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The Myth of the "Smoking Indian"

Tobacco Species in the Pacific Northwest Contact Zone Between Exploitative Colonial Gaze and Indigenous Resilience (1770s-1820s)

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Abstract

This article examines the complex interplay between colonial exploitation and Indigenous resilience through the lens of tobacco species in the Pacific Northwest contact zone (1770s-1820s). Analyzing Eurocentric narratives and Indigenous responses, it critiques colonial ideologies that framed Indigenous tobacco practices as "primitive" while ignoring ancestral permaculture and spiritual traditions. Influenced by Orientalist and Eurocentric hierarchies, European explorers and fur traders dismissed native tobacco species like *Nicotiana quadrivalvis* and *attenuata* as inferior to industrially bred varieties, weaponizing addictive colonial tobacco to manipulate trade and foster dependency. However, Indigenous communities – including the Haida, Interior Salish, and Coast Salish – negotiated, adapted, or resisted these impositions. While some integrated colonial tobacco into "moditional" practices, blending traditional and introduced elements, others upheld prohibitions or repurposed the plant within spiritual and medicinal frameworks. The article highlights how colonial accounts, shaped by exploitative agendas, obscured Indigenous agency, permacultural knowledge, and pre-existing intertribal trade networks. Simultaneously, it reveals Indigenous resilience through oral histories and ethnobotanical evidence, challenging settler narratives that conflated cultural adaptation with assimilation. By interrogating sources from fur traders, missionaries, and Indigenous Knowledge Givers, the study exposes the enduring legacy of colonial tobacco in reshaping power dynamics, ecological practices, and cross-cultural perceptions. Ultimately, it argues that the "myth of the Smoking Indian" emerged from a deliberate colonial erasure of Indigenous sovereignty over tobacco, reinforcing white supremacist ideologies even as Indigenous communities asserted autonomy over their botanical traditions. This research reframes the contact zone as a contested space where tobacco became both a tool of colonial coercion and a medium for Indigenous survivance.

"Tobacco has never been an Indigenous plant of Stó:lō territory, although kinickinick and a hallucinogenic bean was smoked by some supposedly for medicinal purposes."

(Albert 'Sonny' McHalsie, Si:yémiya, "Are the Spirits Addicted?")

1. Introduction

Between the 1770s and the 1820s, the encounters between Indigenous peoples, explorers, and traders in the Pacific Northwest region significantly influenced Canadian, American, and European colonialist ideologies. Tobacco centrality in the contact zone in other North American areas, particularly the gift-giving and the calumet or peace-pipe ceremony, have been extensively explored (Pratt 2008, 134). The history of the maritime otter pelts trade and the inland fur trade in the northwest Pacific region offers a distinct and different understanding of how colonial and Indigenous perceptions of tobacco species and products contributed to the shifting development of Eurocentric and white supremacist ideologies (Wintle 2021, 130; Stuurman 2000, 9). Conversely, Stó:lō Knowledge Giver Si:yémiya, Albert 'Sonny' McHalsie (1993, 10), explained how the history of the British Columbian contact zone could raise helpful questions about the early absence of native tobacco species in pre-contact Coast Salish cultures and the subsequent introduction of the pan-Indigenous sacred plant and ceremonies.

The colonial exploitation of Indigenous tobacco and sugar production, as well as their trade in fur, fish, and other staples, had a significant reciprocal impact on the economies, cultures, and social structures of North American colonies and European empires (Innis 1995, 158). Exploitative colonialism, one form of colonial domination, necessitates the labour of the colonized to extract resources from the empire's periphery to the metropolis. While it represents a distinct historical phase of colonial activity, exploitative colonialism is not incompatible with and can overlap with other forms, such as extractive and settler colonialism. Exploitative colonialism has been the most common initial stage of European colonialism, during which the colonial powers exploit resources through the surplus value of Indigenous labour (Veracini 2010, 6-15; Wolfe 2006, 395). The dehumanization of colonized peoples was a critical component that enabled such exploitative actions and the colonial enterprise. Similarly, European intellectuals and scholars studying the history of Indigenous tobacco in the Pacific Northwest based their theories on the othering and Orientalizing of permacultural Indigenous tobacco species and practices. They contrasted these with what they viewed as civilized tobacco plants and modified uses resulting from European scientific breeding, agricultural techniques, and products that emerged during the First Industrial Revolution.

Said's concept of Orientalism provides insight into the exploitative ideology surrounding Pacific Northwest Indigenous tobacco species and habits; its heuristic potential is revealed when the analytical framework is extended beyond its primary geographical focus on the "Orient" to examine the othering processes on liminal frontiers of European empires, such as the Pacific Northwest (1979, 19). Between the 18th and 19th centuries, the Orientalist gaze interpreted Pacific Northwest Indigenous tobacco as existing outside the boundaries of Western civilization. Nonetheless, those narratives show that Indigenous peoples contributed to the codification of

history and ethnography, challenging ideological and historiographical assumptions, theories, and tropes (1979, 220). *Nesika*, the newspaper of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, denounced colonizers appropriating and transforming Indigenous techniques and products, such as tobacco cultivation (*Many of Our Foods* 1974, 12). Eurocentric philosophical biases confined Indigenous tobacco species and related cultures, ceremonies, and habits within Orientalized racist tropes, depicting them as allegedly belonging to a "salvage" and "stone age" pre-civilization stage of human development.

In the late 18th century, European and American explorers and traders began arriving by sea at the Pacific Northwest Coast. The *Hudson's Bay Company* (HBC) carried two colonial varieties of tobacco (i.e., selectively bred to highlight specific traits in a commercial agricultural context) – Brazilian and Virginia rolls. Brazilian tobacco was significantly superior in quality and preferred by HBC management in exchanges with Indigenous peoples (Carlos and Lewis 2010, 87-90). At the turn of the 19th century, the fur trade gradually expanded by land from the east, involving Indigenous communities in the Interior. Canadian, American, European scholars and intellectuals were puzzled by the presence or absence of pre-contact native tobacco among Indigenous peoples in the Pacific Northwest region. Indigenous communities reacted differently to the colonial tobacco species that fur traders and sailors introduced, either succumbing to, accommodating, or resisting the new products within their economies and cultures.

The regional history of tobacco is indeed complex, shaped by both internal and external factors. Internally, prior to the arrival of colonizers, only certain Indigenous peoples, such as the Haida and the Interior Salish, cultivated native tobacco species (Turner 2004, 165-8). McHalsie (1993, 10) and other Knowledge Givers elaborated on how other Indigenous cultures, including the Coast Salish, imposed taboos on the substance and engaged in trading tobacco for proximity exchanges with other groups or accepted matriarch smokers from the Interior through intertribal marriages (Canadian Legal Information Institute 1998, 23-39; Haeberlin and Gunther 1942, 10). Externally, colonizers introduced new colonial tobacco species, curing techniques, pan-Indigenous ceremonies, and practices among communities that either valued or opposed local tobacco species and ceremonies. Faced with the mounting pressure of European and American colonial policies and enterprises, Indigenous peoples empowered their understanding of both colonial and native tobacco species by interrogating their historical consciousness in search of their ancestors' actions. They sought pre-contact private knowledge regarding regional permaculture, spiritualities, or taboos (Suttles 1958, 501-3). Lutz's (2008, 23-5) concept of Indigenous "moditional" tobacco cultures, which blended traditional and modern species, techniques, ceremonies, and understandings, more effectively explains the evolving Indigenous perceptions and usages over time.

2. Tobacco from the Ocean: colonial and sacred species in the contact zone

When European explorers arrived in the Pacific Northwest, Indigenous peoples practiced permaculture with two native tobacco species: *Nicotiana quadrivalvis* (Haida tobacco) on the Coast and *Nicotiana attenuata* (Coyote tobacco) in the Interior (Turner 1975, 1: 231; 1978, 2: 218). Several Indigenous groups in what is now called British Columbia, including the Coast Salish, Gitksan, Nuu-chah-nulth, and Ditidaht, did not engage in the permaculture of native tobacco (Turner 2014, 1: 211-4; Turner et al. 1983, 104; Smith 1997, 136; Turner and Efrat 1982, 64). As a result, the introduction of *Nicotiana tabacum*, a colonial species, represented a new development for those communities in the Pacific Northwest. In contrast, Europeans perceived the cultivation techniques of the two local strains by the Haida and Interior Salish peoples as akin to those found in Asian-African-European agriculture, with captains and sailors speculating about earlier, unknown European travellers "civilizing" Indigenous peoples in a Neo-Aristotelian manner. At that time, Eurocentric ideologies linked agriculture with civilization, and pipes, which had been borrowed centuries earlier from Indigenous American cultures, became familiar European products. As a result, explorers and fur traders often attributed the presence of pipes on the Pacific Northwest Coast to borrowings from voyagers. Similarly, Europeans regarded tobacco cultivation as having been introduced.

Following the First Industrial Revolution, tobacco chewing products gained popularity among the emerging working class, who needed their hands free to work while using the substance. European officers aboard ships viewed tobacco chewing as a 'primitive' habit of 'inferior' Asian and Indigenous societies. Additionally, driven by their exploitative colonial agendas, fur traders and navy officials believed in a scientific mandate that justified their commercial and imperialistic goals with higher purposes. They often described and classified native tobacco according to European taxonomies, sending their findings to colonial academics and intellectuals. These scholars, frequently novelists with well-educated readers, tended to Orientalize and interpret the new geographical, botanical, and ethnological discoveries through a Eurocentric lens (Eisler 2013, 147; 281; 326-327; Ingraham 1971, 150; Cornwallis 1858, 17; 262-266). The exploitative ideology of fur traders and explorers also shaped intellectuals' perceptions of native tobacco species in the metropolitan centers of the empires and colonies.

The early records detailing the Pacific Northwest Indigenous tobacco permaculture, species, and uses reveal biases and tropes of the mentalities of explorers and fur traders. In 1775, Francisco Antonio Mourelle de la Rúa (1781, 21) observed local tobacco practices among Esselen people on the Pacific Northwest Coast of northern California, providing Europeans with their first glimpse of permacultural native tobacco species and conical pipes. In 1787, Beresford's

account of the travel of English fur trader Captain George Dixon (Beresford 1789, 175) described people from the Alaskan Yakutat Tlingit communities chewing a local species mixed with a substance extracted from "the inner rind of the pine-tree." Ten canoes of Eyak traders encountered Spanish lieutenant Salvador Fidalgo onboard the Eliza three years later. In a moditional framework, the Indigenous delegates emphasized the value of colonial sniff tobacco within their commercial and military covenants with the Russian fur traders (Espinosa y Tello 1802, cxi). Cossack fur traders and soldiers introduced tobacco among the Inuit, Aleut, Tlingit, Eyak, and Athabascan peoples of Alaska through Siberia in the mid-17th century (White 2018, 79). In 1789, onboard the Iphigenia Nubiana, Captain William Douglas, anchored near Dadens on Langara Island's southern Coast, expressed skepticism about the Haida's traditional gardening practices, suspecting prior contact with other European sailors who allegedly taught them agriculture (Meares 1790, 368-369).[1]

The escalating trade competition among Europeans, Russians, and Americans resulted in heightened colonial intrusion, conquest, and exploitation of Indigenous land and resources. Accounts from officials and sailors proliferated, and more detailed descriptions catered to an expanding European cultural market of bourgeois curiosity about the last "exotic" and "Orientalized" region within the western frontier. The relentless pursuit of profit from the colonial enterprise manifested again in 1791 when the ship Columbia anchored in Rose's Harbour on Haida Gwaii. During this period, American sailor John Hoskins (1990, 201) documented the tobacco habits and cultivation of the Haida. Hoskins and Captain Gray journeyed three to four miles up the Sound to a large meadow featuring salt and fresh grass, including red and white clover, tobacco plants, and wild celery. The white sailors had discovered the most extensive permacultivated cleared area along the Coast. The Haida chew fresh tobacco with a lime-like taste substance.

Early voyagers and intellectuals viewed Indigenous gardens as an inferior form of agriculture. However, in the 20th century, Duff (1996, 128), followed by Deur and Turner (2005, 17), moved away from the idea that pre-contact Haida tobacco gardens were merely a case of local agriculture borrowed from early European sailors towards concepts of ancestral Indigenous permaculture. In 1791, Étienne Marchand (1801, 1: 340-341), anchored near Sitka, noted the chewing habits of the Tlingit people. The French naval merchant compared them to South American Indigenous peoples and other Asian cultures where such practices were customary. Marchand also mentioned that colonial tobacco leaves replaced the local plant because of their stronger addictive properties. At the same time, fur trade companies began

[1] In his unpublished notes, Charles Frederick Newcombe was highly skeptical of Douglas's hypothesis, pointing to historical and geographical incongruences (Newcombe, "On Native Tobacco as Used by Indians of the West Coast of North America," 1-2).

crossing the Rocky Mountains from the Plains to reach the ocean and establish brigade trails north of the Columbia River. Traders sought to set up posts in the interior and northern regions to access oceanic routes and exchange fur or pelts for goods like tobacco with Indigenous peoples (Anderson 2021, 18; 43; 52; 54; 65; 102-103). Fur traders also obtained significant supplies of local tobacco species from Indigenous peoples. For instance, they acquired native tobacco from the Californian Yurok and the Oregonian Wishram and Wasco along the Columbia River banks near The Dalles (Gibson 1992, 9-10).

In the early 1790s, fur traders sought new substances, including medicines, to exploit and commercialize. Local tobacco species in British Columbia emerged as potential commodities to meet the colonial demand for exploitation. Aboard the ship Hope, anchored off Haida Gwaii, American fur trader Joseph Ingraham (1971, 150) was eager to return home and capitalize on native tobacco seeds. He observed that the Haida chewed a plant with potential tobacco-like properties, though he was uncertain whether they used it for leisure or medicinal benefits. Ingraham compared the Indigenous practice of chewing this plant to the sailors' use of tobacco. He collected seeds to send to the United States for examination by botanical experts to determine the plant's properties. George M. Dawson (1880, 114-115; 132) arrived in Haida Gwaii with the Geological Survey of Canada in 1878 when only one Haida Elder was still cultivating the last *Nicotiana quadrivalvis* patch, a privilege reserved for high-status women.

According to Haida informants, native tobacco was especially smoked as spiritual medicine and more frequently chewed as a tonic and energizer. Before use, tobacco leaves were dried on a framework over a fire, finely crushed with a stone mortar, and then compacted into loaves. Subsequently, they were mixed with a small amount of lime from burnt clamshells and either chewed or placed in the mouth for gradual release. John Macoun, the first botanist hired by the Geological Museum in Ottawa, wrote in 1890 to British Columbian ethnobotanist Charles F. Newcombe, stating that the Haida procured *Nicotiana quadrivalvis* from Puget Sound, as they did with abalone, rather than from the Skeena River. However, Haida Knowledge Keepers John Sky and John Enrico explained that, in ancient times, the "tobacco tree" grew tall in the Stikine region, preserved by spiritual powers, and a man brought the seeds to Haida Gwaii, initiating local tobacco permaculture (Turner 2004, 168).

In 1794, George Vancouver (1984, 4: 1357) anchored near Angoon, Alaska, at Admiralty Island (Xootsnoowú). The captain of the ship Discovery was amazed by the cultivated patches of a local species of tobacco tended to by the Tlingit near the village. On another occasion, naval officer William Robert Broughton joined Vancouver as the commander of the ship Chatham, looking for potential sites to establish imperial forts. Broughton observed the smoking habits of the Chinookan peoples living along the lower Columbia River, foreshadowing a lucrative business opportunity through trading colonial tobacco with Indigenous peoples. Broughton

(Vancouver 1984, 2: 770) considered the residents to be "universally addicted to smoking." Chinookan pipes, resembling those from Europe, featured a hardwood bowl adorned with intricate carvings and a two-foot-long tube made from elder wood. He smoked a mild native tobacco and found the substance enjoyable. "They, however, took great pleasure in smoking our tobacco; hence, it is natural to conclude that it might become a valuable article of trade among them" (Vancouver 1984, 2: 770).

3. Tobacco from the Mountains: the fur trade crosses the Rockies

As the Spanish, Americans, Russians, and French struggled to establish their colonial power on the Coast, the British profited from their presence in the Northwest Territories and expanded westward toward the Rocky Mountains. Colonial expeditions sought new mountain paths from established eastward fur trade routes across the prairies and foothills. After establishing trading posts, the London-based HBC and the Montreal-based North West Company (NWC) exploited the region's fauna, primarily beaver, sending expeditions to reach the ocean north of the Columbia River route (Smyth, 1984, 67). Colonial tobacco was the fulcrum of economic activities and cultural exchanges with Indigenous peoples, serving as an addictive and valuable commodity used in censuses, covenants, and bartering. Although fur traders' approaches to engagement and negotiation were gender-based and discriminatory, they generally respected Salish social structures and hierarchies. Nonetheless, they often resorted to using tobacco as leverage to manipulate Indigenous power dynamics among families, classes, communities, and tribes. Companies aimed to profit from Indigenous resources by creating dependency on a colonial product.

In 1812, Ross Cox (1832, 1: 116; 176; 262; 307), operating among the Chinookan and Sahaptin peoples of the Columbia River, utilized colonial tobacco not only for fur payment. As a fur trader for the Pacific Fur Company and later for the NWC, he used tobacco as a gift when invited to a wedding, to compensate unfriendly communities or friendly guides (1832, 1: 119-120; 123-125), to honour agreements and ceremonies (1832, 1: 139-140; 247-248), and to ward off rattlesnakes (1832, 1: 129). However, refusing to offer or accept tobacco was a cross-cultural signal of disappointment by traders and Indigenous people (1832, 1: 124; 200). The Spokane Chief confronted Cox about the responsibility of fur traders in introducing a habit that created dependence.

> My heart is glad to see you. We were a long time very hungry for tobacco; and some of our young men said you would never come back. They were angry, and said to me, "The white men made us love tobacco almost as much as we love our children, and now we are starving for it." (Cox 1832, 1: 313).

Colonial tobacco, horses, and other goods from forts and posts became status symbols for emerging wealthy Indigenous families. During the early 19th century, the arrival of David Thompson, also known as Koo-Koo-Sint (the Stargazer), from the eastern side of the Rockies marked the start of the exploitative colonial era. Initially employed by the HBC and later by the NWC, this Canadian cartographer and explorer travelled extensively throughout the American and British Pacific Northwest, surveying the land and counting the Indigenous population. While working in the Columbia River basin, Thompson and fellow traders used tobacco to establish covenants with Chinookan and Sahaptin authorities (Lloyd and Jackson 2016, 26; 43). In 1811, Koo-Koo-Sint also used tobacco as a criterion, incentive, and form of retribution for engaging Indigenous people in his census, tallying 13,615 individuals living along the river. This estimation was made "by counting the number of married men that smoked with us, and also that danced, for we remarked that all the Men of every village, or lodge came to enjoy smoking Tobacco; they speak of Tobacco as their Friend, especially in distress, as it soothes and softens their hardships" (Thompson 2015, 2: 250-285).

Indigenous peoples' oral and written historical records demonstrate that the first generation of fur traders were respected and protected guests in the Interior Salish territory (Thomson and Ignace 2005, 32-35). Indeed, in the 1910s, fur traders frequently adhered to the requirements of Indigenous communities. In their historical understanding, the Secwépemc, Syilx, and Nlaka'pamux Chiefs and Knowledge Givers compared the then-ascendant settler colonialism with the earlier phase of exploitative colonialism their ancestors had faced in the previous century, emphasizing the key differences between these two forms of colonization. During this early exploitative colonial era, fur traders did not attempt to socially, culturally, environmentally, or economically assimilate or erase Indigenous peoples as settlers later did from the 1860s onward (Teit 1910, 1).

Introducing Brazilian-grown tobacco influenced recreational habits and played a significant role in economic and transcultural engagements with Indigenous peoples, cementing political and economic alliances. Traders were perplexed to find some Indigenous groups without tobacco permaculture, while others employed native species differently than those in the eastern trade routes. European, Indigenous, and later Métis traders also introduced pipe ceremonies from east of the Rockies (Fladmark 1985, 57-58), including the smoking complex described by Warren Springer (1981, 217-218) and the Nanabozho's sema narrated by Potawatomi botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013, 35; 144; 208). Thompson (2015, 2: 25) noted that, following the establishment of trade with companies, "tobacco is always mentioned by feet and inches; it is the current money across all the Indian Countries, from Ocean to Ocean." In Washington State, an elderly Chief of the Interior Salish Sinkiuse-Columbia people, residing at Sənkwáxcən, the Sinkayuse village located at Rock Island Rapids, expressed his gratitude to Thompson for

allowing him to try tobacco for the first time before his passing (2015, 2: 216-217; 282). In 1817, English botanist Thomas Nuttall (1818, 1: 133) remarked on the absence of spontaneous specimens of *Nicotiana quadrivalvis*, noting, "but I am informed of its existence on the banks of the Columbia."

David Douglas (1914, 59; 141) observed Indigenous people cultivating native tobacco along the Columbia River. The botanist found *Nicotiana multivalvis* on a branch of Multnomah Creek in the Columbia River Gorge, Oregon. Douglas speculated that a species called *Nicotiana pulverulenta* may have spread from the Columbia to the Missouri Rivers via intertribal trade routes. He saw the plant at the Great Falls of the Columbia River and met a Multnomah person who refused to trade their native tobacco for colonial tobacco. Indeed, he frequently used tobacco as currency to pay Indigenous labour. Douglas secured some specimens of seeds and leaves by taking them from a small local tobacco plantation in the burned woods, away from the Indigenous lodges. When caught red-handed, he compensated the Multnomah owner with his colonial tobacco. The owner also informed him about the fertilizing value of wildfire ashes in permacultural techniques (Bancroft 1884, 509). Later, he observed plants cultivated by a Sahaptin individual at Oregon's Celilo Falls. Subsequently, he came across a tobacco patch above Willamette Falls, within the territory of the Kalapuya people, gathering samples that did not match other native or colonial species. After the turn of the century, ethnographers compiled those records from fur traders and explorers, explicitly attributing tobacco growing to the Wishram (French 1999, 33).

In the early 18th century, fur traders found native tobacco in the Kootenays region, located west of the Rocky Mountains. Through intertribal proximity trade, the Ktunaxa people secured Indigenous tobacco and pipes from their southeastern neighbours. Furthermore, smoking was uncommon among the South Salish communities of coastal Washington, such as Nisqually and Quinault. Native tobacco from transmontane tribes, traded at locations like the Dalles of the Columbia, was combined with dried leaves of partridgeberry, red osier dogwood, yew, or madrona. Unlike the Plains First Nations, these communities did not smoke red osier dogwood bark. Their pipe bowls were angular and typically crafted from stone, often talc (Curtis 1970, 59). European and Indigenous fur traders introduced several Coastal Indigenous peoples to using sun-dried and toasted bearberry leaves as a substitute for colonial tobacco. For example, in 1927, Gitksan Knowledge Giver Luke Fowler stated (Ingersoll Smith 1997, 87) that his ancestors did not smoke bearberry before the arrival of fur traders. Even among those who permacultivated native tobacco species, such as the Secwépemc people, bearberry was consumed as food or beverage before contact because the Indigenous substance and practice varied from those introduced by colonialism (Teit 1909, 574-5). Despite early ethnographers denying that

Indigenous people used smoking bearberry leaves as a narcotic, this misconception persisted as a trope in academic and colonial ethnography for the subsequent century (Eells 1889, 629).

In the mid-20th century, George Henry Griffin highlighted the confusion between the sacred and medicinal use of native tobacco on the one hand and the recreational and addictive nature of introduced colonial smoking on the other. "Bestial practices, which the whites have been only too prone to associate with savage uncultured races, were sporadic. The use of tobacco can hardly be classed as a vice" (Griffin, *Aborigines of the Pacific Northwest*, 1-2). In 1829, Hugh Murray published a biased portrayal of the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest. Despite being a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and possessing information indicating that the Indigenous peoples were unacquainted with "intoxicating liquors," he depicted them as using tobacco "to excess," even those who did not cultivate local tobacco.

Colonial tobacco smoking spread throughout Indigenous trade networks, catalyzed by the fur trade, from peoples living west of the Rockies to the Pacific Coast (Turner 2014, 1: 212). In response to the exploitative effects of the fur trade and the addictive nature of colonial tobacco, Coast Salish peoples utilized the new routes to expand their intertribal trades and the circulation of native tobacco. In 1841, Charles Wilkes (1845, 4: 298-9), leading the United States Exploring Expedition, arrived among the Klallam people at Clallam Bay (Port Discovery). The American naval officer observed imported potatoes and the local cultivation of tobacco within the southern Coast Salish community: "They have a great passion for carved pipes, for which they cultivate small quantities of a species of tobacco. They also smoke the leaves of the dwarf arbutus mixed with their tobacco: these are powerful astringents, and are also frequently chewed." Gunther (1927, 279-280) noted the post-contact introduction of tobacco among the Coast Salish Klallam. However, she doubted Wilkes's statements, believing they did not permacultivated native tobacco before contact. In contrast to contemporary ethnobotanists, Gunther (1973, 44) asserted that the southern Coast Salish smoked bearberry leaves prior to the introduction of colonial tobacco by fur traders.

According to codified social rules, fur traders often smoked European pipes and tobacco species. Indigenous communities along the Coast creatively embraced local plants as substitutes or additives to colonial tobacco once they were addicted. Moved by his white supremacist trope about intoxication and Indigenous people, in 1857, British Army officer and early settler Walter Colquhoun Grant (1857, 290) described the arbutus smoked in pipes by Coast Salish on Vancouver Island as acting "slightly as an opiate." Recent studies (Graeber, Nakabayashi and Leubner-Metzger 2016, 488) show that smoke from burning wood can enhance seed germination, including the postfire annual *Nicotiana attenuata*. Lieutenant Richard Charles Mayne (1862, 412), on duty aboard the Royal Navy's ship HMS Plumper, described local tobacco's Indigenous permacultivation during his ground survey. The Interior Salish people

(e.g., Shuswap) refrained from planting native tobacco near their villages to prevent its premature harvesting before full maturity. Instead, they opted for open areas in the woods for cultivation, where they burned a dead tree or stump. They then sprinkled the ashes over the ground before planting the tobacco, believing the wood ashes consistently promoted the plant's growth and size. "I have smoked this at Fort Kamloops, and liked the flavour – which was similar to that of mild tobacco – very much" (Mayne 1862, 413).

In the early 19th century, during their northwest colonial expansion, European and North American competing imperialisms and fur trading companies introduced colonial tobacco west of the Rocky Mountains, from land and sea, among Indigenous communities, regardless of the presence of local plant species and related traditions. Captains, surveyors, and traders used their tobacco as leverage to build relationships based on technological and chemical dependency, exploiting local fauna and altering the intersectional power dynamics within Indigenous communities. Salish and other Indigenous peoples utilized the products bartered in this trade to transform regional economies. Their traditional economy empowered new extended families and proximity trades that flourished after the devastating epidemics and subsequent resettlements of the late 18th century (Boyd 1996, 318-322).

Local tobacco species were milder than heavily processed products from Brazil, Virginia, or the Pacific Islands. Moreover, the spiritual implications of ceremonial tobacco use varied significantly from the consumerist and recreational habits associated with European tobacco consumption. For instance, the Secwépemc people harvested the leaves of the local *Nicotiana attenuata* plant for ceremonial purposes. After drying and finely cutting the leaves, they combined them with mountain ram's grease and ground them using two stones or a mortar and pestle. The Secwépemc perspective on native tobacco species and conical pipes as guardian spirits also differed from interpretations held by other eastern Indigenous groups (e.g., Cree) regarding the spiritual value of the plant (Teit 1909, 474-475; 606; 609; 615).

4. The legacy of colonial tobacco in the contact zone of the Pacific Northwest

From the 1830s, reports from emerging scientific explorers and fur traders reached a limited audience of colonial officials, company executives, and academics. Meanwhile, popular accounts from early romantic travellers and intellectuals gained popularity among the expanding readership of mass-produced newspapers and novels. Both genres reinforced an ethnocentric classification of the peoples, cultures, spiritualities, plants, and even biomes of the Pacific Northwest in a hierarchical manner. American painter George Catlin (1876, 234) argued that the act of smoking, rather than the plant itself, was a "primeval" characteristic shared by all

North American Indigenous peoples. According to Catlin, while Indigenous peoples had engaged in smoking various plants before first contact, it was Europeans who introduced "civilized" tobacco practices among what they considered "savages." Trends and ideas from the overseas metropolis influenced the perspectives of North American settlers regarding tobacco and its related customs. Moreover, the prevailing white ideologies shaped European historians' interpretations of the tobacco cultivation and habits of both British Columbian Indigenous peoples and Canadian or American settlers.

In 1844, while stationed at the Cowlitz mission, Jean-Baptiste-Zacharie Bolduc (1979, 102-103), a Jesuit from Quebec, excitedly shared a letter with his colleagues in London about his scientific experiments at the far western frontier. The Coast Salish and Sahaptan Cowlitz recognized the missionary's medicinal abilities, sending a case filled with Indigenous belongings and natural specimens to London for a colonial Catholic collection reflecting dehumanizing "natural history." The Cowlitz Great Chief gifted the missionary a stone pipe shaped like a bear, embodying the spirit of "temanwas" from its ancient owner. Around the same time, near the southern border of the Salish world, Methodist missionaries Daniel Lee and Joseph Frost (1844, 88) observed a plant used by the Oregonian Chinook-speaking Clatsop living south of the Columbia River. Lee and Frost learned about a small red berry from a laurel shrub, roughly the size of a large pea, which is very astringent and contains hard seeds. The Clatsop used these berries as food, preparing them by boiling or roasting. They also dried the laurel leaves and mixed them with tobacco for smoking. This finding would perplex ethnographers, historians, and anthropologists of the Pacific Northwest for years to come.

At Fort Victoria in May 1855, American officers George Stoneman and William H. C. Whiting (1858, 175) noted that by attracting Indigenous people to the forts regularly through a tobacco addiction, fur traders attempted to alter their dependence on traditional knowledge and techniques, reflecting social structures (Miller and Boxberger 1994, 272-3). Moreover, Haida traders came to the fort in winter to acquire goods such as colonial tobacco, which they permacultivated in their communities (Poole 1872, 313). However, in 1878, Dawson described the effects of smoking bearberry leaves on the Haida as narcotic. Despite his Indigenous informants describing the process of obtaining vision by a healer as an initiatory process grounded in sobriety and deprivation, Dawson (1880, 115; 122) insisted on interpreting the need for psychotropic substances as a supposed universal trait of North American Indigenous peoples.

American settlers observed that few individuals among the Washingtonian Salish peoples smoked tobacco as the practice was rare. When Europeans smoked a combination of tobacco and bearberry leaves, referred to as "kinuse or kinutl," they did not experience psychoactive effects (Swan 1857, 155). The bearberry plant, also used by Indigenous peoples for its edible berries,

became increasingly favoured among colonial tobacco smokers who sought a milder and more fragrant aroma. They would roast the bearberry leaves until they turned brown and then mix them in equal parts with tobacco. According to early American settler Ezra Meeker (1905, 174-175), he had observed rare spiritual uses of the mixture when Indigenous smokers "would keel over in a trance." This trance-like state was part of a spiritual process rather than the psychotropic effect of smoking tobacco and bearberry.

The evolving interpretations of tobacco and associated cultural practices among colonizers and Indigenous peoples underwent significant epistemological and ideological transformations by the late 19th century. This period coincided with the professionalization of North American ethnology, anthropology, and historiography, which systematically integrated philosophical, theological, and religious frameworks to analyze the historical presence or absence of Indigenous tobacco cultivation in the pre-contact Pacific Northwest. European dominance transitioned from extractive colonial exploitation – characterized by metropolitan appropriation of Indigenous lands and labour – to the consolidation of permanent settler colonies. These structural shifts precipitated a corresponding reconfiguration of Euro-Canadian and American perceptions and discourses concerning the Pacific Northwest. Central to this ideological transformation was the proliferation of Eurocentric Hegelian philosophy, which essentialized the white European bourgeois male as the apotheosis of human civilization, thereby systematically dehumanizing Indigenous populations (Stone 2020, 254; Copilaş 2018, 44-45). Hegelian dialectics, widely institutionalized in academic discourse during this era, provided a philosophical scaffold for enduring white supremacist ideologies and settler colonial narratives. Hegel (2007, 44) posited European societies as teleologically destined for global hegemony, framing Indigenous peoples as existing in a primordial "savage" stage of human development – analogous to childhood – before European intervention. This paradigm naturalized the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty, territories, and resources, including autochthonous tobacco species, through their purported assimilation into Eurocentric capitalist modernity. Hegel's ontological hierarchies profoundly influenced subsequent generations of intellectuals and pedagogues, cementing a discursive framework that rationalized settler colonialism's epistemic and material violence.

Tobacco was crucial in early interactions between newcomers and Indigenous peoples in British Columbia. The various uses of this plant species illuminate the evolving dynamics of cultural interaction during the initial exploitative colonial era. In the Pacific Northwest, fur traders exploited colonial tobacco to foster addiction among Indigenous peoples and ensure customer loyalty. They also utilized tobacco for diverse purposes, such as currency or gifts. Fur traders relied on tobacco for trading, introducing complex smoking ceremonies, forming covenants, resolving conflicts, socializing, surveying the population and land, and establishing

their companies' posts, forts, and brigade routes. Fur trade posts and forts in the Pacific Northwest functioned as parasitic mechanisms to exploit Indigenous resources and labour. This labour is compensated with goods such as colonial tobacco. Although parasites can sometimes kill their hosts, they typically require their hosts to be alive. This mode of dominance differs from settler colonialism, which entails the genocidal removal and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their land to make room for activities such as colonial tobacco agriculture run by settlers. Extractive colonialism, a distinct form related to exploitative colonialism, occurs when colonizers focus on acquiring local raw materials, often with decreasing reliance on Indigenous labour for primary extraction activities, as exemplified by the mining industry (Globe 2022, 91-92; 95; Carlson and Osmond 2017, 166-169; 180). While this can be a violent transitional phase paving the way for settler colonialism, extractive practices are not necessarily superseded; they can persist alongside, or become integrated within, settler colonial systems to ensure ongoing resource exploitation. In the Pacific Northwest context, the sudden influx of European and Chinese miners into regions still governed by Indigenous politics exemplified such extractive pressures, shifting power dynamics, increasing the circulation of colonial tobacco, and contributing to the decline of native tobacco permaculture.

Despite the presence of exploitative colonialism (from the late 18th century), extractive colonialism (from the mid-19th century), and settler colonialism (emerging shortly after the onset of mining activities) in British Columbia in a diachronic manner, they were not mutually exclusive. Each new colonial era synchronically layered economic and ideological structures onto Canadian cultural nationalism (Litt 2023, 439-440; 448). The establishment of forts and posts led to the development of small farms where Indigenous peoples, who intermarried with traders, cultivated tobacco using a combination of permacultural and agricultural techniques. During the early fur trade era, historical records from the Pacific Northwest inaccurately credited early European explorers with the introduction of native tobacco species and permaculture. Furthermore, Indigenous tobacco practices were often framed as inferior compared to those of Europeans, thereby perpetuating biased stereotypes such as the "drunken Indian" by incorrectly attributing psychotropic properties to local plants used to enhance colonial tobacco.

Following the establishment of fur trade posts and forts selling colonial tobacco during the exploitative colonial era, two other typologies of European dominance began to emerge in the background, albeit in embryonic form. The exploitative nature of early colonialism obscures the nuances of emerging settler farms around the HBC posts, which often cultivated colonial tobacco for family use (Mackie 1992, 4-6; 12-15; 20-23). Additionally, coal mines in Fort Rupert existed before the Fraser River Gold Rush (Belshaw 2002, 21-24), and colonial tobacco was used to compensate Coast Salish labour (Cryer 2000, 41; 190-191). Analyzing the introduction of colonial tobacco to Indigenous peoples, who either did not use the substance or cultivated native

varieties, could deepen our understanding of the differing ideologies that shaped various types of colonialism and the continuity within the evolving context of British Columbian and Canadian cultures.

The Vancouver Island and British Columbia colonies served as strategic points for the British Empire in the Pacific and its intercontinental tobacco trade. They were situated between Russian and American territories after it became evident that the Spanish Empire could not expand on the Northwest Coast. European traders shipping colonial tobacco began appearing in the 1770s. Following the Nootka Crisis of 1789, British companies, and subsequently the Crown, claimed exclusive trading rights in the region (Tovell 1992, 4-5; 11-3). The HBC's monopolistic control over the colonial tobacco trade in present-day British Columbia triumphed in competition with the NWC in the early 1820s. The intersection of the HBC's exploitative trade of colonial and native tobacco species laid the groundwork for two new unconventional colonies – the colony of Vancouver Island and the British Columbia colony on the mainland (Barman 2022, 12-24; Carlson 2021, 297; 311-312; Gough 2012-2013, 9-18). The shifting and contested processes of identification, classification, and exploitation of Indigenous tobacco and associated customs illuminate British colonial expansion in the Pacific Northwest between the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

5. Conclusion

The encounters between Indigenous peoples and Euro-American colonizers in the Pacific Northwest between the 1770s and 1820s reveal tobacco as both a material and ideological instrument of colonialism, shaping power dynamics, cultural exchange, and the evolution of white supremacist ideologies. As a commodity central to trade, ceremony, and addiction, colonial tobacco species such as *Nicotiana tabacum* served as tools of exploitation, fostering dependency among Indigenous communities while reinforcing Eurocentric hierarchies that framed Indigenous permaculture and practices as "primitive" or "Orientalized." European explorers, traders, and intellectuals employed Orientalist frameworks – as theorized by Said – to dehumanize Indigenous peoples, justifying extractive colonialism through narratives that contrasted "civilized" European agricultural practices with allegedly inferior Indigenous traditions. These ideologies were further entrenched by Hegelian philosophies, which positioned Indigenous societies as stagnant relics of humanity's "savage" past, destined to be assimilated or erased by European modernity.

The introduction of colonial tobacco disrupted Indigenous economies and spiritual practices, yet Indigenous communities demonstrated resilience and agency through adaptive strategies. Coast Salish, Haida, and Interior Salish peoples negotiated the integration of colonial tobacco into existing trade networks, ceremonial practices, and moditional frameworks that blended

traditional and introduced species. Indigenous resistance manifested in critiques of dependency, as articulated by Spokane leaders, and in preserving native tobacco permaculture despite encroaching settler expansion. However, the fur trade's parasitic exploitative colonialism – dependent on Indigenous labour and knowledge – laid the groundwork for more violent phases of extractive and settler colonialism. The transition from trade posts to settler farms and mines marked a shift from leveraging Indigenous cooperation to displacing Indigenous sovereignty, accelerating the decline of native tobacco species and their cultural significance.

The legacy of these encounters underscores tobacco's dual role as a bridge and a weapon in the contact zone. While colonial narratives sought to erase Indigenous agency, ethnographic and historical records reveal Indigenous contributions to shaping transcultural exchanges and challenging Eurocentric tropes. The professionalization of anthropology and historiography in the late 19th century further codified colonial biases. Yet, contemporary scholarship increasingly centers Indigenous perspectives on dismantling enduring myths, such as the "drunken Indian" stereotype or the erasure of pre-contact tobacco permaculture.

Ultimately, the history of tobacco in the Pacific Northwest illuminates the broader mechanisms of colonialism – exploitative, extractive, and settler – as overlapping and iterative processes. It highlights the necessity of centering Indigenous epistemologies to critically reassess how colonial ideologies were constructed, contested, and perpetuated. By examining tobacco's role in these encounters, we gain insight into the resilience of Indigenous cultures and the enduring implications of colonial violence on land, labour, and identity in the Pacific Northwest and beyond.

Bionote

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