western machines or technologies. Potawatomi and other Anishinaabe/Neshnabé societies directly attempt to cultivate ecosystems, using the institutions and 'technologies' of the seasonal round, such as the implements and skillsets for sugar bushing, so that there would be ecological conditions characterised by sufficient abundance of plants and animals. This also shows that one way of adapting to change is to work directly with ecosystems, whether through seasonal burning, strategic planting, or tapping a maple tree.

As trends in seasonal change are related to climate change, it is also true in a sense that something like what we understand today in the English language as adaptation to 'climate' change was also part of Indigenous cultural and political systems as community members keep track of, share and compare memories of seasonal change over the years. Anishinaabe/Neshnabé stories, traditions and memories can be used as decision-making processes for adapting to inter-annual change (Nelson; Davidson-Hunt and Berkes).

My observations in this section offer just the basic idea that the seasonal round is built on and emphasised institutions with capacities to adapt to environmental change and to relate to local ecological conditions. I am not making any comparative claims about the superiority of Indigenous systems and institutions for values such as sustainability or resilience. Though Indigenous peoples everywhere vary widely in their being more sedentary or more mobile, or having members living in less populated areas or large urban centers, I want to convey that Indigenous peoples generally are not surprised by the idea that their history consists of the adaptive interplay between their cultural and political systems and institutions and environmental change (Trosper; Colombi).

Settler Colonialism and Environmental Change

For Indigenous peoples of different nations and heritages, because we often share ways of life and histories that explicitly consider adaptation to environmental change, we think very specifically about different kinds of anthropogenic environmental change. That is, human-induced alterations in the environment can range from the ‘anthropogenic’ change involved with cultivating landscapes in a seasonal round to that involved at earth system scales with the massive amounts of burning fossil fuels that have been occurring through carbon-intensive economic activities. Colonialism, such as U.S. settler colonialism, can be understood as a system of domination that concerns how one society inflicts burdensome anthropogenic environmental change on another society.

More specifically, settler colonialism, in the U.S. context (but also others too), very specifically targets the ecologically mobile, adaptive systems of Indigenous peoples. Settler colonialism refers specifically to a system (or structure) of oppression by which one society settles the territories of another society. The settler society seeks to fully establish itself in that territory according to its own cultural and political systems, which requires erasing the Indigenous population (see Lefevre for an overview of major sources). Erasure can be understood as the strategic process of instantiating cultural and political institutions that destroy the Indigenous mobile, adaptive cultural and political systems and institutions that are tightly coupled with certain ecological conditions. Consider some examples of one settler colonial structure, that of ‘containment,’ which engenders cultural and political institutions designed to inhibit or ‘box in’ Indigenous capacities to adapt to environmental change. Strategic institutions of containment were used by the U.S. to facilitate the proliferation of extractive industries, such as coal mining and oil drilling, large-scale agriculture, deforestation and the creation of large urban areas—in short, the drivers of today’s ordeal with anthropogenic climate change.

The fixed rights of treaty areas and fixed jurisdictions of reservations, established during the 19th century, place limits on Indigenous peoples, effectively rendering them immobile. In the case of treaties, the idea that they represented ‘fixed rights’ is a U.S. settler interpretation, as Indigenous peoples, in some cases, understood the treaties as open to flexibility and renewal (Stark). Settlers eventually ‘filled in’ treaty areas and reservation areas with their own private property and government lands, which limits where and when Indigenous peoples can harvest, monitor, store and honor animals and plants; settlers then stigmatise containment through social discourses that cast reservations as bad places or that simply disappear reservations altogether as neighboring communities; or settler discourses cast Indigenous harvesters and gatherers as violating ‘the law,’ among many other types of stigmatisation.

The consequences of capitalist economics, such as deforestation, water pollution, the clearing of land for large scale agriculture and urbanisation, generate immediate disruptions on ecosystems, ‘rapidly’ rendering them very different from what they were like before, undermining Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous peoples’ capacity to cultivate landscapes and adjust to environmental change. These changes ‘contain’ Indigenous peoples because they limit the abundance of plants and animals and the number of locations for harvesting, monitoring, storing and honoring. Many plants, animals and habitats are simply destroyed.

Boarding schools and other problematic forms of education strip Indigenous peoples of languages that express knowledge and skills related to particular ecosystems, seasonal change

and knowledge. Anishinaabe/Neshnabé languages, for example, are derived from Potawatomi and other peoples' specific engagements with certain plants, animals and ecosystems and are primarily verb-based, referring very explicitly to particular practices arising from ecological contexts (Borrows). The forced adoption of English limits the range of meanings, knowledges and skill-sets that Indigenous persons can draw on for sustenance. Many Indigenous peoples in the 1830s were forcibly removed from their territories altogether to take up small pieces of reservation land or private property hundreds of miles away in different ecosystems and climate regions.

Forms of recognition, such as U.S. Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, created Tribal governments and Alaska native corporations that seek to redefine Indigenous peoples' governments as capitalist enterprises whose goal is to mimic the U.S. economy by investing in carbon-intensive economic activities, including Tribes that are heavily involved in coal-fire energy and mining. These governments inhibit Indigenous seasonal and clan-based cultural and political systems and institutions by creating a profit-dependent entity the citizens of which depend on its revenues for their well-being—which becomes defined primarily in terms of financial stability. The governments have been particularly hamstrung in their capacity to address key human rights issues, such as the increase of sexual violence against Indigenous women (Deer).

All of these examples are cases where settler colonialism seeks to erase Indigenous peoples' adaptive capacity and self-determination by repeatedly containing them in different ways, destroying the ecological conditions that are tightly coupled with Indigenous cultural and political systems. While some Indigenous peoples manage to find ways to use forms of containment to their advantage, such as through winning court cases within the U.S. legal system that protect ecological conditions such as fish habitat for certain valuable species, settler colonial institutions tend to render Indigenous persons more susceptible to adverse health outcomes, sexual violence, loss of cultural integrity and political turbulence, among other common issues facing many Indigenous peoples today. In this sense, though Indigenous cultural and political institutions can adapt to change, what cannot be denied is that U.S. settler society has required rapid adaptations in which preventable harms become unavoidable harms. And Indigenous peoples incur these harms for the sake of facilitating U.S. settler society's instantiation as the dominant and legitimate nation and peoples within North America. We can look at this history as a cyclical history in which U.S. repeatedly instantiates settler institutions that contain Indigenous peoples, reducing their capacity to adapt to environmental change on their own terms (consensually) and without suffering preventable harms.

Climate change fits succinctly within this pattern. For this reason, many contemporary Indigenous peoples are concerned about their vulnerability, or susceptibility to be harmed, by impacts associated with the observed rise of global average temperature, or climate change. That is, they are concerned about climate risks as they are increasingly confronted by change stemming from the carbon intensive economic activities of settler and other colonial societies. Climate change impacts can be seen through the lens of forms of containment (among other forms of domination), this time arising from settler contributions to increasing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

Warming waters and receding glaciers affect the fish habitats in Indigenous territories all over the world, such as on the Pacific coast of North America where many Tribal nations harvest salmon for economic and cultural purposes (Bennett et al.). Sea level rise is pushing people living in the Village of Kivalina in Alaska, the Isle de St. Charles in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Carteret Atoll in Papua New Guinea to relocate (Maldonado et al.). In these cases we see both shrinking habitats and relocation occurring again. The Loita Maasai peoples in Africa face droughts that affect the rain conditions required for performing many of their ceremonies (Saitabu). Indigenous women in the Arctic and Great Plains region are subject to greater sexual violence, abuse and trafficking as work camps for oil and gas extraction, such as ‘fracking,’ bring in male contractors from outside the communities into the communities to profit from the resources found within Indigenous territories (Sweet). Climate change impacts represent another form of inflicted anthropogenic environmental change.

Scientific reports confirm many of the threats just described. In 2014, the U.S. National Climate Assessment states that Indigenous peoples face the ‘loss of traditional knowledge in the face of rapidly changing ecological conditions, increased food insecurity... changing water availability, Arctic sea ice loss, permafrost thaw, and relocation from historic homeland’ (Bennett et al. 2). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s Fifth Assessment Report claims Indigenous peoples face ‘challenges to post-colonial power relations, cultural practices, their knowledge systems, and adaptive strategies’ (Adger et al.).

Indigenous peoples’ own descriptions of climate risk indicate that settler and other colonial societies are imposing rapid environmental change that generates otherwise preventable harms. The Mandaluyong Declaration quotes Miskito women in the Americas who say, in response to changing environmental conditions, that “We now live in a hurry and daughters do not cook as grandmothers... We do not catch fish as before, do not cook as before; we cannot store food and seeds as before; the land no longer produces the same; small rivers are drying up... I think that along with the death of our rivers, our culture dies also..” (300-01).

For many Indigenous peoples, these rapid changes are experienced as a continuation of settler colonialism and other forms of colonialism that they have endured for many years. For we have experienced these types of environmentally-related impacts before—from dietary change to relocation to sexual violence—though caused by different factors, such as multiple settler institutions of containment. Though institutions of containment represent just one limited example of a much more complex history with settler colonialism. Anthropogenic climate change is of a piece with forms of nonconsensual and harmful environmental change inflicted on our societies in the past. Some Indigenous peoples look at futures of rampant climate injustice as looking to the cyclical history of settler and other colonial inflictions of anthropogenic environmental change on Indigenous peoples in order to instantiate erasure.

Yet what is more insidious about climate injustice against Indigenous peoples is that the settler institutions such as those of containment, that inflicted environmental change in the past, are the same institutions that fostered carbon-intensive economic activities on Indigenous territories. That is, containment strategies, such as removal of Indigenous peoples to reservations or the forced adoption of corporate government structures, all facilitated extractive industries, deforestation and large-scale agriculture. What is more, and as I will discuss in more detail in

later sections, these are the same institutions that today make it hard for many Indigenous peoples to effectively cope with climate change impacts. In this way, climate injustice against Indigenous peoples refers to the vulnerability caused by ongoing, cyclical colonialism both because institutions facilitate carbon-intensive economic activities that produce adverse impacts while at the same time interfering with Indigenous people's capacity to adapt to the adverse impacts.

The Indigenous Climate Justice Movement and Colonialism

Indigenous voices are among the most audible in the global climate justice social movement. Over 200 Indigenous delegates attended the 2015 Conference of Parties (COP) in Paris, France, where they pressed for (1) greater inclusion and leadership of Indigenous peoples at the COP and in the developing climate change plans of all nation states and (2) respect for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Previously, at the Rio +20 Earth Summit in 2012, over 500 Indigenous persons gathered at a culturally significant Kari-Oca Village in Rio de Janeiro to discuss and express their concerns about sustainable development and climate change. Voices in the Indigenous climate justice movement call attention to how colonialism and capitalist economics facilitate the role of rich, industrialised countries and transnational corporations in bringing about risky climate change impacts. Many assert how climate injustice is a colonial structure of domination because Indigenous peoples are being erased.

The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) states that “Indigenous peoples have been severely impacted by the main cause of climate change, which is fossil fuel extraction carried out on our lands without our free prior and informed consent. That makes it essential that our rights are fully respected in this agreement and in the implementation of real solutions for the survival of our future generations” (Native News). For IITC, carbon-intensive economic activities occur non-consensually on Indigenous territories; establishing climate justice involves states and corporations coming to respect Indigenous rights to develop their own lands instead of being exploitative for the sake of extracting fossil fuels.

In North America, the climate justice movement includes declarations such as the Mystic Lake Declaration and the Inuit Petition and direct actions against fossil fuel industries organised by Idle No More, the Indigenous Environmental Network and the International Indian Treaty Council. Indigenous Peoples often call for stringent reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases than nations do. For example, the Mystic Lake Declaration claims that “Carbon emissions for developed countries must be reduced by no less than 40%, preferably 49% below 1990 levels by 2020 and 95% by 2050” (The Mystic Lake Declaration 2).

Indigenous peoples take leadership in creating (or updating) and implementing their own cultural and political institutions for adapting to adverse climate change impacts. They have set up educational initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Institute at the College of Menominee Nation in Keshena, Wisconsin (founded in 1994), written their own programs and policies, such as the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Climate Change Strategic Plan (in 2013) and—globally—designed their own metrics for how to assess climate change, such as the Indigenous Peoples Biocultural Climate Change Assessment Initiative and the Mauri Meter (for Maori cultural based environmental and climate change assessment) (Morgan).

North American networks such as the Indigenous People Climate Change Working Group (started by Tribal college students), the Climate and Traditional Knowledges Workgroup, the Rising Voices of Indigenous Peoples, and the First Stewards Symposium continue to bring attention to the climate risks faced by Indigenous peoples. Each network works to develop strategies for best dealing with climate risks. An important aspect of what these networks seek to do is resolve conflicts between Indigenous people and climate scientists that prevent both groups from working productively together to understand the nature of climate change and solutions for achieving climate justice (see, for example, Climate and Traditional Knowledges Workgroup).

In my experience as a Potawatomi, as well as an organiser and participant in the Indigenous climate justice movement, all the work just referenced in this section seeks to bring to the fore the idea that climate injustice occurs when settler and other colonial institutions inflict rapid environmental change on Indigenous peoples. Consider the 20 Treaty Tribes of in Western Washington, which include the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Lummi Nation and Quinault Indian Nation, who in the last 10 years have taken significant action on climate change. According to some of the scientific reports cited earlier, climate change, and other anthropogenic environmental change, is destroying salmon habitat in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S.

The Treaty Tribes produced the *Treaty Rights at Risk* movement to address these problems with climate and environmental change ‘as’ the U.S. settler state’s failure to live up to its treaty obligations to do its part in ensuring it does not interfere with salmon and other species that are integral to Tribal cultural and political systems (Treaty Indian Tribes in Western Washington 2). The Treaty Tribes have cultural and political systems that are designed to adapt to changes in salmon habitat since time immemorial. According to the late Billy Frank Jr. (Nisqually), “Through the treaties we reserved that which is most important to us as a people: The right to harvest salmon in our traditional fishing areas. But today the salmon is disappearing because the federal government is failing to protect salmon habitat. Without the salmon there is no treaty right” (2). The Tribes seek to remind and pressure the U.S. government to interpret the significance of the treaties as the Tribes do, which would require the U.S. to address how its own cultural and political institutions foster climate and environmental changes that degrade salmon habitat and erase the Indigenous relationship to the fish.

At the same time, the Lummi Nation, one of the same group of Treaty Tribes, has taken action to block the establishment of a coal shipment terminal and train railway near its treaty protected sacred area of Xwe’chi’eXen. In addition to environmental protection, the Lummi reject the industrial capitalist values and colonial strategies that ignore treaties for the sake of expanding carbon intensive industries such as coal. The Tribal chair, Tim Ballew II, claims “We’re taking a united stand against corporate interests that interfere with our treaty-protected rights... Tribes across the nation and world are facing challenges from corporations that are set on development at any cost to our communities” (Schilling).

In this case, respect for treaty rights from the U.S. is the key climate justice issue. Simply calling for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions will not occur in time to protect salmon and other species. Importantly, the Treaty Tribes of Western Washington have articulated clearly an insidious feature of climate injustice against Indigenous peoples: disrespect for treaty rights

concerns ‘both’ why U.S. has gotten away with establishing carbon-intensive economic activities on Indigenous territories ‘and’ why it is hard for the Treaty Tribes to adapt effectively to today’s climate injustice ordeal. That is, the Tribes see respect for treaty rights as both stopping the continued interference with their cultural and political systems and curtailing the carbon intensive economic activities that play a significant part in anthropogenic climate change. Climate justice is matter of breaking the cyclical history of colonial strategies that interfere with our rights to self-determined adaption to environmental change and our rights to reject industrial, capitalist and colonial values.

The Indigenous climate justice movement brings to the fore why it is hard to claim that ‘at least’ indigenous peoples would be harmed less if rich, industrialised countries lowered their emissions without dealing with colonialism. For many strategies for lowering emissions impose harms themselves on Indigenous peoples if colonialism is not addressed. Beymer-Farris shows how (REDD+), a United Nations program, was implemented in Kenya in ways that displaced Indigenous peoples cultivation of rice in protected forests, rendering these Indigenous communities worse off than before (Beymer-Farris and Bassett). Or in the U.S., bills for clean energy often exclude recognition for funding to Indigenous peoples for supporting clean energy and retrofitting of housing within the jurisdictions of Indigenous nations (Suagee). Or in the case of treaty rights or Inuit petition, lowering emissions too slowly, may render change at too lumbering a pace for the rapid changes Indigenous peoples are experiencing. Hence, lowering emissions without addressing colonialism can be highly problematic even if we assume that some of the types of strategies just referenced will ultimately have beneficial results on reducing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The Bad Luck View

While ongoing, cyclical colonialism is a major issue taken up by the Indigenous climate justice movement, it is rarely considered in the governmental and academic literatures that can be and often are used to understand Indigenous vulnerability to climate change and justice. These literatures include those specifically about Indigenous peoples and vulnerability, as well as literatures on climate justice that primarily refer to the vulnerability of global south countries (that Indigenous peoples live in) and that nonetheless discuss issues relevant to Indigenous peoples in the global north. In these views on vulnerability, Indigenous peoples are often seen as facing greater risks as matter of happenstance or bad luck. Here, my goal is not so much a direct criticism of these literatures; rather, I aim to examine how well they are suited to some Indigenous peoples’ situations given that they are often used to understand the nature of vulnerability and climate injustice.

The *Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples Backgrounder* produced by the United Nations describes Indigenous peoples as vulnerable “owing to their dependence upon, and close relationship with the environment and its resources. Climate change exacerbates the difficulties already faced by vulnerable Indigenous communities, including political and economic marginalization, loss of land and resources, human rights violations, discrimination and unemployment” (UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, pg. 1). The proceedings from the United Nations Conference on Indigenous peoples, Marginalized Populations and Climate Change, states, “Impacts on their territories and communities are anticipated to be both early and severe due to their location in vulnerable environments, including small islands, high altitude

zones, desert margins and the circumpolar Arctic. Indeed, climate change poses a direct threat to many Indigenous and marginalized societies due to their continuing reliance upon resource-based livelihoods” (McLean, Ramos-Castillo and Rubis, pg 5). The U.S. Department of Interior makes a similar claim, citing Indigenous peoples as “heavily dependent on their natural resources for economic and cultural identity” (Secretarial Order 3289 – Section 5, pg 4).

These understandings of vulnerability lean heavily on two ideas. First, for some Indigenous peoples, heightened vulnerability arises from their ‘continuing’ dependence on local ecosystems, which somehow suggests that Indigenous peoples are ‘more’ dependent on the environment than others. Moreover, this idea also suggests that it is by dint of Indigenous peoples own choosing or simply happening to live in certain places and living in certain ways that they are at risk. In this sense, all that is going on is Indigenous peoples ‘living close to the land’ and climate change impacts occurring on top of this geographic and lifestyle situation.

Second, Indigenous peoples endure legacies of colonialism ranging from poverty to marginalisation. The resulting socio-economic conditions do not absorb or withstand climate change impacts well. That is, Indigenous peoples are not resilient to climate change impacts owing to their socio-economic conditions. For example, lack of employment and lack of strong infrastructures (e.g. buildings, roads, transportation options, etc.) are not going to protect communities well from climate change impacts such as sea level rise and severe droughts. That climate change impacts visit populations, such as Indigenous peoples, who have socioeconomic problems, is also happenstance.

It is important to note that both ideas in the previous paragraph are not associated with the drivers of climate change. Drivers of climate change are the carbon-intensive economic activities that contribute to increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Climate change impacts mix with Indigenous local lifestyles and socioeconomic conditions to make the consequences of injustice more severe. Colonialism is rarely referenced in relation to local Indigenous lifestyles and socio-economic conditions beyond the obvious fact the latter is colonialism’s legacy (Cameron; Haalboom and Natcher).

Ethicists and political philosophers such as Shue (1992), Gardiner (2006), and Preston (2012) have developed concepts of compound injustice or skewed vulnerability to describe the relationship between vulnerability and injustice, especially for people in the global south, but that also can be used in relation to Indigenous peoples who share comparable vulnerabilities to populations in the global south (and are also often living in global south countries). These concepts of vulnerability and justice extend the two ideas referenced above almost exactly. Preston summarises well some of the main threads of the literature on compound injustice and skewed vulnerabilities. He writes that “Less developed nations had already lost the economic lottery through colonialism and military and economic imperialism,” which creates three kinds of vulnerability:

- (1) “*Geographically increased vulnerability to climate change,*” which refers to how climate change “wreaks the greatest havoc and destruction on the lives of the global poor partly as a result of nothing more than geographical bad luck. Many of the global poor

happen to live in locales that will be most susceptible to the consequences of increasing global temperatures....” (Preston 80-81).

(2) “*Economically increased vulnerability to climate change.* Situated squarely on top of the geographically bad luck is the fact that persons who lack resources and economic mobility are less capable of extricating themselves from life-threatening situations (Preston 80-81)”

(3) “*Historical responsibility.* The geographic and economic vulnerability of the poor nations to rising temperatures is particularly unfortunate given their lack of historical responsibility for creating the problem in the first place.” (Preston 80-81).

For Preston, “the three factors described illustrate how, through a combination of skewed vulnerabilities and skewed responsibilities, climate change appears to be particularly unfair to poorer nations.” (Preston 80-81).

In these readings/arguments about risk, vulnerability and injustice, the reason why harms are seen as bad luck is that climate ‘injustice’ primarily refers to the origins of climate change impacts on carbon-intensive economic activities, such as burning fossil-fuels and deforestation. Yet these climate change drivers are ‘not’ related any further to the reasons why Indigenous peoples live locally in ways that are more sensitive to climate change impacts or endure the legacies of colonialism such as poverty and declining infrastructure. According to Preston’s summary, climate change impacts occur ‘on top of’ the fact that Indigenous peoples continue to live off the land and continue to endure legacies of colonialism. Climate change impacts are like new problems that exacerbate old problems—and the old problems (e.g. colonialism) are themselves unrelated to climate change.

According to my analysis of these accounts from the U.S. Department of Interior to Preston’s summation of the literature, ‘bad luck climate injustice’ against Indigenous peoples occurs when there is an accidental convergence of three histories. The first history is that of anthropogenic climate change brought about thanks to the carbon-intensive economic activities of industrialisation and capitalism. The second is the history of Indigenous local lifeways, that is, Indigenous cultural and political systems that have persisted over time in ways that turn out to be more sensitive to climate change impacts because they are “resource-based livelihoods” (McLean, Ramos-Castillo and Rubis, pg 5). The third is the history of entanglements with colonialism that render Indigenous peoples today living under socio-economic conditions characterised by poverty, isolation, discrimination and social invisibility.

Climate change impacts arise from the history of carbon-intensive economic activities ‘as something new’ that Indigenous peoples have to reckon with on top of everything else they have to deal with. The bad luck of the convergence of these three histories is ‘something new.’ Since climate change and colonialism are dissociated in the accounts of the bad luck view I am examining here, it is simply unfortunate that Indigenous and other populations are threatened the most. Accordingly, the main focus for efforts to establish climate justice should be on the responsibility of industrial countries and transnational corporations for their contributions to climate change without considering their continued settler and other forms of colonialism.

Resolving bad luck climate injustice primarily must involve reducing emissions and compensating victims for adaptation—solutions that remain silent regarding colonialism.

No Case of Bad Luck: The Village of Shishmaref

Thinking about climate injustice against Indigenous peoples is less about envisioning a new future and more like the experience of *déjà vu*. This is because climate injustice is part of a cyclical history situated within the larger struggle of anthropogenic environmental change catalysed by colonialism, industrialism and capitalism—not three unfortunately converging courses of history. Today’s climate injustice ordeal reminds us of historic climate injustices that began well before the last 250 years of industrial development (Wildcat).

Consider one example in detail, that of Marino’s work with the Kigiqitamiut people, who live in Shishmaref, Alaska, a small Inupiat island community in the Bering Sea. The community’s cultural and political systems are located at the central convergence of animal migration routes that support Inuit subsistence hunting. Because they live so far north, to most people in the world, Shishmaref is largely unknown or considered somehow spatially separate from all other societies. For this reason, the climate injustice being experienced by community members is also largely unacknowledged by the rest of the world. A community member, Fred Eningowuk, cited by Marino, says, “Shishmaref is in the middle of a circle of subsistence.” (377). Impacts such as increases in windiness, storminess and erosion and diminished sea ice threaten the low-lying island with habitual flooding and eroding Oceanside bluffs, risking a life-threatening disaster (Marino).

Globally, these changes are associated with anthropogenic climate change. But locally, Shishmaref is grappling with the immediate problem of not having the required mobility to shift and adapt in response to these impacts. Prior to settler colonisation, the village was quite mobile, with multiple adaptive institutions as part of their cultural and political systems. As Marino claims, “Previous flexibility to environmental shifts and unexpected hazards allowed the community to adapt to abrupt changes” (374). Yet now a “relatively immobile infrastructure and development requires people to stay in place in order to carry out their daily lives.” (Marino 374). The community’s immobility—a key reason for why they are vulnerable—results from colonial strategies that sought to missionise, educate, and render sedentary Indigenous peoples in the Arctic, replacing the Indigenous institutions with settler ones. These policies were likely pursued out of diverse motivations, but they subsequently facilitated resource extractive industries, from fishing to the oil industry.

For example, at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, one strategy of settler colonialism was to consolidate mobile family groups to sedentary villages with central nodes, such as a post office, government school and a mission. The last 100 years then, is one in which the “previously mobile Kigiqitamiut have become intimately tied to this infrastructure for school, work, life, and livelihood. Development and ‘sedentarization’ policies rapidly decreased the ease of mobility.... Lives and work became rooted in specific, new, critical infrastructure. Thus, traditional strategies became less practical.” (Marino 378).

In light of this history, Marino argues that the village is particularly vulnerable to climate change owing to a number of key factors: (1) procedural injustice, or a lack of input into development

decisions, which led to the building of infrastructure in already marginal and increasingly exposed locations (such as flood prone areas); (2) containment, or the ending of high mobility as an adaptive strategy (via sedentarisation) “without replacing it with other readily identifiable adaptation strategies;” and (3) settler centralisation, that is, decision-making and political power were shifted outside the local community to the state of Alaska, exposing the village distant political and economic fluctuations. “In Shishmaref, the colonial history and inequities inherent in colonizing decisions contributes heavily to current vulnerabilities to flooding, in the ways we observe here, among others.” (Marino 379)

I interpret Marino’s work as suggesting three different strategies of settler colonialism to erase the way of life of Kigiqitamiut as a way of creating a U.S. homeland based on carbon-intensive economic activities. Each strategy curtails the community’s capacity to adapt to environmental change. Today, we see the cycle again. Relocation is very expensive, and the policies governing relocation are highly problematic. The Federal Emergency Management Agency, who would share responsibility for the relocation, is governed by 1988 Stafford Act, which requires rebuilding “in place” and “without improvement” (378) as the way to respond to disasters. This fails to adequately protect the community. Moreover, since there is no agency that works with communities on “preemptive disaster planning or risk reduction in these cases where erosion increases exposure to flooding hazards,” the solution requires herding the cats that are multiple federal agencies and their budgets (Marino 378).

According to Marino, the U.S. interferes with Shishmaref’s capacity to adapt to environmental change, and has done so multiple times throughout its settler colonial history. The settler colonial strategies that impede adaptation today are the ones that were originally designed to facilitate carbon-intensive economic activities in the Arctic. Again, as with the Potawatomi, these recountings of cyclical history in relation to climate change are not unique to Indigenous peoples—though there will certainly always be exceptions given the diversity of Indigenous experiences globally. This cyclical history locates colonialism at the heart of the problem of both vulnerability and climate change mitigation. There is no bad luck. Climate injustice against Indigenous peoples, then, refers to the vulnerability caused by settler and other forms of colonialism ‘both’ because colonial institutions facilitate carbon-intensive economic activities that produce adverse impacts while at the same time interfering with Indigenous people’s capacity to adapt to the adverse impacts.

Conclusion: The Experience of Déjà Vu

The recounting of Indigenous histories, such as the Village of Shishmaref, suggest different perspectives on the history of climate injustice than the bad luck view, which compounds three histories, one associated with carbon-intensive economic activities driven by industrial capitalism; another with colonialism and the socio-economic conditions Indigenous peoples face; and yet another with Indigenous cultural and political systems. For many Indigenous peoples, climate injustice does not involve, simply, an ‘age of the human’ dated to industrial development. Indigenous peoples often see themselves as participating in cultural and political systems that, from hundreds even thousands of years of experience, are explicitly designed to adapt to environmental change; climate injustice emerges as an issue more recently that is part of a cyclical history of disruptive anthropogenic environmental change caused by settler and other colonial institutions that paved the way for extractive industries and deforestation. Colonial

institutional strategies that historically made it harder for Indigenous groups to adapt to climate change from the 1500s to the mid-1800s, continue to complicate abilities to adapt to accelerating climate change today. We will understand the nature of climate injustice against Indigenous peoples better—and perhaps its solutions too—the more we see it as more like the experience of déjà vu.

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