

(De)Constructing Nation and Race Along the Canadian Pacific Railway:
First Nations and Chinese Migrants in the Colonial Project

by

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written on the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), but rarely are conversations regarding the experiences of First Nations and Chinese immigrants on the railway brought together. This thesis will analyze how First Nations and Chinese people in Western Canada experienced the construction of the railway and how, as racialized peoples, they were excluded from the original national mythology centered on the completion of a transcontinental railway. The seemingly benign symbol of a railway representing the nation continues the violence of naturalizing colonial, capitalist structures in the national landscape. A closer look at this history reveals the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, the destruction of their ways of life and incorporation of the capitalist economy—all processes that continues today. The history of the railway also reveals the place of Chinese immigrants as a distinct, racialized labour force in late-nineteenth-century Canada that reinforced and that was informed by the racial and economic interests of the national subject at an important time in the development of the nation and its national myths. Drawing on the insights of Manu Karuka's *Empire's Tracks*, this analysis situates the CPR as a tool of colonial, capitalist, countersovereignty.

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To my friends, family, supervisor, and dog

Thank you for all your support

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) united the nation. That is one of the original myths of Canada. At one point in time, the construction of the railway symbolized the union of a great and industrious White nation. That myth was later reimagined to reflect a new understanding of the nation in which the railway was built in collaboration by White Canadians and racialized immigrants to unite a multicultural nation. As the Land Back and Black Lives Matter movements bring increased attention to the topic of systemic racism and colonialism, I wonder if it is not time to re-examine this myth and its colonial roots.

Nationalist narratives must be continually reimagined and reinforced so as to reflect the nation and define national belonging. Many academics have defined and redefined nation and nationalism since the nineteenth century; however, for the purposes of examining nationalist narratives, Elie Kedourie provides the most applicable definition in his seminal work, *Nationalism*. He defines nationalism as a doctrine that “pretends to supply a criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state, and for the right organization of a society of states.”¹ In other words, nationalism is the legitimizing rhetoric used to naturalize the nation, its borders, and

¹ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th ed. (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1960; Malden, US: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 2000), 1. Nationalist theories understood nation as a community connected by common features like history, language, culture and ethnicity, and nationalism was the political doctrine establishing those common features. In 1862, John Stuart Mill argued that national sentiment was required to create “the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government” and Lord Acton described nationality as being “involved in the democratic theory of the sovereignty of the general will.” Ernest Renan expanded on these ideas in 1882 when he argued that nations possessed “a rich legacy of memories” and required the consent of the people to be considered a political unit. Nationalist theories understood nation as a community connected by common features like history, language, culture and ethnicity, and nationalism was the political doctrine establishing those common features. See: John Stuart Mill, *Representative Government* (Kitchener: John Stuart Mill, 2001), 182, <https://socialsciences.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3113/mill/repgovt.pdf>; John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton, “Nationality,” in *The History of Freedom and Other Essays* (1862; repr., London: Macmillan and Col., Limited, 1922) 270-300, <https://archive.org/details/a544661400actouoft>; Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?” in *Nation & Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, trans. Martin Thom (1990; repr., New York: Routledge, 2005), 19; and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 1.

its people, often through the construction of perceived similarities or a shared past. Our understanding of a nation is therefore informed by how we imagine it and how we write about it. Benedict Anderson put forth the idea in 1983 that a nation was “an imagined political community” in which it is “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”² In 1990, Homi K. Bhabha expanded on this theory of the imagined community in his examination of the literary and cultural narration of nations. He argues that there is a contradiction held within the imagination of nations in that “despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.”³ When writing about the origins of a nation, historians are informed by the present in which we live and we inevitably inscribe that temporality within the nationalist narrative.

This thesis looks at nationalism through the lenses of colonialism and capitalism. It is therefore pertinent that I provide definitions of these concepts. Colonialism is a product of imperialism, which is the global policy of extending the power of one nation beyond the national borders. Colonialism generally refers to the logic and action of establishing colonies. Historian Patrick Wolfe differentiated colonialism and settler colonialism by the purpose of the established colonies. In reference to the broader vision of colonialism, Wolfe explained that colonies were “primarily established to extract surplus value from indigenous labour.” While settler colonies might initially be established to extract resources from the colonized land, the primary function of settler colonies becomes the displacement of Indigenous peoples so as to replace them with the surplus imperial subject. Wolfe envisioned settler colonialism as “a structure and not an

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (1983; repr., New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

³ Homi K. Bhabha, introduction to *Nation and Narration* (1990; repr., New York: Routledge, 2005), 1.

event.”⁴ Capitalism is another such structure. In Karl Marx’s concept of capitalism, Indigenous modes of production and trade are imagined to precede and lay the groundwork for capitalism. Scholars have challenged the Eurocentrism of this theory, but it is nevertheless important for the way it highlights how the colonization of Indigenous modes of production informed the growth of capital. Marx wrote that colonialism signaled “the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.” He argued that, in the British colonies, the capitalist industry was arrived at through the organization of capital in national debt, the modern mode of taxation and national protectionist systems, which were enforced through colonial force and state power.⁵ Capitalism and colonialism function in conjunction with one another.

It is with this understanding of nationalism, colonialism, and capitalism that I look at the history of the CPR during its construction between 1881 and 1885. The conception of Canada’s first transcontinental railway was imagined in conjunction with the creation of the nation. The railway was part of John A. Macdonald’s National Policy, which was a nation-building and economic strategy responding to fears that the U.S. might annex the West. The policy raised tariffs on imported goods and promoted the development of Canadian manufactured goods and a Canadian economy. The policy also promoted westward settlement to develop the prairies. The transcontinental railway would transport immigrants and manufactured goods westward. The

⁴ Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (New York: Cassell, 1999), 1.

⁵ Karl Marx, *Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 521; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* (London: Electric Book Company, 2001), 1075. Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson challenged the Eurocentric temporality and “normative developmentalism” of the idea that Indigenous modes of production precede and inform the rise of capitalism. They resituated primitive accumulation from the historical past to the present “as an ongoing practice of dispossession that never ceases to structure capitalist and colonial social relations”. They also argued that primitive accumulation was a “condition of possibility” for capitalism and not “a necessary condition”. Oglala Lakota activist Russell Means has also criticized Marxism for its maintenance of the colonial, industrial system that dispossesses Indigenous peoples, just with the redistribution of the results of that system. See: Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity,” *American Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2016): 251; Russell Means, “The Same Old Song,” in *Marxism and Native Americans*, ed. Ward Churchill (Boston: South End Press, 1982), 19-34.

railway also extended the reach of the central government's authority through communication lines and by providing transportation to mobilize the military. It enabled and promoted the settlement of the West and justified the Dominion's claim to the land. Its construction was also required by British Columbia in its agreement to join confederation in 1871.⁶ With all these grand claims to having contributed to the nation, the CPR was imagined as having geographically, economically, and politically tied the nation together from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

However, this examination of CPR nationalism will reveal that the nation was more fractured on the ground in regards to the construction of the railway. People were divided by class, race, and region on how the railway impacted them and what its construction said about the Dominion. These divisions are particularly clear in Western Canada, which had not been settled and developed to the same extent as Central Canada and where the nationalist value of the CPR was purported to impact the most. In the prairies, the CPR represented a monopoly of land that informed immigration to the west. In British Columbia, the construction of the CPR brought White settlers into contact and competition with Chinese migrant workers and discussions of the nation often centered around the desired exclusion of Chinese immigrants. Therefore, I focus this study on the impact of the railway in Western Canada, which I define to include both the Pacific Northwest and the western prairie region. This thesis will analyze how First Nations and Chinese people in Western Canada experienced the construction of the railway, how racialized peoples were excluded from the original national myth, and what that means for understanding the nation.

⁶ Cory Blad, *Neoliberalism and National Culture: State-Building and Legitimacy in Canada and Quebec* (Leiden: BRILL, 2011), 65; *Order of Her Majesty in Council admitting British Columbia into the Union, dated the 16th day of May, 1871* (Windsor, England, 1871), c. 11, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/p1t41.html>.

I write this thesis a few years after the 150th anniversary of Canada and the resulting protests that spread increased awareness of the ways in which Canadian nationalism masks its colonial roots and racial discrimination. I write this as a biracial Canadian whose ancestor, Low Lim, came to Canada as a youth in the mid-1880s to work on or adjacent to the railway.⁷ In some ways, this thesis is a reflection of my own search for identity and belonging as a White-Chinese Canadian settler living on the unceded traditional territories of the *ləkʷəŋən* (Lekwungen) People, known today as the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, hailing from the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and part of the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishnabek of the Williams Treaties. I will inevitably and intentionally bring these politics into my analysis of this history as writing history is inherently political as we make meaning of data. My goal in writing this thesis is to re-examine the ways in which nationalism and the CPR were understood at the time of its construction and how the historical experiences of First Nations and Chinese immigrants on the railway can better inform our current understanding of this history.

A Historiography of the Canadian Pacific Railway, A National Endeavour

Canada has been a British nation since its inception, retaining its status as part of the British empire even as it became independent. Although Canada's ties to Britain were much stronger in the nineteenth century, this connection has remained and had a pervasive impact on the racial—specifically White—characterization of the nation. Academic Patricia K. Wood

⁷ My first family history source is a short autobiography written by my Popo's (grandmother's) uncle: Sing Lim, *West Coast Chinese Boy* (1979; Montreal: Tundra Books, 1991). In it, Sing recounted how his father Low Lim, also known as Duck Fay Lim, came to Victoria, BC in 1884 at the age of eighteen and got work cutting trees in the bush. My second source is a written summary of an interview Robert Louie (another family member) did in 1998 with Wing Lim (Sing's older brother). At the time, Wing was the last living child of Low Lim. Wing recalled that his father came to Canada at the age of sixteen in 1886 when the CP was recruiting labourers. Lim travelled to New Westminster and then up Fraser Canyon to work on the railway. Although these accounts differ, they both communicate that Low came to Canada as a youth in the late-construction period and likely worked on the railway.

argued that the White nature of Canadian nationalism is “hidden only because, in the appropriation of the word ‘Canadian,’ ethnicity and nationalism are sharing the same ideological space.”⁸ The national subject was defined originally as and by White men and the Whiteness of this character has often remained as a default. White men had the authority over the construction of the CPR and its national mythos. They made political decisions about the CPR, won the contract to build it, managed the labourers, and were recognized as the leaders in the nation-building process. The focus on men like Prime Minister Macdonald, railway contractor Andrew Onderdonk and railway general manager William Cornelius Van Horne reinforced the image of Canada as a White man’s nation. Nationalist CPR histories united a European-descended polity to legitimize the colonial government and create a common history of industriousness.

One of the first academic monographs on the CPR was written by Harold A. Innis in 1920 for his doctoral thesis in political economics and subsequently published in 1923: *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway*. At the time he was writing, most nationalist narratives defined Canadians in opposition to Americans. Innis’ work, however, is notable for how it changed the narrative by defining the nation internally through its geography: the “spread of civilization” was characterized by Canada’s lateral geography.⁹ Settlement turned westward to capitalize on discoveries of gold in the Rocky Mountains and the construction of the transcontinental railway further enabled this movement by following the paths of earlier fur traders. Innis’ book *The Fur Trade in Canada* is known for the argument that the nation developed laterally through the fur

⁸ Patricia K. Wood, “Defining ‘Canadian’: Anti-Americanism and Identity in Sir John A. Macdonald’s Nationalism,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2011): 66, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/672660/summary>.

⁹ Harold A. Innis, *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1923), 1, 17, <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/innis-historyofthecpr/innis-historyofthecpr-00-h.html>. See also: Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

trade, but he first considered the lateral geographical development of the nation in his history of the CPR.

Innis' *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* was an economic and political history of the CPR. To tell such a history, Innis wrote of the Canadian government and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company (CP) as active entities shaping the construction and history of the CPR. This naturally emphasized the roles of decision-making men, like railway minister Charles Tupper and CP executive R.B. Angus, who contributed to the CPR's construction. Through this focus, Innis applied the Great Man theory of history—which holds that the history of the world is the history of men's accomplishments—to his work.¹⁰ Labourers—particularly Indigenous and Chinese people—were, therefore, negligible characters in his history due to the menial nature of their work and contributions. Their narrative absence promoted the image of the CPR as a White man's project. Innis aligned the railway with the development of the nation, but, more than that, he aligned it with the development of a European-descended nation. He argued that “[t]he history of the Canadian Pacific Railroad is primarily the history of the spread of civilization over the northern half of the North American continent.”¹¹ His thesis reflected the colonial tones of early-twentieth-century rhetoric that associated “civilization” with Whiteness.¹² His book worked to reinforce the association of Canadians with Whiteness.

Innis' work was the blueprint for many of the ensuing histories written about the CPR.

James B. Hedges connected the CPR to the settlement component of the nation-building process

¹⁰ Thomas Carlyle introduced this theory in a series of lectures in the nineteenth century. See: Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship & The Heroic In History: Six Lectures* (London: James Fraser, Regent Street, 1841).

¹¹ Innis, *A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway*, 287.

¹² Edward Said examines the construction of this association between civilization and Whiteness in *Orientalism*. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, Europeans constructed an image of themselves in contrast to Asians, an “us” versus “them” dichotomy. This self-construction imagined “European superiority over Oriental backwardness” that has been applied against other non-European civilizations in which the non-Europeans are always found lacking. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., 1979), 7.

in an examination of the land subsidies granted by the state to the CP. At the request of the CP President, J. Lorne McDougall published a corporate history of the railway that also associated the creation of the railway with the making of the nation. Robert Chodos's economic history examined the mythology of nationalism around the railway. W. Kaye Lamb wrote an economic and political history of the company with a new emphasis on the CP's subsidiary ventures. Bill McKee and Georgeen Klassen wrote a nationalist history on the CPR's role in settling the west. John A. Eagle wrote a history on the CPR's impact on the economic development of the west. Throughout the twentieth century, these men framed the political, economic, and immigration history of the CPR in terms of the nation.¹³ There were variances in their foci and the details of their arguments, but the gist of these nationalist histories is the same: the CPR played a crucial role in the development of Canada as a nation.

Like Innis, these authors focused on the roles of the White railway men—predominantly the leaders but sometimes also the labourers—in their assessments of the national construction. Indigenous and Chinese peoples are mentioned in varying but limited ways in these histories. Hedges, for example, did not address the question of Indigenous dispossession while discussing the acquisition and settlement of land. He referred to the prairies as being “unsettled”, perpetuating the belief that colonial settlers had the right to settle the land.¹⁴ On the other hand, Lamb mentioned the impact of the construction on First Nations and the many Chinese immigrants who worked on the railway but only over the course of a few lines and largely as an

¹³ James B. Hedges, *Building the Canadian West: The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), 2; J. Lorne McDougall, *Canadian Pacific: A Brief History* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1968), vii; Robert Chodos, *CPR: A Century of Corporate Welfare* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1973), 7; W. Kaye Lamb, *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* (New York: Macmillan, 1977); Bill McKee and Georgeen Klassen, *Trail of Iron: The CPR and the Birth of the West, 1880-1930* (Vancouver: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1983); and John A. Eagle, *The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Development of Western Canada, 1896-1914* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), xi.

¹⁴ Hedges, *Building*, 84.

obstacle to the creation of a White nation. He explained that “[t]here was trouble occasionally with the Indians” and discussed the threat Siksika posed to the railway, only quelled by the intervention of missionary Albert Lacombe.¹⁵ The limited inclusion of racialized peoples in these histories emphasizes their exclusion from the national image.

Outside of academia, the CPR also gained renewed public interest in the early 1970s with the publication of Pierre Berton’s two-volume popular history series on the construction of the railway. The first volume, *The National Dream*, recounted the lead up to the construction of the railway from 1871 when the idea of the railway was being discussed in Parliament to 1881 when the CP was incorporated by an act of Parliament. The second volume, *The Last Spike*, picked up where the first volume left off and tells the history of the construction up until the final spike was driven into the ground in 1885. His books followed the tradition of CPR histories in their Great Man approach to history and nationalist framework, and have been criticized for Berton’s oversimplification of a complex history and his lack of citations. He does have notable sections on First Nations and Chinese labourers in his book; as these books were so widely received and popular, they had a significant role in including Indigenous and Chinese peoples in this national history. Berton dedicated a section of Chapter 5 to the Chinese labourers on the CPR, following Onderdonk’s employment of large numbers of Chinese labourers and the low wages he paid them, as well as the anti-Asian sentiment in British Columbia. Berton also included a section in Chapter 6 dedicated to Indigenous peoples, which he subtitled: “The displaced people.” This section covered the loss of the bison and the turn towards agrarianism that preceded the arrival of the railway on the prairies, and the politics and conflict between Indigenous leaders and CP men. Berton relayed the tension between Siksika Nation and the CP over the course of two pages,

¹⁵ Lamb, *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway*, 87, 122.

focusing on Albert Lacombe's role. Lacombe was described as "a homely priest in a tattered cassock, bumping over the prairie" while heroically trying to advocate for Siksika against the advancing railway. When his appeal to the railway men failed, Lacombe then returned to convince Crowfoot to allow the railway to pass through Siksika territory.¹⁶ While these books made an important contribution to the inclusion of First Nations and Chinese peoples in the public image of the nation, the majority of Berton's narrative and messaging still centered on the great, White male leaders.¹⁷

Writing in the late twentieth century, Maurice Charland and A.A. den Otter challenged the strength of a nationalism embodied by a railway based on the way in which technology mediates national identity, as opposed to other critiques of nationalism on the basis of race. Looking at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's television miniseries *National Dream*, based on Berton's history of the CPR, Charland noticed a rhetoric in Canadian nationalism that

¹⁶ Pierre Berton, *The National Dream: The Great Railway, 1871-1881* (1970; repr., Toronto: Anchor Canada, 2001); Pierre Berton, *The Last Spike: The Great Railway, 1881-1885* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1971), 194-206, 232, 235.

¹⁷ While Berton's history is still in print fifty years later and remains the pre-eminent popular account of the railway, his work built on the epic, nationalist image of the railway that had been previously established in Canadian literature. In 1952, famous twentieth-century poet E.J. Pratt published an epic on the construction, titled "Towards the Last Spike", which won the Governor General's Award for poetry that year. Pratt emphasized the Scottish nature of the construction, referencing Scottish immigrants working as labourers and in leadership, such as Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, CP president George Stephen, and CP director Donald Smith, and making comparisons to Scottish history. On the ceremonial driving of the last spike, Pratt wrote: "The Scot, invoking his ancestral clan, / Using the hammer like a battle-axe, His eyes bloodshot with memories of Flodden, / Descended on it, rammed it to its home." The reference to the Battle of Flodden, in which the Scottish lost to the British, refers to Smith's unsuccessful first attempt to drive the last spike into the ground. On his first attempt, he bent the spike, which had to be removed and which he kept. He was successful on his second attempt. Pratt described this second attempt as: "Like a gavel it would close / Debate, making Macdonald's 'sea to sea'". The national subject in this poem became the Scotsman and the railway a Scottish creation.

A few years after the publication of this poem, F.R. Scott wrote a short poem titled "All the Spikes But the Last" in response to Pratt. Scott directly asks Pratt: "Where are the coolies in your poem, Ned?" Ned is a nickname for Edward, which is Pratt's first name. Scott's poem is a series of pointed questions about the erasure of Chinese labourers in nationalist narratives, such as that of Pratt. "All the Spikes But the Last" stood out amongst the many works that referenced Chinese railway workers minimally—if at all—and it preceded much of the efforts to include people of colour in the national history that would come in the next decades.

E.J. Pratt, "Towards the Last Spike," in *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, 3rd ed., ed. Donna Bennett and Russell Brown (1952; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 382-383; F.R. Scott, "All the Spikes But the Last," in *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, 3rd ed., ed. Donna Bennett and Russell Brown (1957; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 412.

“ascribe[d] to technology the capacity to create a nation by enhancing communication.”¹⁸

Canada is a vast territory and technologies work to limit the experience of that vastness, such as the CPR’s role in enabling trade, extending the political power of Ottawa throughout the territory, and facilitating communication. However, Charland argued that the CPR—and other transportation and communication technologies—“provides no substance or commonality for the *polis* except communication itself.”¹⁹ Charland thought that the emptiness of a mediated technological nationalism created a continuous search for a Canadian identity and lent to the Americanization of Canadian culture. den Otter also challenged the connection between the nation and the CPR, although he focused on the contradictions associated with the nationalistic characterization of the CPR. He argued that the CPR connected Canada to the continental railway system and the United States. The CPR was a good symbol of Canadian nationalism as a rhetorically constructed symbol, but its reality reflected poorly on this rhetoric. den Otter expanded on the relationship between nationalism and the CPR in *The Philosophy of Railways*, which examined the ways people thought about railways and how those ideas motivated the construction of the transcontinental railway. He argued that, despite the railway’s influence on British Columbia and New Brunswick’s decisions to join Confederation, the construction of the CPR was influenced by goals to centralize economic and political authority in Central Canada, thereby alienating the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. These works challenged the nationalist character of the CPR on the basis of technology, regional divisions, and continental relations;

¹⁸ Maurice Charland, “Technological Nationalism,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 10, no. 1-2 (1986): 197.

¹⁹ Charland, “Technological Nationalism,” 198.

however, the power of a nationalist myth lies in its rhetoric, not its reality.²⁰ These critiques of CPR nationalism were eclipsed by discussions of race and multiculturalism in the nation.

In the mid-twentieth century, racialized, feminist, and labour activists demanded social change and protested the discriminatory and exploitative treatment of marginalized peoples in North America. The increased vocality and awareness of racialized peoples in the 1960s resulted in historiographical changes and in competing expressions of Canadian nationalism. French Canadians and Indigenous communities advocated for their own nationalisms and challenged Anglo-Canadian control of the national image. In 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau announced a policy of bilingualism and cultural plurality in Canada. The *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* was established in 1988 to legislate the cultural policy adopted the previous decade. Demands for social change were reflected in Canada's historiography as historians began to move away from grand nationalist narratives toward social histories and multiculturalism. Canada as multicultural has since been inscribed in our national histories.²¹

Late-twentieth-century historians and Chinese activists began to correct the exclusion of Chinese Canadians from these nationalist narratives. In an examination of nationalist history, Timothy J. Stanley explained that “[w]hile nationalist grand narratives purport to trace the origins of the ‘imagined community’ that makes the nation, they in fact constitute it. They

²⁰ A.A. den Otter, *The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 11-12; A.A. den Otter, “Railway Technology, the Canadian Northwest, and the Continental Economy,” *Railroad History* 162 (1990): 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43521388>.

²¹ Donald Wright, “Nationalisms,” in *Canada: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 49, doi: 10.1093/actrade/9780198755241.001.0001; Jean Burnet and Howard Palmer, introduction to, *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*, by Harry Con, Ronald J. Con, Graham Johnson, Edgar Wickberg, William E. Willmot, edited by Edgar Wickberg (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd. in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 1982), vi-viii. Jean Burnet and Howard Palmer were the series editors of *From China to Canada*.

identify who belongs in the nation and in what ways.”²² The nation is built around a common people and nationalism identifies that commonality in the language, land, ethnicity, history, and/or culture of the people. Therefore, historians and activists created space for Chinese Canadians in the nation when they identified the construction of the CPR as one of the sites of commonality between Chinese and White Canadians and as proof of Chinese Canadian’s contributions to the nation.

The inclusion of Chinese Canadians in the national narrative was especially notable in the 1980s when several important works focusing on Chinese labourers and the CPR were published. These works did much to reveal and include Chinese immigrants in a well-known national history. Edgar Wickberg co-wrote and edited a collection of articles on Chinese Canadians in *From China to Canada* in 1982 with the “hope that this history will assist Canadians of all backgrounds to understand Chinese-Canadian history, grievances, and contributions.”²³ In the research for this book, Ma Sen informally translated *Jianada Huaqiaoshi (A history of Chinese in Canada)* by Li Donghai (sometimes stylized as David T.H. Lee or David Li). Stanley noted that Li’s book, which was originally published in 1967, was “the first, single-authored scholarly history of the Chinese in Canada, one of the first published Canadian ethnic histories”.²⁴ *Jianada Huaqiaoshi* challenged the Euro-Canadian-centrism of Canadian history by focusing on Chinese immigration to and settlement in Canada. However, the audience for Li’s book in Canada has

²² Timothy J. Stanley, “Why I Killed Canadian History: Towards an Anti-Racist History in Canada,” *Histoire sociale / Social History* 33, no. 65 (2000): 82.

²³ Harry Con, Ronald J. Con, Graham Johnson, Edgar Wickberge, William E. Willmot, *From China to Canada: A History of the Chinese Communities in Canada*, edited by Edgar Wickberg (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd. in association with the Multiculturalism Directorate, Department of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 1982), 2.

²⁴ Stanley, “Why I Killed Canadian History,” 92; Li Donghai (David T.H. Lee), *Jianada Huaqiaoshi* [A history of Chinese in Canada], trans. Ma Sen (Taipei: Zhonghua dadian bianyinhui, 1967; unpublished translation, 1973). Ma Sen’s translation can be found in the University of British Columbia Archives, Chinese Canadian Research Collection, Box 25, File 54.

been limited, partially stemming from the lack of a published English translation. In 1983, another David Lee published an article titled “Chinese Construction Workers on the Canadian Pacific.” Lee noted that several other people had written about Chinese immigration “but little has been written specifically about the historical experience of Chinese railway workers in Canada”, which was explained in part by the limited documentation on Chinese labourers.²⁵ He sought to fill this gap and affirm the presence of Chinese railway workers in Canada, but he described the construction period, specifically the acceptance into the nation and the employment of thousands of Chinese immigrants, as “a unique episode in Canadian history”—particularly as this period was followed by decades of exclusionary immigration policies.²⁶ Patricia E. Roy continued this historiographical focus on Chinese railway workers with her analyses of White Canadians’ reaction to Chinese immigration and the inclusion and exclusion of Asians in the nation. In 1984, she published a chapter on the historical treatment of Chinese labourers during the construction period. Five years later, she published the book, *A White Man’s Province*, which discussed the economics and politics of race in the relationship between provincial politicians and Asian immigrants. Roy discussed how a perceived fear of job competition shaped politics and racism in the province and how Chinese labourers were perceived as “a necessary evil” in order to complete the CPR.²⁷ In 1988, Ronald Faustino-Santos took a similar approach to Roy in his analysis of the role of political and economic influences on Chinese railway workers, although his analysis was international in scope. He examined the role of global capitalism and the Chinese and Canadian states in driving migration, arguing that the exploitation of imported

²⁵ David Lee, “Chinese Construction Workers on the Canadian Pacific,” *Railroad History* 148 (1983): 43.

²⁶ Lee, “Chinese Construction Workers,” 43, 56.

²⁷ Patricia E. Roy, “A Choice between Evils: The Chinese and the Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia,” in *The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984), 34; Patricia E. Roy, *A White Man’s Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989).

labour was necessary for corporate profits.²⁸ These works established the broad outlines of the Chinese railway worker experience—one defined by hard work in poor working conditions with poor wages in a foreign land with people who expressed a lot of hatred towards their presence on the land and in the work force but which was nevertheless crucial to the completion of the national railway.

Lily Siewsan Chow re-examined this history in 2014, in *Blood and Sweat over the Railway Tracks*. This book is a recollection of the construction of the CPR as experienced by Chinese labourers. Chow examined both the reasons and the ways in which Chinese railway workers were recruited and brought to Canada. She drew on historical newspapers in British Columbia to put together a timeline of the progress of the railway and the work of Chinese labourers. The book also contained a detailed break down of the tasks required to build a railway. Chinese railway workers cut timber, used dynamite to create tunnels, and cleared debris. They also transported materials to the work sites and ballasted the line by filling the space between ties with gravel.²⁹ Chow's close analysis of the work on the railway contributed to a deeper understanding of how Chinese labourers contributed to the construction of the railway.

While the construction of the CPR has continued to be a centerpiece of Chinese Canadian history, historians have largely moved to look at the wider experiences of Chinese immigrants throughout the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. David Goutor argued that, using anti-Asian rhetoric, White labourers constructed the White working man's identity as civilized and rational in contrast to Asian labourers. Alison R. Marshall examined the experiences of Chinese

²⁸ Ronald Faustino-Santos, "A Race of Cuckoos: Chinese Migration, Anti-Chinese Legislation and the Canadian Pacific Railway," *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research* 8 (1988): 44, <https://www.alternateroutes.ca/index.php/ar/article/view/20285>.

²⁹ Lily Siewsan Chow, *Blood and Sweat over the Railway Tracks: The Chinese Labourers in the Canadian Pacific Railway Construction (1880-1885)* (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia and Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies, University of British Columbia, 2014), 38-39, 37.

immigrants in the prairies as shaped by the railway between 1870 and 1947. Jay M. Perry wrote about how the relationship between British Columbia and California informed immigration policies in the late nineteenth century.³⁰ The construction of the CPR was one of the earliest events establishing Chinese Canadians in Canada, but legislation put in place after the completion of the railway limited the presence of this community in Canada and its immediate impact.

Across the border, in the United States, Stanford University undertook an expansive research project on Chinese railway workers that also influenced research in Canada. In 2012, the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project (CRWNAP) became “the first comprehensive effort to recover and interpret the work of Chinese railroad workers” in America.³¹ Over the next eight years, over one hundred scholars across North America and Asia contributed to the research and analysis of the history of Chinese railway workers. One of the various works produced from this project includes a chapter on the construction of the CPR by Zhongping Chen.³²

³⁰ David Goutor, “Constructing the ‘Great Menace’: Canadian Labour’s Opposition to Asian Immigration, 1880-1914,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 88, no. 4 (2007): 549-576; Alison R. Marshall, “Railways, Racism and Chineseness on the Prairies,” in *Place and Replace: Essays on Western Canada*, ed. Adele Perry, Esyllt W. Jones, and Leah Morton (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2013), 107-122; Jay M. Perry, “‘The Present of California may prove ... the future of British Columbia’: Local, State and Provincial Immigration Policies Prior to the American Chinese Exclusion Act and Canadian Chinese Immigration Act,” *BC Studies* 201 (2019): 13-35.

³¹ Gordon H. Chang, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, and Hilton Obenzinger, introduction to *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, edited by Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 3.

³² Research publications provided by the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at Stanford University include: Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, ed., *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019); Gordon H. Chang, *Ghost of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019); Calvin Cheung-Miaw and Roland Hsu, “Before the ‘Truckee Method’: Race, Space, and Capital in Truckee’s Chinese Community, 1870-1880,” *Amerasia Journal* 45, no. 1 (2019): 68-85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00447471.2019.1605712>; Sue Lee and Connie Young Yu, ed., *Voices from the Railroad: Stories by Descendants of Chinese Railroad Workers* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, 2019); and Yong Chen, “Uncovering and Understanding the Experiences of Chinese Railroad Workers in Broader Socioeconomic Context,” *chineserailroadworkers.stanford.edu* (2020), <https://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/website/uncovering-and-understanding-the-experiences-of-chinese-railroad-workers-in-broader-socioeconomic-context/>.

Zhongping Chen recently published three works on Chinese railway workers and the CPR. The first, published in 2018, was an article analyzing the CPR's Chinese labour contractors and the relationship between the contractors and labourers. This article examined the ways in which the labour contractors played a role as partners with Onderdonk in the exploitation of Chinese labourers while also seeking to protect Chinese labourers from dismissal from the CPR and providing relief following the completion of the railway. Chen re-examined and corrected "limited or incorrect information about the CPR's Chinese labor contractors and significant disparities in the estimated numbers of CPR laborers from China."³³ For example, Li Donghai and Edgar Wickberg and company claimed that there was only one major Chinese labour contracting company working for the CP in Victoria and Hong Kong and that 15,000 or 17,000 Chinese immigrants came to Canada between 1881 and 1884. Chen, however, identified four Chinese contracting companies—Lee Tin Poy (Li Tianpei), Lee Yick Tack (Li Yide), Li Tin Shat (Lee Chuck), and Lee Yau Kain (Li Touqin)—hiring labourers for the CPR, working out of China, Canada, and the United States. He also reviewed shipping reports in newspapers and used inferential statistics to calculate that at least 19,524—but likely over 20,000—Chinese people came to Canada between May 1880 and June 1885 and that more than 10,000 of them would have worked on the railway. No more than 6,505 Chinese labourers worked on the railway at one time and even that figure is believed to be an exaggeration. In 2019, Chen published a chapter in *The Chinese and the Iron Road*, which was produced from CRWNAP. Chen examined the transpacific Chinese diaspora, focusing on Chinese labour contractors and labourers'

³³ Zhongping Chen, "Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers of the Canadian Pacific Railway, 1880-1885," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 110, no. 1 (2018-2019): 18, 24; Zhongping Chen, "The Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Transpacific Chinese Diaspora, 1880-1885," in *The Chinese and the Iron Road: Building the Transcontinental Railroad*, ed. Gordon H. Chang and Shelley Fisher Fishkin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 294-313; Zhongping Chen, "Vancouver Island and the Chinese Diaspora in the Transpacific World, 1788-1918," *BC Studies* 204 (2019-2020): 45-65.

relationships in China and Canada. Chen also published “Vancouver Island and the Chinese Diaspora in the Transpacific World, 1788-1918”, which looked at Chinese diasporic networks across Vancouver Island. Chen’s research on the transpacific relations, the Chinese labour contractors, and the dynamics between ethnic groups on the railway has been particularly valuable in revising previous interpretations and facts, and in complicating understandings of the relationships between contractors and labourers.

Chen’s focus on the transpacific relations in this history is just one example of the ways historians have reconsidered nationalist history. Stanley recommended a multicentric, anti-racist approach to history, instead of nationalist histories which failed to adequately “failed to explain racism”. He made this recommendation in response to J.L. Granatstein’s book, *Who Killed Canadian History?*, which argued that multiculturalism and social history were the death of Canadian history for which Granatstein saw a solution in a nationalist history told through a chronological, military and political lens. Stanley challenged the nationalist framework, suggesting that the grand narratives it produced marginalized people and were “more of a cultural artifact than a serious history.” Stanley identified the history of Chinese railway workers as “a conscious attempt to incorporate the Chinese in the national past.”³⁴ In contrast to the grand narrative, Stanley argued for an anti-racist approach with localized and temporal histories that “are necessarily ‘small’ ones which can be written in multiple ways.”³⁵

Eva Mackey made a similar criticism of multicultural nationalism the year prior in 1999 in regards to Indigenous peoples and the nation. Despite the ostensible acceptance of cultural differences and plurality in the multicultural nation of the late twentieth century, nationalist

³⁴ Stanley, “Why I Killed Canadian History,” 80, 82, 84; J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 1998).

³⁵ Stanley, “Why I Killed Canadian History,” 102.

narratives recognized only limited forms of difference and settler colonialism remained a key feature of these narratives. Where Canada was understood as a benevolent, accepting, and multicultural nation, Indigenous peoples were “the colourful recipients of benevolence, the necessary ‘others’ who reflect back white Canada’s self-image of tolerance.”³⁶ Indigenous peoples were included in expressions of nationalism so long as they did not threaten Canada’s nationhood, but their subjugation was also a requirement of Canadian nationalism, needed to legitimize the settler nation. While Canadian nationalism claims to represent a multicultural people, it does so only in limited ways that uphold its colonial roots.

The inclusion of Indigenous peoples in national history reveals the ways colonialism founds the nation. Therefore, histories discussing the impact of the construction of the CPR on Indigenous peoples have largely been histories of Indigenous peoples and not of the nation—and, further, are often just a brief mention in the larger history of settler-Indigenous relations. Helen Buckley touched on the railway in her history of how First Nations lost their lands to settlers in the prairies in the 1870s. Sarah Carter discussed the impact of the railway on farming on reserves in her examination of the economic, legal, social, and climatic factors preventing First Nations from adapting to colonial agriculture. She also mentioned the role of the CPR in the dispossession of First Nations in her history of women on the prairies. In a book on the exchanges between and labour of Indigenous peoples and settlers, John Sutton Lutz noted that the completion of the railway marked both the end of a source of employment for First Nations in British Columbia and the start of a massive invasion of settlers into First Nations’ wage economies. James Daschuk included the railway as one of the factors influencing the ethnocide of Indigenous peoples on the prairies. In these histories of Western Canada, the CPR is often just

³⁶ Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London: Routledge, 1999), 15-16, 178, 86.

one component of the larger history of colonialism in the late nineteenth century affecting the movement and labour of First Nations.³⁷

One of the most complete histories of the construction of the CPR and its impact on First Nations in the prairies was published in 1984 by Hugh A. Dempsey. He examined the ways Cree and Blackfoot peoples in the prairies understood the railway throughout its construction. The CPR was initially a rumour of an unknown thing that quickly became a colonial imposition with a notable impact on the lives of Plains First Nations. One of the early and marked impacts of the railway on First Nations was the way that it moved them. The railway encroached on their lands, but government officials and the North-West Mounted Police dissuaded resistance. Beyond the impact of the CPR on the shape of the land, the railway also caused fires and an injury to a Blackfoot man who fell beneath one of the cars. Dempsey concluded this history of colonialism with a note of acceptance. He argued that the Cree and Blackfoot came to accept the railway and that it came to symbolized “the white man’s domination of the plains.”³⁸

More research has been done on the impact of the CPR on First Nations in British Columbia. Andrea Laforet and Annie York dedicated a chapter in a book on the history of Spuzzum, a Nlaka’pamux village, to examining the economic and environmental impact of the construction of railways through Spuzzum. First Nations were employed on the railway, cutting wood for the train engine and other such work. Some of these men, including York’s uncle, were injured in the precarious working conditions on the railway. The mountain was blasted through

³⁷ Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 42; Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 59, 101; Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 52; John Sutton Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008); James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013), 108-109, 123, 164;

³⁸ Hugh A. Dempsey, “The Fearsome Fire Wagons,” in *The CPR West*, ed. Hugh A. Dempsey (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984), 69.

and a church was damaged. The railway would have a long-term impact on the First Nation for how it disrupted the land and their way of life. Nadine Schuurman took a broader look at the material and social repercussions of the three railways constructed in the southern interior of British Columbia on First Nations. She examined the allocation of reserves and the proposed route of the CPR, noting how federal legislation enabled the taking of land for the CPR and disadvantaged First Nations. She also examined how work on the construction of the CPR incorporated First Nations into a cash economy and labour force. Gordon Robert Lyall examined the construction of three major rights-of-way through one Stó:lō reserve. His section on the CPR looked at how the railway destroyed crucial fishing sites. He argued that, although government officials claimed that these pieces of infrastructure would benefit First Nations, these projects caused a lot of damage and revealed the ways in which settlers are ignorant of Indigenous relationships with the land. Laforet, York, Schuurman, and Lyall's works highlight the role of the CPR as a tool of colonialism and its continued impact on First Nations.³⁹

Indigenous peoples and racialized settlers share some similar experiences of discrimination in settler societies. However, racialized settlers have a complicated position in settler colonialism as they are exploited in the colonial system but they also benefit from this system which dispossesses Indigenous peoples. In *Alien Capital: Asian racialization and the logic of settler colonial capitalism*, Iyko Day moved “beyond the binary theory of settler colonialism, which is predominantly structured around an opposition between Indigenous peoples and settlers” to look at the dynamic third position that racialized settlers and enslaved

³⁹ Andrea Laforet and Annie York, *Spuzzum: Fraser Canyon Stories, 1808-1939* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 73; Nadine Schuurman, “Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway through Reserves in British Columbia,” *Native Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2000): 19-39; Gordon Robert Lyall, “‘They Smashed It Right Through Our Reserve’: The Problem of Settler Consultation for Infrastructure on Chawathil IR 4,” *BC Studies* 207 (2020): 67-99. I explore these works further in Chapter 1.

peoples and their descendants occupy. The binary of settler-Indigenous relations aligned trafficked and enslaved Black people and the indentured Asian immigrants with White settlers, thus ignoring the role of race in the organization of settler colonial societies. Day examined a triangle of settler colonialism in which the alien and the settler are dynamically distinguished based on histories and sentiments of entitlement to the land. She argued that “the degree or forced or voluntary migration or level of complicity with the settler state is ultimately secondary to their subordination under a settler colonial mode of production driven by the proprietorial logics of whiteness.”⁴⁰ Roshon Signh Nandhra drew on Day’s analysis of settler colonial logics to understand the impact of settler colonial capitalism on relationships of solidarity between Black, Indigenous, and Asian people. To understand these relationships, he looked at the mid-twentieth-century salmon-canning industry in British Columbia where Indigenous and Asian people worked together and in competition. He argued that “in so far as people of colour are structurally implanted in exploitative labour processes—processes that were and continue to be predicated on sustaining settler-colonial populations—our positionality situates and implicates us within practices and processes that contribute(d) to the subjugation, dispossession, and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their land and modes of life regardless of our intentionality.” Jean Barman, on the other hand, looked at the solidarity between Asian and Indigenous people through thirty intimate relationships between Chinese bachelors and Indigenous women in the late nineteenth century.⁴¹ These scholars, amongst others, have highlighted the very dynamic and contextual relationship between racialized settlers and

⁴⁰ Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian racialization and the logic of settler colonial capitalism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2016), 19, 24.

⁴¹ Roshon Signh Nandhra, “Transversing Settler Colonial Capital: Indigenous Dispossession and Non-White Labour Exploitation,” *BC Studies* 210 (2021): 93; Jean Barman, “Beyond Chinatown: Chinese Men and Indigenous Women in Early British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 177 (2013): 39-64.

Indigenous peoples. Understanding the historical interracial relationships—both between White and racialized people and between Indigenous and Asian people—is important for understanding racial dynamics in the present. Despite Barman’s contribution, the experiences of First Nation and Chinese labourers on the CPR are rarely put into conversation and considered as equally important parts of the history of the railway. Writing on the Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) in the United States, Manu Karuka provided a template for a new approach to railway history that takes into account both the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and exploitation of racialized immigrants along the railway in his book, *Empire’s Tracks*. He argued that “[c]apitalism is imperialism” by looking at the impact of the CPRR on Lakota, Pawnee, Cheyenne and Chinese people.⁴² He introduces the concept of “railroad colonialism”, which refers to the ways in which the American state claimed the land, denied Indigenous sovereignty, and replaced other means of production with capitalism through the construction of railroads. Karuka explained that his book “offers structural analyses of capital and imperialism from distinct colonial standpoints, crossing the borders of discrete subfields of Indigenous and ethnic studies in its citational practice and in its theoretical and methodological approaches.”⁴³ This approach does not look at the interactions between Indigenous and Chinese people. However, by putting their experiences in conversation, Karuka shed light on the larger role of railways as instruments of imperialism.

Last year, Thomas Blampied also considered the application of railroad colonialism in his PhD dissertation. Blampied examined the Ontario Northland Railway (ONR) as an active agent of provincial colonialism in the twentieth century. However, he found that Karuka’s theory faced some challenges in being applied to Canadian history, especially to the ONR. The imperial

⁴² Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 185, xiv, xiii.

⁴³ Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, xiv. On vocabulary: Americans refer to train tracks as railroads and Canadians refer to the same as railways.

nature of railroad colonialism that Karuka emphasized did not translate to the provincially constructed and operated ONR and the financial potential of railways in Canada was not equal to those in the United States. Further, Karuka's analysis of Chinese labourers and the unfree labour involved in the construction of railways was not applicable to the ONR which began construction in 1901, during the period Chinese immigration was severely restricted and the year after the Chinese Head Tax was raised from \$50 to \$100. While railroad colonialism was not entirely applicable to the history Blampied studied, it is much more relevant to this study of nationalism and the Canadian Pacific Railway.⁴⁴ The history of the CPR is temporally, spatially, and theoretically more similar to the CPRR as a transcontinental railway supported by the national state and built using racialized labour in the nineteenth century to facilitate mass immigration of White settlers to the West.

This thesis will follow the path paved by Karuka, looking at the experiences of Indigenous and Chinese people on the railway as two parts of a whole. I draw on his conception of railroad colonialism to understand the ways the CPR was used as a tool of colonialism and capitalism. However, rather than looking at this from a top-down approach—like Karuka—that focuses on the government and corporate execution of railroad colonialism, I take a more bottom-up approach, one that focuses first on the experiences of First Nations and Chinese immigrants. By taking such an approach, I aim to shed light on the nature of railway nationalism. The nationalist narratives on the CPR insist that the railway represents a proud settler nationhood and/or a point of multicultural belonging in the nation. A look at how racialized peoples

⁴⁴ Thomas Blampied, "'Ontario's Development Road': The Ontario Northland Railway and Provincial Colonialism, 1901-1995," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2022), 21-22, <https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/125081>; David Goutor, "Drawing Different Lines of Color: The Mainstream English Canadian Labour Movement's Approach to Blacks and the Chinese, 1880-1914," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 2, no. 1 (2005): 61.

experienced the railway sheds further light on the destructive and exclusionary nature of Canadian nationalism.⁴⁵

First Nations and Chinese Migrants in the Nation

This thesis is organized in two case studies on First Nations and Chinese peoples during the construction period of the CPR. Chapter 1 examines the impact of the construction of the CPR on First Nation lands and economies in southern Alberta and British Columbia. These regions had different policies regarding land and Indigenous peoples, but a comparison of their approaches regarding the railway highlights the colonial attitudes of the Canadian nation. The need for land for the CPR was one of the driving factors in the immediate need to control land in Western Canada and helped to shape the allocation of reserves and the taking of rights-of-way. As the CPR was built through their lands, many First Nations people found work on the railway and the construction shaped the viability of their economies and ways of life. I use government reports and oral histories and works published by First Nations to understand the impact of the railway. While I do not presume to speak for their experiences, I hope that the inclusion the writings and reflections of First Nations people in this chapter will highlight the lasting impact of the CPR on their communities and on Canada. Chapter 1 examines the CPR as a tool of colonialism and capitalism in the dispossession of Indigenous lands, the destruction of their economies, and the incorporation of First Nations into capitalism.

⁴⁵ Black, Métis, and Hindu peoples also worked on the railway, but I have chosen not to include their experiences in this thesis for several reasons. Regarding Black and Hindu labour, there are very few sources that mention their labour on the railway during the early 1880s and most primary and secondary sources on Black railway labour tend to speak more to the period after the construction when they worked predominantly as sleeping car porters. On the other hand, Métis labour may be lumped in with First Nations labour on the railway under the label of “Indian”, which can largely be separated by the examination of a particular nation or reserve. However, Métis experiences on the railway start to go beyond the scope of this thesis in the discussion of the North-West Resistance and Métis nationalism. See: Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Jennifer Reid, *Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

Chapter 2 examines the experiences of Chinese railway workers whose labour was required for the construction of this important national infrastructure but who were frequently derided by White Canadians for taking work and money from White labourers. Following the completion of the railway, xenophobic policies were put in place to limit or prohibit Chinese immigration into Canada, emphasizing the exclusion of Chinese people from the nation. However, the history of Chinese railway workers and the nation is more complex than simply inclusion or exclusion. In this chapter, I examine the role of capitalism and White supremacy in shaping Chinese exclusion from Canadian society and exploitation in the construction of the railway.⁴⁶ I analyze the only two known accounts from Chinese railway workers on the CPR—one of which was published in 2020—to understand the ways these two men understood their place in Canadian society. This chapter considers the role of the CPR as a tool of racial capitalism that exploited Chinese railway workers and implicated them in the colonial system.

How historians have written about the history of the CPR has changed over time, reflecting different understandings of the nation. In this thesis, I seek to understand how the nation was understood and experienced at the time the railway was being constructed. By highlighting the colonial and capitalist nature of this longstanding national symbol, I hope to shed light on how these issues persist in Canadian nationalism and society today.

⁴⁶ I use the term “White supremacy” to speak of the logic of racism and I draw on Andrea Gibbons’ definition of the term. She refers to “White supremacy” as “a political, economic and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.” See: Andrea Gibbons, “The Five Refusals of White Supremacy,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 77, no. 3-4 (2018): 730.

CHAPTER 1

LAND AND LABOUR: FIRST NATIONS AND RAILROAD COLONIALISM IN WESTERN CANADA

“Our policy was this: That the lands of the Northwest ought to build the Canadian Pacific Railway.”

– Sir Charles Tupper, Minister of Railways and Canals¹

Canada has a long history of dealing in land, which was emphasized in the late nineteenth century with the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). In the first half of the 1880s, the Dominion had the CPR built across 4,442 kilometers of land from Lake Nipissing, Ontario to Port Moody, British Columbia. To get the railway built, the Dominion agreed in 1881 to give the Canadian Pacific Railway Company (CP) subsidies of \$25,000,000 and of 101,171,410 hectares (25,000,000 acres) of land for the construction of the railway. The Dominion granted the railway company desirable lands along the railway in the prairies, which the CP then sold to settlers and speculators for profit. The Dominion also agreed to “extinguish the Indian title affecting the lands herein appropriated, and to be hereafter granted in aid of the railway.”² The railway both required Canada’s accumulation of land and it asserted Canada’s authority over the extended territory in the west. It enabled the settlement of the prairies by

¹ Charles Tupper, H.L. Langevin, J.B. Plumb, and Thomas White, “The Pacific Railway Speeches Delivered by Hon. Sir Charles Tupper, K.C.M.G., Minister of Railways and Canals., Hon. H.L. Langevin, C.B., Minister of Public Works., J.B. Plumb., Esq., M.P., (Niagara.), Thomas White, Esq., M.P., (Cardwell.) During the Debates in the House of Commons – Session 1880,” folder 19, box 2017, The Wallace B. Chung and Madeline H. Chung Collection, University of British Columbia Archives.

² W.C. Van Horne, J.H. McTavish, and Chas. Drinkwater, *The Canadian Pacific Railway: traversing the great wheat region of the Canadian Northwest* (New York: American Bank Note Co., circa 1886), Archives / Collection and Fonds, Local class no. G3401.P3 1886. C36 H1, box 2000233135, item no. 183861, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/redirect?app=fonandcol&id=183861&lang=eng>, Library and Archives Canada, Local class no. G3401.P3 1886. C36 H1, box 2000233135, item no. 183861; *The Canadian Pacific Railway Contract Between the Government of the Dominion of Canada and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, also The Consolidated Railway Act (1879), and the Act of 1881 Amending It* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1882), 6, Canadiana, Monographs, FC 02 0203 no. 02046, <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.02046/1>.

national and international immigrants. It also extended westwards the economic and military authority of Central Canada. A claim to the land was needed to justify the authority and existence of the Dominion. Resultingly, the railway made real what the treaties envisaged in bringing Indigenous peoples under the control of the government and dispossessing them of their land.

The Dominion began to prepare for the construction of the transcontinental railway in the early 1870s. In 1870, the Dominion purchased the prairie territories and maintained control of the land, at least in part to facilitate the construction of the railway. Similarly, the next year, when British Columbia included the construction of the railway as one of its terms to join Confederation, the province agreed to convey to the Dominion a maximum of 32 kilometres (20 miles) on each side of the length of the railway.³ However, while these agreements added to the territory over which the Dominion laid claim, it did not give the nation-state title to the land. The land was home to First Nations people first. When colonizers brought the concept of land title to what is now known as North America, the British generally recognized Indigenous peoples' right to their territories and required that the Crown extinguish these rights before the land could be settled or sold.⁴ The Dominion, therefore, began to make treaties with First Nations in the prairies throughout the 1870s, which the Dominion claimed gave Canada legal title over the land. This was the landscape that set the stage for the construction of the CPR.

³ Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 47; *Order of Her Majesty in Council admitting British Columbia into the Union, dated the 16th day of May, 1871* (Windsor, England, 1871), c. 11, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/pl1t41.html>.

⁴ Andrew Graybill, "Rangers, Mounties, and the Subjugation of Indigenous Peoples, 1870-1885," *Great Plains Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (2004): 91; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 136. See also "Royal Proclamation of 1763," in *British Royal proclamations relating to America, 1603-1783*, ed. Clarence S. Brigham (Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 1911), 212-218, <https://archive.org/details/britishroyalproc12briguoft/page/n3/mode/2up>. British Columbia, Newfoundland and parts of Quebec were not beholden to this proclamation.

Although the CPR had a significant impact on First Nations in Western Canada, historians rarely focus on its construction when considering First Nations history. This is largely because the CPR was constructed in conjunction with several other colonial strategies that overshadow the railway. In the first two decades of the Dominion of Canada's existence, prairie First Nations lost their main food source, the bison; First Nations and Canada negotiated treaties in the prairies; the reserve system was established to move First Nations onto small plots of land and make space for settlers; the pass system restricted First Nations to those reserves; Canada attempted to make First Nations agricultural people; the first residential schools were established; and the *Indian Act, 1876* was passed.⁵ The situation was different in British Columbia, where treaties were not signed with First Nations—except for the Douglas Treaties of the 1850s—and there was less of a push for First Nations to take up western agriculture due to the mountain terrain. These policies were enforced by the state and resisted by Indigenous peoples to varying degrees of success; however, collectively, these policies speak to a White supremacist system of control.⁶ While the Dominion did not have a single, practicable policy for Indigenous peoples, its ad hoc decisions shed a light on the general plan to settle the west and construct the railway.

The construction of the CPR was part of an imperial strategy that Manu Karuka called “railroad colonialism” in his book *Empire's Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad*. He defined railroad colonialism as “territorial expansion through financial logics and corporate organization, using unfree imported laborers, blending the

⁵ The Métis were also greatly affected by the construction of the CPR, as seen in part in the North-West Resistance of 1885. However, a study of the Métis and the railway involves an analysis of Métis nationalism and is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁶ For more information on state policy regarding Indigenous peoples, see also: J.R. Miller, “Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy,” *Ethnohistory* 37, no. 4 (1990): 386-415, <https://doi.org/10.2307/482861>.

economic and military functions of the state, materializing in construction projects across the colonized world.”⁷ Railroad colonialism relies on three strategies to subjugate the Indigenous peoples and impose a new nation-state on the land and people: continental imperialism, countersovereignty, and modes of relationship. In this way, Karuka recognized that the nation-state was not a natural governing structure. Through continental imperialism, he resituated the nation as an imperial structure maintained through perpetual colonial occupation.

Countersovereignty refers to the imposition of the Western nation-state on Indigenous nations in a violent reaction to Indigenous sovereignty. The third strategy, modes of relationship, refers to the ways in which capitalism works to destroy and replace existing forms of production relationships.⁸ Karuka tied imperialism, nationalism, and capitalism to the ways in which we understand the history of railways in North America.

Although Karuka wrote about the construction of railroads in the United States of America, his framework is relevant to understanding the railways in Canada. The Central Pacific Railroad (CPRR) was built two decades before the CPR and a lot of railway construction in Canada drew on the knowledge and labour force in America. However, the historical narratives of these railways differ greatly. In American history, the CPRR highlights the work of American corporations and capitalism. In Canada, the construction of the CPR was not a financial success story. In 1873, Macdonald’s Conservative government was involved in a political scandal for having accepted bribes to influence the bidding on the CPR contract. Macdonald resigned as Prime Minister and the construction of the railway was delayed for several years. Even after construction was underway, the CP struggled financially. In addition to government subsidies for the construction, the CP required further financial assistance from the government over the next

⁷ Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, xiv.

⁸ Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, xii-xiii.

four years, to the point where the company almost declared bankruptcy in 1885 before being rescued by the Dominion.⁹ The national mythology of the CPR, therefore, relied less on the financial success of the railway and more on engineering and national unification. I apply Karuka's framework by examining the role of colonialism and capitalism in the national mythology of the CPR.

This chapter also takes a much narrower approach to this history than Karuka. In *Empire's Tracks*, Karuka interrogated a breadth of American government policies relating to the construction of the CPRR and relations with Lakota, Pawnee, and Cheyenne people and took a detailed look into First Nations' economies. He fit the railway into the expansive colonial, capitalist system. This chapter examines how the nation was founded in colonialism and capitalism by looking at the experiences of First Nations. I apply Karuka's framework as I build on and bring together research previously undertaken by Hugh A. Dempsey, Andrea Laforet and Annie York, Nadine Schuurman, and Gordon Robert Lyall to inform a broader understanding of the role of the CPR in colonizing western Canada. Dempsey examined how Plains First Nations understood the CPR as the railway was introduced and constructed, altering their lives forevermore. However, Dempsey's defeatist history could use a re-examination in light of developments in postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. Laforet and York, Schuurman, and Lyall wrote about the impact of the construction of major infrastructure, including the CPR, through First Nations communities in British Columbia. The differences in my approach to this history are the broader regional scope, the focus solely on the CPR, and the emphasis on nationalism.¹⁰

⁹ D.C. Masters, "Financing the C.P.R., 1880-5," *The Canadian Historical Review* 24, no. 4 (1943): 350-361; A.A. den Otter, "Nationalism and the Pacific Scandal," *The Canadian Historical Review* 69, no. 3 (1988): 315-339.

¹⁰ Dempsey, "The Fearsome Fire Wagons," 55-70; Laforet and York, *Spuzzum*, 23-37; Schuurman, "Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway," 19-39; Lyall, "They Smashed It Right Through," 67-99.

This chapter looks at the relationship between the CPR and First Nations in Western Canada and what that relationship says about Canadian nationalism. I re-situate the history of the railway in a history of colonialism and capitalism. First Nations' labour and land was crucial to the construction of the railway, and they played a significant role in both assisting and resisting the construction. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first two sections look at the experiences of the Siksikai'tsitapi (the Blackfoot People of Siksika Nation) and the Stoney Nakoda in Treaty 7 territory (now Alberta). The first section examines how the preparation for and construction of the railway impacted Treaty 7 First Nations' relationship with the land through the signing of the treaty, the allotment of reserves, and the acquisition of rights-of-way. The second section examines the impact of the railway on Treaty 7 economies, from the disruption of their ways of life to their employment on the CPR. The third section examines the impact of the railway on the Stó:lō, Nlaka'pamux and Secwépemc people—with whom Canada did not sign treaties—and on their land and their economies in British Columbia. I have chosen to focus on these First Nations due to the significant impact of the CPR on these nations and on the availability of primary and secondary sources pertaining specifically to these First Nations and the railway. I argue that the CPR was a tool of colonialism and capitalism used to dispossess Indigenous peoples, destroy their modes of relationship, and incorporate them into the capitalist economy.

East of the Mountains: Treaty 7 and the Railway

Treaty 7 was the cornerstone between the Rocky Mountains and the rest of the prairies. It was signed in 1877 in the foothills of the mountains at Blackfoot Crossing by Canada and the three nations making up the Blackfoot Confederacy—Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), and Piikani (Peigans)—as well as the Stoney Nakoda Nations and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee). Treaty 7 was

the last treaty the Dominion negotiated to secure the prairies for the construction of the railway in the 1870s.¹¹ The previous Numbered Treaties had been signed in the southern prairies from western Ontario to what is now southern Alberta between 1871 and 1876, and another treaty would not be signed for another twenty years.

When negotiating Treaty 7, Canada wanted a negotiation that reflected its own understanding of government and power. Its hierarchal understanding of government made it difficult for the Dominion to conceive of the equality and individuality of the nations in the Blackfoot Confederacy. Chief Crowfoot of Siksika Nation was, therefore, elevated from spokesperson for to leader of Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Stoney Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina. These nations recognized Crowfoot only as the lead negotiator, but Canada viewed him as the head of all the nations. This was only one of several issues with the negotiation of Treaty 7, which included: 1) that the treaty was written in English, a language native to the settlers, which thereby disadvantaged First Nations who were at the mercy of fallible translations; 2) that the treaty was based on settler conceptions of private property and land surrender, which were unfamiliar concepts to First Nations who understand the land through a reciprocal and stewardly relationship; and 3) that the treaty negotiations began inequitably, as Canada came to the negotiation table with the treaty document already written. However, the treaty was not initially a colonial imposition on First Nations. For First Nations, the treaty was and is an agreement of reciprocity and peace between nations. Their traditions and requests were notably part of the treaty. It is Canada's strict adherence to the written text of the treaty that territorializes the nation through the imposition of Canadian countersovereignty, its laws, and its relationship to land as property on First Nations. The treaty was also a strategy of countersovereignty, "a project of

¹¹ Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council, Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter, and Dorothy First Rider, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996; 1997), 209.

balancing the chaos and violence of colonialism on one side of the ledger—that of the (implicitly recognized) Indigenous sovereign—in order to establish political and economic space for the settler sovereign.”¹² First Nations’ acceptance of these treaties implied and was sought as an acceptance of Canadian nationhood.

In 1997, Treaty 7 Elders published their oral traditions on and recollections of the signing of the treaty in a book titled *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*. Siksika Elders explained that they understood the treaty as a peace treaty in which they would stop fighting the Crees and other First Nations. They also allowed Canada to use the land to plough it and place fence posts, but the land below what was needed for agricultural purposes were not on loan. In return, they would receive \$12 per capita per year; however, they did not realize this was only the initial payment and that subsequent payments would be for \$5 per capita per year, with Chiefs receiving \$25 and minor Chiefs and Councillors receiving \$15. According to Victoria McHugh, wife to the late Chief Clarence McHugh who was Chief in the 1950s and 1960s, the First Nations leaders were divided on the topic of the treaty. Old Sun, Yellow Horse, and Running Rabbit opposed the treaty and many leaders stepped away from negotiations for a few days.¹³

¹² Karuka considered countersovereignty as the way in which “[t]he United States declares its existence in reaction to complex networks of relationship between humans, nonhuman life forms, and inanimate processes that together constitute a distinct place in the world.” In the negotiation of Treaty 7, countersovereignty can be found in the way that Canada reactively asserted its ownership to land and sought to impose its authority and cultural worldviews on First Nations. See: Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, 2, xii; Keith D. Smith, *Liberalism, Surveillance and Resistance: Indigenous Communities in Western Canada, 1877-1927* (Au Press, 2009), 153-154; J.R. Miller, “Compact, Contract, Covenant: The Evolution of First Nations Treaty-Making,” in *Reconsidering Confederation: Canada’s Founding Debates, 1864-1999*, ed. Daniel Heide, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2018), 19-52.

¹³ Lucien M. Hanks, Jr. and Jane Richardson Hanks, *Tribe Under Trust: A Study of the Blackfoot Reserve of Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 11; Treaty 7 Elders, et al., *The True Spirit, 75-77; Copy of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7, Made 22nd Sept., and 4th Dec., 1877, between Her Majesty the Queen and the Blackfeet and Other Indian Tribes, at the Blackfoot Crossing of Bow River and Fort McCleod*, Canadiana, Monographs, 43117, <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.43117/3>.

In the 1970s, Chief John Snow and Peter Wesley, whom Snow quoted, related a similar perspective from the Stoney Nakoda Nations. Wesley's mother was at the negotiations and could understand the conversations held in Cree between the Lieutenant Governor and the Chiefs. Wesley explained: "The Chief had been told that he could still use his land in the same manner as before and there would be no interruption either, these were the final words put forth by the Governor through the interpreter."¹⁴ Chief Snow contextualized Wesley's comment, stating:

It seems that some of this misunderstanding was intentionally allowed by the government because it was to its advantage to extinguish title to Indian land as quickly as possible. By creating a 'legal' situation in which it could soon send out surveyors and make legislation stating that there must be legal land descriptions and titles to the land, the government set its own stage for control of our land and resources. The government kept these papers in its office and therefore controlled the land; my people had very little say, if any at all, about the land after the treaties were signed.¹⁵

Snow argued that much of the current issues with the treaty derived from these cultural misunderstandings and language barriers, some of which were intentional. The treaty, which was purported to be one of peace and friendship, was really about the control of land.

Around the same time that Snow was writing, settler historians began to also challenge the cultural misunderstanding thesis and the idea that the Dominion had benevolent intentions. Narratives in which Canadians dealt honourably with First Nations people were part of the Canadian national mythos, which compared Canada's approach to American frontier violence.

¹⁴ Interview with Peter Wesley, Big Horn Reserve, Stoney Research Library, Tape E.H.; "E", Side 1, April 1971, quoted in Chief John Snow, *These Mountains are our Sacred Places: The Story of the Stoney Indians* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1977), 29.

¹⁵ Snow, *These Mountains*, 29

John L. Tobias argued that the Dominion intended to ‘civilize’ and assimilate Indigenous peoples into settler society.¹⁶ Tobias made it clear that it was First Nations’ pressure on the government that initiated the treaty process and it was their insistence that ensured the inclusion of some of the more beneficial terms for First Nations. More recently, historian Sheldon Krasowski built on these arguments by looking at Treaties 1 to 7 as a treaty bundle and examining the Dominion’s approach to treaties throughout the 1870s. He identified a common negotiation strategy across the treaties, in which the Dominion’s representatives were “to discuss only the benefits of treaty and to ignore the liabilities, including the surrender clause.”¹⁷ Krasowski concluded by supporting the position that Indigenous peoples never surrendered the land.

However, the nation is predicated on the ownership of the land, thereby necessitating Canada’s strict adherence to the letter of the treaty. The claim to the land is the foundation over which Canada asserts its authority. The territorialization of the nation is a component of “continental imperialism”—as there are no natural national borders, the colonial nation must claim land through conquest. Here, the conquest was the colonial process and the imposition of infrastructure. Karuka explained that “The capture and transformation of putatively free land into a space of liberal imperialist freedoms occurs through infrastructure”, which then enabled the occupation of that land.¹⁸

The terms of the contract to build the transcontinental railway indicated that Canada would give the CP 101,171,410 hectares of land between Winnipeg and Jasper House, northwest of Calgary. The land was intended for settlement, as the contract noted that “should any of such sections consist in a material degree of land not fairly fit for settlement, the Company shall not

¹⁶ John L. Tobias, “Canada’s Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885,” *Canadian Historical Review* 64, no. 4 (1983): 519-548.

¹⁷ Sheldon Krasowski, *No Surrender: The Land Remains Indigenous* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2019), 2.

¹⁸ Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, 173.

be obliged to receive them as part of such grant”.¹⁹ It was in the CP’s interest to settle the West, both to make money on its land grants and to encourage traffic along the line. The CP was quick to promote immigration, establishing the Canadian Pacific Railway Colonization Bureau in order to do so. The CP disseminated pamphlets in various European languages throughout the U.S. and Europe to promote immigration. The CP established experimental and demonstration farms in the prairies to test agriculture in the prairies and to promote farming. It also established hotels along the line to encourage travel. The railway brought many immigrants to settle in Western Canada. These actions all contributed to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples by White settlers. In 1870, there had been fewer than 2,000 White settlers in the prairies, with the majority of the population being composed of Indigenous peoples. By 1881, the number of White people in the prairies had quadrupled. The population of European immigrants further exploded in anticipation of and following the construction of the CPR, increasing by the tens of thousands. By the turn of the century, the prairie territories were populated by more than a couple hundred thousand White people, while the number of Indigenous peoples had been halved.²⁰ The CPR supported the occupation of the lands claimed by Canada through the promotion and transportation of immigrants into Western Canada.

Within a few years of the signing of Treaty 7, life began to look dramatically different for First Nations on the plains. While the bison population had been decreasing rapidly in the years

¹⁹ *The Canadian Pacific Railway Contract*, 9.

²⁰ Hedges, *Building the Canadian West*, 95, 91, 409; David C. Corbett, *Canada’s Immigration Policy: A Critique* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 11, 13; Chester Martin, *Dominion Lands Policy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1938; 1973), 10; *The Calgary Herald* (Calgary, AB), September 10, 1884; *The Calgary Herald* (Calgary, AB), July 23, 1884; *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), October 20, 1883; Sidney L. Harring, “Dispossession, Ecocide, Genocide: Cattle Ranching and Agriculture in the Destruction of Hunting Cultures on the Canadian Prairies,” in *Genocide on Settler Frontiers: When Hunter-Gatherers and Commercial Stock Farmers Clash*, edited by Adhikari Mohamed (Berghahn Books, Incorporated, 2015), 263, 276; Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*, 52; Canada, *Census of Canada, 1880-1881* (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1882); Canada, *Census of Canada, 1901* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1902). Ethnic information – categorized as “the Origins of the People” – was not surveyed and shared in the 1891 census.

leading up to the treaty, the herds were gone from Canada by 1879. Indian Commissioner Dewdney provided relief to Treaty 7 First Nations in 1879 and encouraged them to go south, following the bison, to save the Dominion resources and the responsibility of having to provide relief. However, First Nations began to return north to Canada in 1881 after the bison were gone from Montana.²¹ At this point, the Dominion allotted reserves on which returning First Nations could settle and used reserves as a tool to subjugate them.

The Dominion used several administrative tools to control the land, including the allocation of reserves. According to historian Karen Brglez, “Through governmental procedures such as the land survey [for settlement and reserves], implementation of individual title, document registration, and map creation, states consolidated their rule.”²² Through these procedures, the Dominion divided Western Canada into quadrants and imposed a colonial way of understanding the land. Historian Sarah Carter further explained that: “The grid transformed Indigenous land into the ‘public domain,’ meaning it was no longer owned by or available to the First Nations.”²³ The administration of land gave the Dominion control over it and left small, government-sanctioned reserves for First Nations. Once on reserves, Indian Agents encouraged First Nations to pursue agriculture—First Nations had their own agricultural traditions and welcomed western agriculture, only to have their successes in such endeavours severely hampered by the regulations and limitations imposed by the government—and to abandon their cultural traditions and way of life. According to the western thinking of the time, agriculture was a step above hunting and gathering on the ladder to civilization. Reserves also provided a locale

²¹ Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U.S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), 40; John A. Macdonald to John Douglas Sutherland Campbell, Ottawa, December 31, 1882, in *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December 1881*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1882), xxxvi-xxxvii.

²² Karen Brglez, “Surveying Indigenous Spaces on the Canadian Prairies: The Case of William Wagner,” *Prairie History* 6 (2021): 5.

²³ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 39. See also Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 37, 101.

in which missionaries could establish churches and schools in which to convert and assimilate Indigenous peoples. Reserves are colonial tools of domination used to situate First Nations, who hunted and lived on vast expanses of land, at a static location where it was easier for the state to control them, to facilitate their ‘civilization,’ and to surveil them.

The text of Treaty 7 provided the First Nations with three reserves amounting to one square mile for each family—one for Siksika, Kainai and Tsuut’ina; one for Piikani; and one for the Stoney Nakoda Nations. The CPR only went through the Siksika and Stoney Nakoda reserves in the nineteenth century, so I focus on those reserves in this chapter.

The Stoney Nakoda Nations are made up of three nations—Bears paw, Chiniki, and Goodstoney—and only one nation had a permanent camp site at Morleyville, where the reserve was to be located. The Chiefs of the three nations identified the land between Jumping Pound Creek, Bow River, and Ghost River as the area where they wanted the reserve to be surveyed. However, their wishes were ignored and most of them were not even there when it was surveyed. Recounting what he was told by Chief Bears paw, Elder Bill Mclean explained that the three nations were not all present when surveyors came to Morleyville the first two times, resulting in the following survey:

On the third visit, the Stoney chiefs were not back yet. In those days, only some of the Stoneys had been collecting their treaty money [annuity]. When they collected their money, they sign for it. Their numbers [population] were determined by counting those signatures or marks that were made by the payee on the annuity pay list. And using these figures, the size of the reserve was determined.

I believe it was on the basis of 128 acres per person—something in that area. They [surveyors] had been waiting for the chiefs to come back, but since they didn't, they used annuity pay list figures and the reserve size was determined, but almost half of the Stoney population had not been coming back for their annuity. The areas the chiefs had chosen when the treaty was made using the natural boundaries of the rivers were disregarded.²⁴

There were many issues with the allotment of this reserve, from the miscalculation of First Nations populations to the disregard of First Nations' wishes about the locations of the reserve. McLean's account is an example of one of many problems with the implementation of treaties and can speak to the disregard the Dominion had toward Indigenous sovereignty and the authority of the Chiefs as Canada sought to subject First Nations to its state administration.

There were also issues with the joint reserve for Siksika, Kainai and Tsuut'ina, which was to be surveyed by the Bow, South Saskatchewan, and Red Deer Rivers. At Kainai's request for a separate reserve on the Belly River, Kainai and Tsuut'ina were allocated reserves elsewhere.²⁵ This meant that only the Siksikai'tsitapi remained on the joint reserve. The Department of Indian Affairs did not immediately seek a surrender of the portions of the reserve that were intended for Kainai and Tsuut'ina. Indian Agent C.E. Denny expressed concerns about such a surrender, worrying that

There are always people who make it their business to tell the Indians how valuable their land will be along the line of railroad, and as the reserve at present runs down to the mouth of the Red Deer River, and the Blackfeet consider it

²⁴ Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit*, 167-168; *Copy of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7*, 4,8.

²⁵ Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy*, 15; C.E. Denny to John A. Macdonald, Fort McLeod, November 10, 1882, in *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1882*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1883), 172.

belongs to them, the longer the transfer is delayed, the more difficult it will be to make. It should be made, and the land comprising the reserve surveyed as soon as possible.²⁶

While the issue of the reserve was being settled, Denny prepared to have the railway run through the Blackfoot Reserve. Indian Commissioner Dewdney and Colonel James McLeod were authorized to obtain this surrender for the railway from Chief Crowfoot in March 1881. However, Crowfoot only returned to Canada in the spring of 1881, after heading south across the international border to follow the bison herds in 1879, and Dewdney and McLeod decided to wait until the Siksikai'tsitapi had settled on the reserve before seeking the surrender.²⁷

On April 16, 1882, Lieutenant Colonel Irvine reported:

The Blackfeet have for some time back, been uneasy, on account of the Railroad passing near their reserve. They have been told a good many stories about the harm it is going to do them etc. I spoke to the whole camp on this and other subjects, and explained the benefit they would derive from the road passing near them; ... I think it would be well, as surveyors, and working parties on the line of railroad get near the Crossing, that a police post were built, somewhere, near the Crossing, say at the mouth of High River, this would be a check on the Indians[.]²⁸

²⁶ C.E. Denny to John A. Macdonald, Fort McLeod, November 10, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 172.

²⁷ John A. Macdonald, "Surrenders from the Blackfoot Indians of lands, Blackfoot Crossing and Bow and Belly Rivers required, C.P. R'y [Canadian Pacific Railway] - S.G.I.A [Superintendent General of Indian Affairs], 1883/04/12, recd. [recommends] empowering Lt. Col. [Lieutenant...]" RG2-A-1-a, Privy Council Office, volume 430, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/redirect?app=ordincou&id=22433&lang=eng>, Library and Archives Canada, RG2-A-1-a, volume 430, Reel C-3343.

²⁸ Lieutenant Colonel Irvine to E. Dewdney, Fort MacLeod, April 16, 1882, in "Agent Denny Reporting on Various Matters in the Fort Macleod District," RG10, volume 3600, file 1737, Archives / Collections and Fonds, Library and Archives Canada, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=FonAndCol&IdNumber=2058780&q=RG10,%20Volume%20number:%203600,%20Microfilm%20reel%20number:%20C-10104>.

Irvine also recommended that 75 men be sent to Fort Walsh as a show of force in response to the Siksikai'tsitapi's unrest about the railway. In response to his concerns, Irvine was instructed on May 17, 1882 to "inform Indians that if Canadian Pacific Railway passes through their reserves they will be compensated for right of way and proximity of Railway will increase value of their land and will give them profitable employment."²⁹

On November 10, 1882, Indian Agent Denny reported to Macdonald, Prime Minister and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, that he had spoken to the Siksikai'tsitapi about the railway. He wrote:

The Blackfeet and other Indians along the line of railroad have shown no signs of being displeased at the railroad running through the country, but only show curiosity, which is to be expected, as they are totally ignorant of what a railroad is.

I have on many occasions spoken to the Blackfeet on this subject, and have been asked many questions. I have pointed out to them the advantage they will derive from the road running near them, and they appear satisfied.³⁰

Despite various discussions between the Siksikai'tsitapi and the Indian Agent, the Siksikai'tsitapi were still "totally ignorant" on the subject. A close reading of his letter also suggests that the Siksikai'tsitapi were not displeased with the railway only because they did not fully understand it.

²⁹ Fred White to Lieutenant Colonel Irvine, Fort Walsh, May 17, 1882, RG10, volume 3600, file 1737, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/redirect?app=fonandcol&id=2058780&lang=eng>, Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 3600, file 1737; Lieutenant Colonel Irvine to Fred White, Fort Walsh, April 30, 1882, RG10, volume 3600, file 1737, <http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/redirect?app=fonandcol&id=2058780&lang=eng>, Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 3600, file 1737.

³⁰ C.E. Denny to John A. Macdonald, Fort McLeod, November 10, 1882, in *Annual Report, 1882*, 172. See also: Dempsey, "Fire Wagons," 56.

In April 1883, Macdonald reported that “the rapid construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway renders it imperative that a surrender of that portion of the Indian Reserve which would have belonged to the Blood Indians had they not been given another reserve further South, should be obtained from Blackfoot Chief ‘Crowfoot’ and his followers at an early date.”³¹ At this point in time, Dewdney and MacLeod were given the authority to obtain the surrender for a maximum of \$1,200.

In June, Dewdney and Macleod met with the Siksikai’tsitapi to obtain the surrender.

Dewdney reported the following events:

After holding a council among themselves, Crowfoot met and informed me what they had determined to ask for, and as this was considered by Colonel Macleod and myself advantageous both to the Indians and the Government, we agreed to their proposal, and the surrender was signed by the chiefs and principal head men on behalf of the Indians, and by Colonel Macleod and myself on behalf of the Government. During the negotiations Crowfoot, on the part of his Indians, thanked the Government for what was being done for them, and it is the first time in any experience among the Indians of the North-West, and I believe in the experience of my Co. Commissioner that Indians in council have Admitted that the Government was doing more for them than what was called for in the Treaty.³²

³¹ Macdonald, “Surrenders from the Blackfoot Indians of lands,” Library and Archives Canada, RG2-A-1-a, volume 430, Reel C-3343. See also: Superintendent General of Indian Affairs John A. Macdonald to Governor General of Canada, Ottawa, January 1, 1884, in *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1883*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1884).

³² E. Dewdney to John A. Macdonald, Regina, October 2, 1883, in *Annual Report 1883*, 98.

The new borders of the reserve meant that the CPR now formed its northern boundary. Treaty 7 First Nations surrendered the portions of the joint reserve which had been intended for Kainai and Tsuut'ina. The Siksikai'tsitapi also surrendered a strip of land which the treaty guaranteed them for ten years; in exchange, the Department of Indian Affairs was considering extending the northern part of the reserve.³³

While Dominion officials depicted the surrender as an important occasion in which Canada helped the First Nation, Siksika oral traditions suggest that they might have been tricked into surrendering the land for the CPR. Elder Philip Many Bears recalled that Dominion officials said the railway would be temporary and Siksika Elders were unsure of exactly what was promised in exchange for the right-of-way:

They said that flour rations were promised and Crowfoot was to get a free pass to travel on the railway in perpetuity. Arthur Yellow Fly thought that the agreement involved 'free train' rides for the chiefs 'and half-price for the rest of the tribe. Some members of the tribe remained suspicious of Crowfoot, of whom it was said, 'He always had money.'³⁴

Lucien M. Hanks Jr. and Jane Richardson Hanks, a psychologist and an anthropologist respectively, expanded on the Siksikai'tsitapi's account, having visited with and studied the Siksikai'tsitapi between 1938 and 1941. They reviewed official documents and conducted interviews with the Siksikai'tsitapi and Department of Indian Affairs officials. Based on this research, they paint a clearer picture of the surrender. The CP approached Chief Crowfoot directly to obtain a surrender for a right-of-way for the purpose of building the railway between

³³ John A. Macdonald to Governor General of Canada, Ottawa, January 1, 1884, in *Annual Report 1883*, liv; *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), September 22, 1883.

³⁴ Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit*, 166.

Calgary and Medicine Hat. Crowfoot would not have had the authority to make a deal on behalf of the other Chiefs, but White settlers had long recognized Crowfoot as the sole leader of all Siksikai'tsitapi in accordance with their own understanding of hierarchies. The Hankses explained:

It is certain, however, that Crowfoot did not bring the matter to the attention of the chiefs but acted on it himself. No Indian objected when the railway came through; it was perhaps viewed as another uncontrollable aspect of the treaty. In a public ceremony the railway company gave Crowfoot a medal which entitled him to unlimited transportation. After Crowfoot's death, however, a peculiarity appeared. A cheque for \$70 came each month from the railway company to the head chief of the east end of the reserve, in this case to Three Bulls, the new chief and brother of Crowfoot. Not knowing its purpose, Three Bulls inquired and discovered that Crowfoot had been secretly accepting this sum since the granting of the right-of-way to the C.P.R. This sum should not be construed as a bribe, but as a perfectly above-board part of the agreement with the company.³⁵

The Hankses were unable to identify what exactly happened between Crowfoot and the CP, but we can infer the details of the deal. The Hankses support the Siksika Elders' claims that Crowfoot received money and free transportation from the CP for the surrender.

One of the major differences between the Department's account of the surrender and that of the Siksikai'tsitapi and the Hankses is the intentionality of the surrender. Dominion officials discussed the surrender for the CPR in conjunction with surrenders of the part of the reserve that would have belonged to Kainai and Tsuut'ina and the strip of land with which the Treaty

³⁵ Hanks and Hanks, *Tribe under Trust*, 22.

provided to Siksika for ten years. The railway was constructed on the land that would have would have been Kainai's part of the joint reserve, so the distinction between that surrender and the surrender for the CPR was blurred. Siksika oral history and the Hankses' research, on the other hand, indicate that there was a separate meeting for a surrender, specific to the railway. Perhaps, the Dominion intentionally blurred the lines between the surrenders—this would not be the first time the Dominion intentionally withheld information.

We do not know what kind of pressure the company might have put on Crowfoot to make a deal or what was communicated, and we cannot know what Crowfoot thought, especially since he kept quiet on the subject. However, the Hankses inferred that

His shame and fear in so doing [making the surrender] is argued not only by the secret being kept from his own brother and successor, but also from the fact that subsequent head chiefs have uniformly rejected the payment as tainted money. Furthermore, Crowfoot, though honoured in other ways by his own people, has been roundly condemned for this action because he did not consult the other chiefs.³⁶

The deal Crowfoot and the company made was not one that seems to have benefited Siksika Nation nor was it done with the community's knowledge and approval.

Despite the confusion and the secrecy on the topic of the surrender, Crowfoot's ostensible acceptance of the railway seems to have convinced the Stoney Nakoda Nations of the benefits or inevitability of the CPR. In 1883, Commissioner Dewdney also visited the Stoney Nakoda Nations for the purpose of obtaining a surrender for the railway which would pass through the

³⁶ Hanks and Hanks, *Tribe under Trust*, 22-23.

reserve from one end to the other. Upon enquiring about how the First Nation felt about the reserve, he reported that he

found them quite reasonable, and in hopes that the young men would be able to get work. ... Already the news of negotiations with the Blackfeet had reached the Stonies, and these Indians informed me (as subsequently did the Sarcees, Peigans and Bloods), that they all were of the same mind as Crowfoot, and ‘what he said, they all said.’ Although the Stonies and Peigans had no interest in the fresh negotiations with the Blackfeet, still they looked up to Crowfoot as their chief, whose judgment they had confidence in, and whose advice they are always ready to take.³⁷

Dewdney reiterated some misconceptions about First Nations governance structures, but what is most notable about his statement is that he seems to suggest that the other Treaty 7 First Nations were aware of Crowfoot’s surrender of the right-of-way.

Despite discussions regarding the surrender of the right-of-way in 1883, it would take the CP a decade to pay the Stoney Nakoda Nations for the land. The date the CP occupied the right-of-way is unclear. However, it would have been occupied by 1886, as the Department of Indian Affairs reported on the impact of railway on the Stoney Nakoda Nations that year. Chief Snow, however, recalled that “the Canadian Pacific Railway began negotiations with the Indian Affairs Branch in 1889 to compensate the Stoneys for getting a right-of-way through the reserve at

³⁷ E. Dewdney to John A. Macdonald, Regina, October 2, 1883, in *Annual Report 1883*, 98. In spring 1883, the CPR began to survey the right-of-way through the Stoney Nakoda reserve. The CP was to pay \$1.25 per acre, as well as interest from the day of occupation to payment. Department of Indian Affairs acknowledged this payment in 1983, although interest was only calculated from 1889. In 1978, the Stoney Nakoda Nations submitted a claim for the unpaid interest on the 1893 transaction regarding this right-of-way and, as of the 21st century, the Stoney Nakoda Nations sued Encana Corporation and the CP for trespass and mineral rights, which they claim to never have surrendered. See *Stoney Nakoda Nations v. Canada*, [2016] ABQB 193, 30; and Order-in-Council P.C. 1614 dated June 2, 1893, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=ordincou&IdNumber=57196&q=stoney%20right-of-way>.

Morley”.³⁸ He reported that the CP originally offered to pay \$1.00 per acre, which was less than the regulation price for an acre at \$2.50. Snow recalled:

at no time during the four years of negotiations is it recorded that my people were called upon for their views as to what they considered adequate compensation. Indeed, my father used to tell me that he had been told by our elders that when the railway came through the reserve, the Indian agent said that it was a government order. Undoubtedly, the agent tried to avoid the point for fear that the people might raise embarrassing questions.³⁹

In 1893, negotiations were settled and the CP agreed to pay \$1.25 per acre, the lowest rate for a right-of-way for the railway on Treaty 7 land. The CP paid a total of \$730.26 for the right-of-way, including interest.⁴⁰

The signing of the treaty, the implementation of the reserve system, and the preparation for the railway all worked to dispossess First Nations of their land and empower the colonial nation-state to establish and maintain its occupation of the land. The surrenders of the rights-of-way for the CPR pushed ahead quickly, under unclear and perhaps purposefully misleading terms, to the advantage of the Dominion and the CP. The construction of the railway—from the introduction of the concept of a railway to Treaty 7 First Nations to its completion—introduced much change over a short period of time. The CPR then and now stood as a mark of colonial domination.

³⁸ Snow, *These Mountains*, 61.

³⁹ Snow, *These Mountains*, 61.

⁴⁰ Order-in-Council P.C. 1614 dated June 2, 1893, <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=ordincou&IdNumber=57196&q=stoney%20right-of-way>

East of the Mountains: Economic Integration

In western ideology, the land was a resource which could be possessed and which was a means of production. In such a system, the railway came to facilitate the ownership and production of land, as well as the disruption of Indigenous relationships with the land. Through the introduction of capitalism, modes of production began to replace modes of relationship. The railway ravaged the land, affecting animal populations and disrupting Indigenous ways of life. In its destruction, it required that First Nations enter the capitalist economy and take up wage-labour—often on the railway itself.

In the mid-nineteenth century, First Nations people moved across the unenforced Canada-U.S. border, following the North American bison—colloquially known as buffalo—herds. By the late 1870s, the bison, which had once numbered in the tens of millions in North America, were scarce and First Nations in Canada were moving south to follow them. White settlers had hunted the bison to near extinction for their hide, which was used in the leather trade, and the American army had further enabled the destruction of the bison herd to force Indigenous peoples onto American reservations. In recounting stories of the years preceding Treaty 7, Victoria McHugh stated: “The buffalo was our main source of life and when it began to disappear we were in a dire situation. I believe the situation we were in helped the government to settle treaty with us more easily.” She recalled that “Crowfoot sent word to each tribe to consider making treaty so that it may provide them food.”⁴¹ Tom Yellowhorn of the Piikani—whose uncle, Chief Red Crow, was a signatory of Treaty 7—further argued that the “Canadian government agreed to kill buffalo off so that Indians would have no livelihood.”⁴²

⁴¹ Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit*, 75; Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare*, 31; Haring, “Dispossession, Ecocide, Genocide,” 268-269.

⁴² Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit*, 101.

Bison were important to Plains First Nations' way of life. Tsuut'ina leaders were elected in part based on their actions in the bison hunt. The Piikani used bison dung for fuel, ate the marrow from bison bones, and made clothing and tents out of bison hide. Every part of the bison was used, and they could live exclusively off bison for extended periods of time. Bison and Plains First Nations lived symbiotically together for centuries, if not millennia. Anishinaabekwe activist, economist and author Winona LaDuke explained that it is this co-evolutionary relationship between Indigenous peoples and animals that industrialism seeks to interrupt. She argued that the attempted extermination of the bison corresponded with the construction of railways in America, which transported hunters and hides.⁴³ Building on LaDuke's work, Karuka considered this co-evolutionary relationship in light on the concept of modes of relationship and capitalism's bid to destroy all other modes of relationship. He wrote: "Imperialism excels at proliferating capital into progressively fewer hands, and it does so by wrecking the ecological and social basis of life, through the interrelationship of state and corporation."⁴⁴ In this way, capitalist ideology and goals influenced settlers' supplantation of Indigenous peoples' relationships with the land and animals, installing cattle and Eurocentric agricultural practices in the plains to contribute to the national economy. This colonial desire to replace Indigenous modes of relationship with capitalism was replicated in Canada in Treaty 7, the creation of reserves, promotion of agriculturalism, and the construction of the railway. While the extermination of bison herds was not Canada's plan nor was it expected to happen so quickly, it speaks to the general destructive power of North American capitalism.

⁴³ Treaty 7 Elders et al., *The True Spirit*, 96, 98-99; Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1999), 2, 141.

⁴⁴ Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 31.

Despite Department officials' insistence about the benefits of the railway to the First Nation, the rawness of the deal became clear soon after construction started as First Nations began to be implicated in the capitalist economy as they interacted more with the arriving settlers. Indian Agent C.E. Denny reported that he had "to be continually on the watch to prevent people from encroaching on this reserve, cutting timber, & c., as timber on other sections is scarce." Denny did not indicate much concern regarding the encroachments of railway working parties on reserves. He reported that "as it could not be prevented the Indians allowed dried wood to be cut on receiving a small remuneration for the same." He seemed to find this outcome satisfactory as he wrote that "the settlers who have come in contact with the Indians have treated them well and kindly", although he anticipated this would change over time.⁴⁵ Despite Denny's claim that the Siksikai'tsitapi "expressed their willingness that the road should pass through the reserve", Commissioner Dewdney reported that "During the winter continual reports reached me of the unsettled feeling that existed among the Blackfeet on account of the railways passing so close to them and the fear that their reserve would be interfered with"—a concern Denny previously indicated was coming to pass.⁴⁶

The railway caused a lot of damage on the reserves, both to the people and the land—beyond the cutting, levelling, and clearing of the land for construction. In 1883, G.H. Wheatley, a farming instructor at Blackfoot Crossing, advised First Nations to keep their distance from the railway due to injuries and accidents. Indian Agent W. Pocklington also reported that a First Nation man's foot was crushed between two train cars. In 1885, Indian Agent Magnus Begg reported: "The Canadian Pacific Railway Company's engines caused a good deal of damage to the grass on the Stoney and Blackfoot reserves by fire, the fires having run over part of both

⁴⁵ C.E. Denny to John A. Macdonald, Fort Macleod, July 10, 1883, in *Annual Report 1883*, 81.

⁴⁶ E. Dewdney to John A. Macdonald, Regina, October 2, 1883, in *Annual Report 1883*, 102.

reserves.”⁴⁷ The trains destroyed so much grass that Begg was concerned that the First Nation’s horses might starve over the winter. Siksika and the Stoney Nakoda Nations, therefore, requested that the CP pay them \$1,000 to buy hay should they require it over the course of the winter. They had made a similar request the year prior in 1884, but they were not compensated for the damages caused to their reserves. The CPR also struck and killed horses. In 1885, Noa of the Stoney Nakoda Nations submitted a claim for \$40 for a horse killed by the CPR. Begg corroborated this claim, writing: “from what I can learn the horse was well worth this amount.”⁴⁸ It is unclear whether Noa received compensation, but the CP had a history of not compensating First Nations for their losses.

The railway left First Nations in a poor condition, despite purporting to help them. Even the things the Dominion thought would be beneficial to the First Nations only worked to integrate them into settler society. The Dominion was spending a lot of money on the administration of First Nations. They had anticipated the decline of the bison herds but had expected it to take longer for First Nations to require government assistance. The Dominion did not want to have to pay for this aid and other administration costs, so the Department of Indian Affairs sought ways for First Nations to increase their revenue. Selling Indigenous land was one way for them to make money, but integrating First Nations into the settler economy would provide them with a continuous revenue. Indian Agent Denny clearly states this connection in the following report:

⁴⁷ Magnus Begg to John A. Macdonald, Blackfoot Agency, NWT, July 28, 1885, in *Annual report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1885*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1886), 75; W. Pocklington to John A. Macdonald, Fort Macleod, July 25, 1884, in *Annual report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December 1884*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1885), 87; C.E. Denny to John A. Macdonald, Fort Macleod, July 10, 1883, in *Annual Report 1883*, 82.

⁴⁸ Magnus Begg to Indian Commissioner of Regina, Blackfoot Crossing, May 1, 1885, RG10, volume 1157, page 99, https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_t1471/1389.

Returning to the subject of the railroad running through the northern district next summer, some of our Indians, Sarcees or Stoneys, could be employed with advantage on the road, and others could be hired to cut tie timber either on the reserve (Stoney) or on other limits. The Stoneys are good axe men and so are the Sarcees. These Indians could easily be employed at this work, thereby earning their living and taking a burden off the Government.⁴⁹

Indian Agents anticipated that First Nations would be able to get paid for cutting timber and ties for the CPR, and for acting as packmen, carriers and guides for railway survey teams—and indeed they did.⁵⁰

The railway also disrupted Indigenous modes of life. On the Stoney Nakoda reserve, where plant-based agriculture was a less viable pursuit due to the mountainous terrain, hunting large animals continued to be an important way of living and of making money in the settler economy after settling on reserves. In 1884, Acting Indian Agent William Carnegie De Balinhard reported that:

The hunting on the Stony Reserve has not been so good as in times past, owing in a great measure to the railway and the advance of settlement. The Indians now have to go a long way before they can find game, and on several occasions relief has had to be sent out to help to bring them in, owing to failure in the game supply.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ C.E. Denny to John A. Macdonald, Fort McLeod, November 10, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 172.

⁵⁰ E. Dewdney to John A. Macdonald, Regina, December 15, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 196; John A. Macdonald to John Douglas Campbell, Undated, in *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1881*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1882), ix-xliii; C.E. Denny to John A. Macdonald, Fort McLeod, November 10, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 168-177; Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 78, 101.

⁵¹ William Carnegie De Balinhard to John A. Macdonald, Sarcee Reserve, August 6, 1886, in *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1886*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1887), 135. See also: John A. Macdonald to Governor General of Canada, Ottawa, January 1, 1887, *Annual Report 1886*, lii.

The limited hunting did not concern Indian Agents as First Nations had other means of making money, such as employment in conjunction with the construction of the railway.

Elsewhere, revenue from agriculturalism was expected to replace Indigenous modes of relationship. The expectation that First Nations would become an agricultural people was built into the treaty. Treaty 7 provided for “cattle for raising stock” and, for every family wanting to also undertake plant-based agriculture, “two hoes, one spade, one scythe, and two hay forks, and for every three families, one plough and one harrow, and for each Band, enough potatoes, barley, oats and wheat (if such seeds be suited for the locality of their Reserves) to plant the land actually broken up.”⁵² Efforts to make First Nations an agricultural people had several benefits for the Dominion—farming required less land and was more stationary than hunting, and the Dominion could lessen the amount of rations it had to provide First Nations after destroying their means of subsistence. Further, the state did not intend for Indigenous peoples to succeed as farmers, only to maintain themselves. This is evidenced by the severalty and peasant farming policies implemented on reserves in the prairies in the late 1880s. These policies restricted the amount of land an Indigenous farmer could farm, undermined collective farming on reserves, limited First Nations to ‘peasant’ farming methods, thereby reducing their output to subsistence levels, and identifying ‘surplus’ land that could be sold to settlers.⁵³

The Dominion pushed for the Siksikai’tsitapi to become assimilated and integrated into the national economy. Macdonald noted that “The reserve of the Blackfoot tribe, situated at the Blackfoot Crossing, on the north side of the Bow River, continues to give good returns for the work done upon it.”⁵⁴ G.W. Wheatley and E. Edwards worked as farming instructors on the

⁵² *Copy of Treaty and Supplementary Treaty No. 7*, 5.

⁵³ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 22, 37, 209-210; Chelsea Vowell, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* (Winnipeg: Highwater Press, 2016), 209.

⁵⁴ John A. Macdonald to Governor General of Canada, Ottawa, January 1, 1884 [sic], in *Annual Report 1884*, xlix.

reserves of Chiefs Crowfoot and Old Sun. They instructed the Siksikai'tsitapi in the ways of Western agriculture. By 1884, the Siksikai'tsitapi had over 40 hectares of land under cultivation. An industrial school was also established in 1884 at High River, near the Blackfoot Reserve. The school functioned in conjunction with the promotion of farming on the reserve as it was intended for "the education in the ordinary branches of learning and the instruction in industrial pursuits as well as the moral and social elevation of the Indian children who may be privileged to attend it."⁵⁵ These colonial strategies aimed to ensure that future generations would be integrated into the state and its economy.

Looking at the lands under cultivation and the ways First Nations were being integrated into colonial capitalism, Acting Indian Agent W. Pocklington reported that "we may say the Blackfoot are advancing."⁵⁶ However, the pace at which they were advancing, due to the ways the colonial state disadvantaged them, has put First Nations on unequal footing in the capitalist machine that still exists today. Not to mention that the concept of advancing is Eurocentric and draws on the concept of the ladder to civilization.

Through the Mountains: British Columbia and the Railway

British Columbia was also consumed by the construction of the railway. The CPR was built roughly along major rivers through the mountains—up the Fraser River to where it met the Thompson River at Lytton, then travelling northeast through Kamloops and past Salmon Arm to the Eagle River, which it would follow until it met the Illecillewaet River at Revelstoke, then southeast down the Columbia River and through Rogers Pass, branching off at Golden to follow the Kicking Horse River until it crossed into what is now Alberta at the Bow River. The railway would be built through 29 reserves, most of which are located along the Fraser and Thompson

⁵⁵ John A. Macdonald to Governor General of Canada, Ottawa, January 1, 1884 [sic], in *Annual Report 1884*, 1.

⁵⁶ W. Pocklington to John A. Macdonald, Fort Macleod, July 25, 1884, in *Annual Report 1884*, 87-89.

Rivers, in traditional Stó:lō (Coast Salish), Nlaka'pamux (Interior Salish), and Secwépemc (Interior Salish) territory.⁵⁷

British Columbia had its own policy on Indigenous affairs and the Dominion agreed to continue “a policy as liberal as that hitherto pursued by the British Columbia Government” when the administration of Indigenous policy and lands became part of the federal government’s jurisdiction through Confederation.⁵⁸ This language was purposefully vague and the policy was left undefined. With the exception of the Douglas Treaties in the 1850s, British Columbia did not sign treaties with First Nations and allocated significantly smaller reserves than the Dominion. On this basis, the province claimed that it was not required to allocate more than 4 hectares per family for reserves—which was significantly smaller than the square mile (259 hectares) provided for every family in Treaty 7. The Dominion proposed a compromise of 32 hectares per First Nations family, but the province pushed back against that. In 1876, the provincial and federal governments reached an agreement on the allocation of reserves in which they would establish an Indian Reserve Commission with three commissioners, one chosen by the province, one by the Dominion, and one chosen jointly. The three commissioners were intended to balance federal and provincial interests as they visited First Nations and allocated reserves. By 1878, Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, the jointly elected commissioner, became the sole Indian Reserve Commissioner.⁵⁹ That same year, the province reserved the Railway Belt, which stretched 32 kilometres wide along the length of the railway route, thereby allowing Canada to

⁵⁷ Lyall, “They Smashed It Right,” 78. Stó:lō Nation is made up of eleven First Nations communities: Aitchelitz; Leq’á:mel; Matsqui; Popkum; Skawahlook; Skowkale; Shxwha:y Village; Squiala; Sumas; Tzeachten; and Yakwekwioose. Nlaka’pamux Nation Tribal Council is made up of five member communities: Snepa; Nteq’em; Lytton; Skuppah; and Boothroyd.

⁵⁸ *Order of Her Majesty in Council admitting British Columbia into the Union, dated the 16th day of May, 1871* (Windsor, England, 1871), c. 11, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/pl1t41.html>.

⁵⁹ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 73-74, 95, 136.

circumnavigate the province's jurisdiction over the land and natural resources. The Railway Belt was federal Crown land and the Dominion could allocate reserves in this belt however it wished—even though the Railway Belt was not transferred to the Dominion until 1884.⁶⁰

In the last twenty-five years, several works have been published on the relationship between the railway and First Nations in British Columbia. In 1998, historian Andrea Laforet published *Spuzzum: Fraser Canyon Histories, 1808-1939* with the late Nlaka'pamux Elder Annie York. The book examines the historical relationship between the Nlaka'pamux people of Spuzzum and non-Indigenous peoples from Simon Fraser's arrival in Nlaka'pamux territory to the beginning of the Second World War. One chapter is dedicated to the period between 1860 and 1915 as Spuzzum people adapted to the construction of the CPR and the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) through their land and the ways these railways changed their economies. The railway went through the reserve and through the Anglican church on the reserve. The construction of railways also destroyed much of their economy, which was largely based on hunting and gathering, particularly fishing. The appropriation of the right-of-way for the CPR put the land on which Nlaka'pamux hunted, gathered, and fished under federal jurisdiction. In 1913, a rockfall caused by the construction of the CNR blocked the Fraser River and stopped fish from moving upriver. This caused a surplus of fishing downriver, in the vicinity of Spuzzum, and the Dominion put an embargo on fishing in the area. The railways also brought new work to the reserve, supplying wood and food to the railway workers, and working on track maintenance crews. The book demonstrates how the construction of the CPR through the reserve marked a change in the traditional Nlaka'pamux use of the land and economy.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Schuurman, "Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway," 23; Harris, *Making Native Space*, 138, 198.

⁶¹ Laforet and York, *Spuzzum*, 73, 84, 87, 91, 100-101, 192.

A couple years after *Spuzzum* was published, geographer Nadine Schuurman wrote an article on the material and social impacts of building three railways—the CPR, the CNR and the Pacific Great Eastern Railway (PGE)—through the reserves of the Nlaka’pamux and Stl’atl’imx peoples in British Columbia. The construction of the railway destroyed the land on which it was built and marked the “initial stage of ‘deterritorialization’ leading to erosion of the existing physical and material culture of Native people.”⁶² The construction destroyed fisheries and other forms of the traditional economy and introduced wage labour and the cash economy to First Nations as they were employed on the railway. Schuurman explained that the induction of First Nations into capitalism “introduced the paradigm of clock time to First Nations people” as it was necessary for wage labour.⁶³ This, in turn, regulated schedules and changed patterns of activity. She argued that capitalism erased the existing socioeconomic landscape and reinscribed it to support capitalist production.

Gordon Robert Lyall added that “Often good fishing sites were filled in to build a sturdy table for the railway to sit on”, which damaged both the habitat for spawning salmon and First Nations’ traditional use of the land.⁶⁴ He expanded on previous research in 2020 with the publication of his article on three major rights-of-way—the CPR in the 1880s, a pipeline in the 1950s, and the Lougheed Highway in 1972—through Stó:lō reserve of Chawathil (IR4). He examined how these colonial infrastructure developments purported to benefit Indigenous peoples but actually benefited settlers much more than the people whose land was appropriated for this construction.⁶⁵

⁶² Schuurman, “Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway,” 35.

⁶³ Schuurman, “Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway,” 36, 38.

⁶⁴ Lyall, “They Smashed It Right Through,” 79.

⁶⁵ Lyall, “They Smashed It Right Through,” 68, 78.

These scholars highlighted some of the issues with the location of the right-of-way and the destruction the CPR wreaked on the environment. Nlaka'pamux people lived in s7iskn (pithouses) during the fall and winter and tipis in the spring and summer. The reserve system restricted First Nations movement and altered their economy. The railway then limited their movement further, while also constraining the new agricultural economy into which they had been pushed. Peter O'Reilly, who succeeded Sproat, was given the authority to allocate reserves in 1880 and, throughout the construction period, he allocated many of these reserves within the Railway Belt. Further, there was little arable land in the mountains and valleys, and little of it was allocated to First Nations reserves. In 1886, Indian Agent J.W. MacKay reported that "Spaptsin Indians [S'patsin of Secwépemc Nation] had to relinquish a large portion of their arable land on account of railway requirements. They have now only a few hectares fit for tillage."⁶⁶ In 1913, Felix Sampson, from the Coldwater Band from Nlaka'pamux First Nation, recalled that when

the railway went past us, there is where I got poor. Ever since the railway went through we did not have enough land; I don't think each one had more than two or three acres - Even if I had chickens I could not make enough to feed those chickens If [sic] I had horses and cattle they would all starve to death when the winter time comes. ... I hear to-day that the Government had his hand on all the land, thzt [sic] is the reason I am short of stock, and I cannot get any more arid land to go ahead and make my living - Everything what is in the land, I cannot go

⁶⁶ J.W. Mackay to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Kamloops, BC, August 28, 1886, in *Annual Report 1886*, 84; Darwin Hannah and Mamie Henry, *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nlha7kapmx People* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), 5-6; Peter O'Reilly to Chief Commissioner, Land & Works, Victoria, BC, May 28, 1882, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, B.C. Provincial Collection, Minutes of Decision, Correspondence & Sketches, binder 3, box 3, <https://jirc.ubcic.bc.ca/sites/jirc.ubcic.bc.ca/files/BCMOD%20Binder%2008.pdf>, Correspondence No. 1112/84.

ahead and use them myself because he is holding my back and my coat - If he will only give me a chance and not hold me too much, I would be able to make a living.⁶⁷

Sampson spoke to the impact of the railway right-of-way on him and his family. The CPR, by way of the federal government, took from him the land that he used to live, to survive. His experience was undoubtedly not an isolated one.

The CPR also destroyed parts of First Nations communities. In Chawathil, thirteen houses were destroyed by the construction of the railway. In Spuzzum, the right-of-way ran through a church on the reserve. In another Nlaka'pamux village—Cook's Ferry Band—a graveyard was desecrated by the construction. Indian Agent J.W. Mackay noted in 1886 that the First Nation had not been compensated for this desecration and that another portion of their reserve had been trespassed upon by White settlers.⁶⁸

Along with the destruction and loss of land, First Nations' attempts at agriculture were also hindered by the loss of livestock along the railway. In 1913, Nlaka'pamux Billie McKnown reported to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia that he lost horses and cattle every year since the construction of the railway. The CP did not always pay for the loss of livestock on the railway and they did not pay him for the last horse he lost. Another man lost a steer a couple years prior to the interview and “only got \$10” for it. The man was only able to salvage some of the meat from the steer as it was “spoilt by the wheels”,

⁶⁷ Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia, 1913-1916: Meeting with the Coldwater Band or Tribe of Indians on their Reserve on the 17th Day of October, 1913. 203-204 (1913) (statement of Felix Sampson, Coldwater Band), Union of BC Indian Chiefs, *Our Homes Are Bleeding*, Agency Testimonies, Kamloops, <https://gsdl.ubcic.bc.ca/cgi-bin/library.cgi?e=d-01000-00---off-0kamloops--00-1---0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-11--11-en-50---20-about-railway--00-3-1-00-0--4--0-0-11-10-OutfZz-8-00&a=d&c=search&d=HASH010f300ac41107fb7772c704.13>.

⁶⁸ Laforet and York, *Spuzzum*, 87; *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), August 9, 1883; Lyall, “They Smashed It Right Through,” 74; J.W. Mackay to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Kamloops BC, August 28, 1886, in *Annual Report 1886*, 84.

presumably pulverized. Indian Agent Graham reported that he had taken the issue up with the Railway Commission who claimed that the CP was exempt from fencing reserve lands.⁶⁹

In addition to failing to compensate for lost livestock, the CP sometimes failed to compensate First Nations for the rights-of-way passing through their reserves. Some First Nations did receive payment, such as the First Nations “in the vicinity of Hope and Texas Lake [who] have made good use of the money paid them by the railway contractor in acquiring agricultural implements, which have proved of great service.”⁷⁰ However, it was not uncommon for First Nations to not receive payment. In 1885, Indian Superintendent Powell reported that

The Indians in Mr. Mackay's agency living along the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway from Yale to Savona, complain that no regard has been paid to the Indian Act in compensation provided for therein in cases where the road enters or damages their reserve. The Canadian Pacific Railway Company has intimated to me, through their agent, that compensation would be made to Indians in the same manner as to other persons. This course is just, and exceedingly satisfactory to the Indians, and if it be desirable to treat natives fairly, the same rule should be followed in regard to that portion of the line not yet taken over by the Canadian Pacific Railway Syndicate.⁷¹

However, in August 1886, Mackay again reported that Secwépemc bands—Adams Lake, Little Shuswap, and Neskonlith—were “anxiously expecting payment, for the lands taken from their

⁶⁹ Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia, 1913-1916: Meeting with the Siskah-Skuppah Band. 235 (1913) (statement of Billie McKnown, Siskah-Skuppah Band), Union of BC Indian Chiefs, Our Homes Are Bleeding, Agency Testimonies, Lytton, <https://gsdl.ubcic.bc.ca/cgi-bin/library.cgi?e=d-00000-00---off-Olyttonag--00-2---0-10-0---0---0direct-10---4-----0-11--10-en-50---20-about-c%2ep%2er%2e--00-3-1-00-0--4--0--0-0-01-10-OutfZz-8-00&a=d&cl=search&d=HASH012919621ee8322c31c2fd9d.15.11>.

⁷⁰ Indian Superintendent I.W. Powell to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Victoria, November 2, 1885, in *Annual Report 1885*, 120.

⁷¹ Indian Superintendent I.W. Powell to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Victoria, November 2, 1885, in *Annual Report 1885*, 121.

reserves for railway purposes”.⁷² Even some thirty years later, payments for lands and damages had not been fully paid. When the Royal Commission interviewed First Nations and government officials to settle issues regarding reserve lands, Schuurman explained that “Native complaints about the railway construction were, however, forestalled by promises of compensation. Bands who acquiesced to the demands of the Royal Commission were more likely to be compensated.”⁷³ Boston Bar First Nation, for example, challenged the authority of the Commission and its complaints about the CPR’s destruction of a house were dismissed. In other cases, cheques were promised within days of a First Nation’s acquiescence with the Commission. Schuurman explained that “Cheque distribution was part of a process of absorbing and diffusing material and cultural evidence of the violence done by the railway.”⁷⁴ This was contradictory to the way that the railway was promoted as being beneficial to First Nations.

The railway did bring employment opportunities to First Nations in British Columbia, which were valuable for the ways they enabled First Nations to survive in the new colonial world but which also implicated them in the capitalist system as previously discussed. Historian Zhongping Chen looked at data from reporters at construction sites, from Onderdonk, and from other technical authorities to determine the ethnic origins of CPR railway workers in British Columbia. His focus was on Chinese labourers, but he does present some data on Indigenous labourers. 150 Indigenous people were working on the railway in 1880 and 100 in 1881. In 1882, “2,000 white and ‘Indian’” people worked on the railway.⁷⁵ It is unclear how many of that 2,000 would have actually been First Nations, but *The British Columbian* reported in April 1882 that

⁷² J.W. Mackay to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Kamloops BC, August 28, 1886, in *Annual Report 1886*, 85.

⁷³ Schuurman, “Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway,” 30.

⁷⁴ Schuurman, “Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway,” 31.

⁷⁵ Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 32, 26; *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), June 3, 1882.

the CP was looking to hire a thousand First Nations to work on the railway.⁷⁶ In the annual reports between 1880 and 1887 from the Department of Indian Affairs, department officials mention the following First Nations having people working on the CPR in some manner: Cheam; Chilliwack (Aitchelitz, Skowkale, Shxwhá:y, Soowahlie, Squiala, Tzeachten, and Yakweakwioose); Cook's Ferry; Hope (Chawathil); Ha-im; H-Kum-tcheen (Lytton); Hluk-hluk-a-tan (Kanaka Bar); Ka-mus (Boothroyd); Ka-pa-tse-tsan; Lesees Lake; Ne-pa (Oregon Jack Creek); Ni-cao-min (Nicomen); Nicola (Lower Nicola); Shuswap; Shuzzy; Skowall (Skawahlook); Sku-wha (Skwah); Spahamin (Upper Nicola); Spuzzum; and Yale, as well as and including First Nations in the Lower Fraser, Okanagan, and Kamloops Agencies.⁷⁷

Chawathil people reportedly “prefer[red] to work on the railroad, which is convenient to their homes.”⁷⁸ They laboured on the railway and they fed White railway workers for \$0.50 per meal. Shuswap men were hired as packers and canoe men for railway survey parties. They also packed the train cars for passengers on the completed sections. At Spuzzum, men largely worked cutting wood for the railway. Spuzzum Elder Annie York stated that they “Cut it for seventy-five cents a cord.” Spuzzum people also supplied food to railway crews and packed supplies to work sites. Even after the construction was complete, they worked on the railway as track maintenance crew. York recalled that her uncle, Bill Graham, was a powder man, who “always makes the holes where they were going to blast”.⁷⁹ One time, he was caught in a blast that went off while

⁷⁶ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), April 19, 1882.

⁷⁷ I compiled this list of First Nations by identifying which individual First Nations and Agencies were reported to have worked on the railway in the annual reports. I used the machine searchable transcriptions of the annual reports available at Library and Archives Canada to find references of the railway, excluding accounting charts. I then compiled a spreadsheet of all these references.

⁷⁸ P. McTiernan to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, New Westminster, August 8, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 58.

⁷⁹ Laforet and York, *Spuzzum*, 86, 91; Peter O'Reilly to Supt. General of Indian Affairs, Victoria, BC, December 14, 1884, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, B.C., Federal Collection, Minutes of Decision, Correspondence & Sketches, volume 10, file 29858, no. 4, <https://jirc.ubcic.bc.ca/sites/jirc.ubcic.bc.ca/files/Volume%2010.pdf>, Correspondence No. 17605; *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), November 29, 1883.

he was putting the caps in. He went to the hospital and stayed there for a while but was ultimately fine. York said: “He was lucky to get away. The others died.”⁸⁰

First Nations in British Columbia received good pay for their work on the railway, equal to that of White labourers. In 1883, men reportedly received \$2.00 a day for their work on the railway and youths received between \$1.00 and \$1.50 per day. Wages were reduced to between \$1.50 and \$1.75 per day as work wined down in 1885.⁸¹ Work on the railway was expected to support First Nations administration and relieve the government’s budget. Indeed, Powell wrote:

The proceeds derived from their employment in railway construction has placed most of the bands here in comfortable circumstances, and the present is a favorable time to encourage them in every possible way to utilize their lands and make provision for their future requirements, when public works are completed and expenditure withdrawn.⁸²

It provided them with the funds to acquire agricultural implements and to build houses and schools on reserves. However, the benefit of this labour was not long lasting. Thomas White, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, wrote in 1887 that “These Indians used to engage with the Canadian Pacific Railway Company as laborers in the construction of their line, but since its completion they have had, from lack of other resources, to resort again to fishing and hunting.”⁸³

Others turned to find work in the mines and canneries.

⁸⁰ Laforet and York, *Spuzzum*, 86.

⁸¹ P. McTiernan to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, New Westminster, 15 August 15, 1883, in *Annual Report 1883*, 45; J.W. Mackay to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Kamloops, August 15, 1885, in *Annual Report 1885*, 88.

⁸² Indian Superintendent I.W. Powell to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Victoria, November 2, 1885, in *Annual Report 1885*, 121.

⁸³ Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Thos. White to Governor General of Canada, Ottawa, January 3, 1888 in *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December 1887*, ed. John A. Macdonald (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Co., 1888), lxxiv; J.W. Mackay to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Kamloops BC, August 28, 1886, in *Annual Report 1886*, 85.

Labour also interfered with Indian Agents' plans to make First Nations an agricultural people. An agricultural economy was more difficult in the mountains due to the limited amount of arable land, poor irrigation, and the smaller sizes of reserves in British Columbia. However, Indian Agents still encouraged agriculture and were frustrated with disruptions to that endeavour. Their reports to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs frequently mentioned a lack of planting on reserves and frustration as First Nations found work elsewhere. McTiernan, for example, wrote this of the First Nations at Lesees Lake: "The Indians on this place have not planted much land for the last two years, for the reason that they are employed on the railroad, which runs right in the centre of their reserve."⁸⁴ When construction ended, attention was turned back towards agriculture. In 1886, Macdonald noted:

now that this work is drawing to a close the Indians will be obliged to turn their attention exclusively to agriculture to procure a subsistence; and their discontentment will be greatly increased when they find that owing to the want of water for irrigation their labor will generally be barren of result. The sales made by the Department of Lands and Works of British Columbia of certain lands that had previously been allotted to Indians has not served to reassure the minds of the latter. And the impossibility at several points of procuring from unsold Crown lands either sufficient or suitable allotments for the Indians of the locality has tended to increase the embarrassment. The only way to overcome this difficulty would appear to be to purchase lands for them.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ P. McTiernan to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, New Westminster, August 8, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 58.

⁸⁵ Superintendent General of Indian Affairs John A. Macdonald to Governor General of Canada, Ottawa, January 1, 1886, in *Annual Report 1885*, lvi.

For some First Nations, labour on the railway enabled them to take up western agriculture and buy farming tools, while, for others, this labour prevented them from fulfilling their agricultural potential.

Nevertheless, settlers considered First Nations to be good labourers for the construction of the railway. Department of Indian Affairs officials boasted about First Nations labour on the railway. Indian Agent P. McTiernan reported that CPR supervisors liked First Nations labourers because “they are moral and industrious.”⁸⁶ Indian Superintendent General J.W. Powell similarly noted that: “The railway contractor states that he is more than satisfied with Indian labor, their work being superior to Chinese, and fully equal to that of the best class of whites.”⁸⁷ First Nations labourers were commonly compared to Chinese railway workers in British Columbia. One newspaper, *The British Columbian*, espoused the benefits of First Nation labour in contrast to Chinese labour. The newspaper argued that First Nations already resided in British Columbia and so they might as well work, whereas Chinese labourers had to immigrate from China and became an imported, racialized labour force with which White labourers had to compete. In contrast, “Indian labor has proved very satisfactory so far, and the contractor only wishes he could procure a few hundred more Indians.”⁸⁸

White settlers believed Chinese men to be a bad influence on First Nations people. In the House of Commons, Mr. Bunster argued that: “If we allow Chinese to infest our country, as is at present being done, they will drive out the white population which has gone there and civilized

⁸⁶ P. McTiernan to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, New Westminster, August 8, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 59.

⁸⁷ Indian Superintendent J.W. Powell to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Victoria, November 22, 1882, in *Annual Report 1882*, 161.

⁸⁸ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), June 3, 1882. See also: *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), February 15, 1882, April 19, 1882, and June 21, 1882.

the Indians, who make better citizens than the Chinese.”⁸⁹ A lot of these fears derived from the sale of alcohol and other intoxicants to First Nations by Chinese men—never mind that White men had first introduced First Nations to alcohol and that White men had also brought an influx of opium into China in the mid-nineteenth century. McTiernan painted a vivid picture: “All along the rail road line Chinamen are prowling about trying to sell Chinese brandy”.⁹⁰

These beliefs about First Nations and Chinese people were based upon previously established racial differences in the White-Black racial binary of the U.S., which sociologist Renisa Mawani called “racial knowledges.” The 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration identified five races: Chinese, First Nations, Metis, Black, and White people. Mawani argued that the inclusion of Black people in this breakdown of British Columbian demographics was surprising as there was a very small Black population in the province and that this inclusion speaks to the shared racial knowledges between Canada and the U.S. She argued that “while many believed that Aboriginal people could be redeemed through moral training and sobriety, colonial authorities were less convinced about the future prospects of Chinese migrants”, who were marked with narratives of being too foreign to assimilate.⁹¹

However, while relations between First Nations and Chinese people were not always amicable, they were not as bad as Indian Agents feared. Chinese men had first arrived in Spuzzum in 1858 with the gold rush and more arrived with the construction of the railway. A few men had settled in the area after the gold rush and some more settled in Spuzzum after the

⁸⁹ House of Commons Debates, 4th Parliament, 3rd Session, Vol. 2, 1012, https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC0403_02/2.

⁹⁰ P. McTiernan to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, New Westminster, August 15, 1883 in *Annual Report 1883*, 45. See also Renisa Mawani, “Cross-Racial Encounters and Juridical Truths: (Dis)Aggregating Race in British Columbia’s Contact Zone,” *BC Studies* 156 (2007-2008): 162; and Indian Superintendent I.W. Powell to Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Victoria, October 31, 1883, in *Annual Report 1883*, 105-112.

⁹¹ Renisa Mawani, “Cross-Racial Encounters and Juridical Truths: (Dis)Aggregating Race in British Columbia’s Contact Zone,” *BC Studies* 156 (2007-2008): 168, 153-156.

completion of the railway. First Nations and Chinese settlers coexisted and their cultures influenced one another. Annie York, for example, recalled a winter dance in 1910 where a Chinese dish—hamai or dried shrimp—was served and that her “grandmother brought a Chinese crock filled with blackberry jam” to another dance.⁹² Chinese and First Nations had a complex relationship in which they were sometimes rivals and sometimes allies in the construction period. However, White narratives of the time pitted them against each other.

The construction of the CPR enveloped First Nations in the contradictions of settler society. It destroyed their lands, replaced their economy, disrupted their means of living in that economy, and still expected them to succeed.

Conclusion: Unsettling the West

The construction of the CPR was the start of a new dynamic between public interest in resources and the appropriation of First Nations land for those resources. The construction wrapped the appropriation and expropriation of First Nations land into the needs of the nation. Following the construction of the CPR, railways like the CNR and PGE, as well as highways and pipelines, have been and continue to be run through reserves and unceded territory. One of the most recent examples of such a right-of-way is the Coastal GasLink pipeline on Wet’suwet’en territory in British Columbia, which First Nations have been protesting for the last three years. A settlement was only reached in 2022 between the Government of Canada and Siksika regarding an illegal surrender of 46,539 hectares of reserve land in 1910, which also addressed a longstanding claim against the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. The seemingly benign symbol of a railway representing the nation continues the violence of naturalizing these colonial, capitalist structures in the national landscape. However, a closer look at the train reveals the

⁹² Laforet and York, *Spuzzum*, 157, 5, 23, 90, 176.

history of the dispossession of Indigenous lands, the destruction of their ways of life, and their incorporation of the capitalist economy that continues today. Canada was founded by violently forcing its infrastructure and its existence through Indigenous lands and homes. The construction of the CPR carved colonialism, capitalism, and Canadian nationalism into the bedrock of this land. Karuka reminds us: “There is no ‘national’ territory ... There are only colonized territories.”⁹³

⁹³ Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, xiv.

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPORTED LABOURER: CHINESE RAILWAY WORKERS, RACIAL CAPITALISM, AND THE NATION

The symbiotic development of racism and capitalism is a foundational part of the modern colonial nation. Canada attempted to form for itself an identity, a nationality, at the same time it was developing its economy and promoting immigration, thereby increasingly encountering racialized peoples. As such, the ideologies of capitalism, racism, and nationalism came to reinforce one another. Through the lens of these systems, national and industry leaders utilized racial divisions in order to exploit racialized peoples for capital, justified class differences and exploitation on the basis of racism, and legislated and naturalized these differences on the basis of nationalism to create an exclusive national identity. The symbiosis of capitalism, racism, and nationalism is evident in the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Capitalists exploited the racialization of Chinese immigrants to undervalue and exploit their labour and White settlers used their popular economic fears to justify Chinese exclusion, which Canada legislated, despite opposition within the government and public, after Chinese labour was no longer required for the construction of the railway.¹ The CPR was a national tool of colonial capitalism.

The entwinement of racism and capitalism is called “racial capitalism.” In *Black Marxism: The Making of Black Radical Tradition*, Cedric Robinson popularized this term, arguing that “The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be

¹ Christopher G. Anderson, “The Senate and the Fight Against the 1885 Chinese Immigration Act,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 30, no. 2 (2007): 21-26.

expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structures emergent from capitalism.”² Capitalism developed along the divisive class and racial lines in feudal Europe, perpetuating these differences into the future and the territories colonized by Europeans. He defined racialization—or racialism as he called—as: “the legitimation and corroboration of social organization as natural by reference to the ‘racial’ components of its elements.”³ In the nineteenth century, racialization and capitalism reinforced one another in the oppression and exploitation of people of colour.

Robinson also saw nationalism as a fundamental force in the development of capitalism. Like racialization and class divisions, nationalism was a nascent concept in the feudal period that evolved symbiotically with capitalism. Robinson drew on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ conceptualization of nationalism as a bourgeois concept that stood in the way of and would precede a universal proletariat. Nationalism was the ideological force that co-opted the proletariat and mobilized them for bourgeois purposes, such as destroying international economic competition.⁴ Robinson added racialism to this equation, thereby conceptualizing nationalism as an ideology informed by “racial sensibility and the economic interests of the national bourgeoisies” that required and demanded the buy-in of the working class.⁵ Using this framework of nationalism, I explore how expressions of Canadian nationalism reflected economic and racial concerns in the late nineteenth century.

² Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983; Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2; Justin Leroy and Destin Jenkins, *Histories of Racial Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 3.

³ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2.

⁴ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 9, 27; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848; Minneapolis, US: Lerner Publishing Group, 2010), 11. Marx and Engels wrote in reaction to the emergence of a strong sense of nationalism in the early 19th century. They alternately accepted and reject nationalism and they never took a definitive stance on nationalism. Nevertheless, Marxist scholars have contributed greatly to thinking about nationalism. See also: Michal Kasprzak, “To reject or not to reject nationalism: debating Marx and Engels’ struggles with nationalism, 1840s-1880s,” *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 4 (2012): 585-606.

⁵ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 3.

In this chapter, I examine the place of Chinese immigrants as a distinct, racialized labour force in late-nineteenth-century Canada that reinforced and was informed by the racial and economic interests of the national subject at an important time in the development of the nation and its nationalism. This chapter is divided in two sections. The first section examines the individual experiences of Wong Hau-hon and Dukasang Wong. The second part looks at the broader collective experience of Chinese immigrants. Despite the approximate 10,000 Chinese labourers who worked on the CPR, Hau-hon and Dukasang provide the only first-hand accounts of the construction of the railway from the Chinese perspective—and Dukasang’s diaries were only rediscovered and published very recently. Most historical records on Chinese Canadians have been lost to time, space, language barriers, and racial violence, including the exclusionary practices that sent many Chinese labourers back to China.⁶

In order to understand the colonial and capitalist functions of the railway in regards to Chinese immigrants, I examine both what Chinese railway workers have written on their experiences and what White people were writing in the 1880s. I analyze the writings of railway workers Dukasang Wong and Wong Hau-hon.⁷ I also look at the testimonies in the *Report of the*

⁶ In this paper I will refer to the late nineteenth-century Chinese population in British Columbia as either Chinese labourers or Chinese migrants. I have chosen to use these designations for several reasons. “Chinese” was originally a designation ascribed by White people to people from China. In the late nineteenth century, these migrants identified themselves by their localities rather than by a sense of nationality. Historians commonly refer to them as Guangdong migrants as most Chinese migrants arrived from Guangdong Province during this period. Historians frequently use “migrants” rather than “immigrants” as many of them returned to China after their labour was no longer needed and as restrictions were put in place to limit their presence in Canada. A sense of Chinese nationalism emerged around the turn of the twentieth century and Guangdong migrants began to conceive of themselves as “Overseas Chinese”. The term “Chinese Canadian” originated in 1914 from a group of Canadian-born, ethnically Chinese men. However, as I am writing about Canadian nationalism, I have chosen to centre Canadian identity. By referring to the Chinese population of British Columbia in the 1880s as “Chinese migrants”, I maintain connections to current identities of Chinese Canadians while recognizing that they were not considered and largely did not consider themselves to be Canadian. For more on historical Chinese Canadian identities, see: Timothy J. Stanley, “‘Chinamen, Wherever We Go’: Chinese Nationalism and Guangdong Merchants in British Columbia, 1871-1911,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 77, no. 4 (1996): 475-503; Timothy J. Stanley, “‘By the Side of Other Canadians’: The Locally Born and the Invention of Chinese Canadians,” *BC Studies* 156 (2007/2008): 109-139.

⁷ Dukasang Wong, *The Diary of Dukasang Wong: A Voice from Gold Mountain*, trans. Wanda Joy Hoe, ed. David McIlwraith (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2020); Wong Hau-hon, “Reminiscences of an old Chinese railroad worker,” trans. and ed. Him Mark Lai, *East/West Chinese American Journal* (1971): 6, <https://himmarklai.org/wordpress/wp->

Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration (1885) and three newspapers—*The Inland Sentinel*, *The British Columbian*, and *The Port Moody Gazette*—to understand how Chinese immigrants were perceived by White settlers—the national subject—to fit in the nation.⁸ Through this examination of the place and perception of Chinese railway workers with the nation and the CPR, I argue that the CPR was a tool of White supremacy and capitalism in the exploitation of Chinese railway workers and the incorporation of Chinese immigrants into the colonial system. The longevity of the CPR's national mythos is a mark of the persistence of colonialism in the nation.

The Space of Race in the Nation

While these two sources provided only a glimpse into their lives, Wong Hau-hon and Dukasang Wong's accounts of their experiences reveal something of their understanding of Canada as a nation. Wong Hau-hon wrote his account in 1926, some forty years after the completion of the CPR. In his brief reminiscences, he reflected on the construction of the railway and the contributions of Chinese labourers to the nation in light of the passing of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act. At the age of 18, Hau-hon had arrived in Canada from Xinhui District in Guangdong Province in 1882, at the peak of Chinese immigration to Canada. He landed in New Westminster and then walked to Yale with

[content/uploads/01H.M.-Lai_Remiscences-of-an-Old-Chinese-Railroad-Worker_05.05.71_PDF.pdf](#); William Rayner, *British Columbia's Premiers in Profile* (Surrey: Heritage House Publishing Company Ltd., 2000), 59-64.
⁸ *The British Columbian* and *The Port Moody Gazette* were available online and word searchable. *The British Columbian* was published twice a week and is available through the University of British Columbia from 1882 to 1890; I looked at the issues published from 1882 to 1885. *The British Columbian* is notable for its relationship to John Robson, who edited the newspaper with his brother, David. John Robson was a Member of the Legislative Assembly in 1882, became the provincial secretary and minister of finance and agriculture in 1883, and became the premier of British Columbia in 1889. Although he left the newspaper to his brother in 1883, John's politics, especially his anti-Chinese politics, are undoubtedly intertwined with the newspaper's reporting. *The Port Moody* was published weekly beginning in December 1883 and is available through UBC from 1883 to 1887; I looked at the issues published from 1883 to 1886. *The Inland Sentinel* was published weekly starting in May 1880 and is available on microfilm at the BC Archives; I also sampled this newspaper, looking at every fifth issue until June 1885—issues between August 1885 and January 1886 were not available at the BC Archives. *The Inland Sentinel* is especially notable as it was created for the purpose of reporting in the construction of the CPR.

400 other Chinese labourers to work on the railway. He joined gang No. 161 of a rumoured 380 gangs with approximately 30 workers each. Between 1882 and 1883, he travelled to North Bend, Yale, Hope, and Thompson River to work on the railway. 1883 is the last date that Hau-hon mentioned, so presumably he either stopped working on the CPR that year or he had little else to say on that period in his brief reminiscences.⁹

In 2020, a new first-hand account—the diaries of Dukesang Wong—was rediscovered and published. In 1966-1967, Wanda Joy Hoe wrote an undergraduate sociology assignment titled “A Chinese Transition to Canada.” For this assignment, she translated select passages from her grandfather’s diaries. The original diaries—seven notebooks—were lost in a fire shortly thereafter, so all that is left are these translations.¹⁰ Without the originals and with the selection of only some passages for translation, we cannot know what might not have been translated, the accuracy of the dates and translations, and other important information. The publication also suffers from some editorial errors, such as the editor’s claim that Dukesang’s diary is “the only primary source, the only known voice, for thousands of his generation.”¹¹ Despite the limitations of this text, it nonetheless provides valuable insight into the experience of Chinese railway workers in Canada.

Dukesang Wong was born to a family of a magistrate in northern China in the mid-1840s. As a magistrate’s son, Dukesang came from an elite and educated background. His education gave him an advantage as he was able to write this diary and he knew some English. Over a

⁹ Him Mark Lai, introduction to “Reminiscences of an Old Chinese Railroad Worker (1926),” by Wong Hau-hon, in *Chinese American Voices: From the gold rush to the present*, ed. Judy Yung, Gordon H. Chang, and Him Mark Lai (California: University of California Press, 2006), 39; Wong, “Reminiscences,” 6; Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 23. In the 1971 publication, Hau-hon’s account of his experiences on the CPR fit on one page.

¹⁰ Wong, “The Diary,” 9; Wong, “Reminiscences,” 6; Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 24-25, 28, Appendix 2.

¹¹ Wong, “The Diary,” 2; Zhongping Chen, “In Search of the Lost Chinese Canadian Story: A Review and Research Note for *The Diary of Dukesang Wong*,” *BC Studies* 211 (2021): 80.

decade after his father was killed and his family disgraced, Dukasang decided to travel to Canada. He arrived in North America in 1880 and found work on the railway in New Westminster in 1881. That same year, his fellow labourers elected him as their spokesperson to the contractor. He last mentioned working on the railway in 1886 at which time the construction of the extension of the railway to Vancouver was being completed. In 1888, he mentioned needing to find a new trade and gaining an apprenticeship as a tailor.¹² Dukasang stayed in Canada, bringing his wife over from China and building a family in this land he had helped to shape. According to Chen, Dukasang was “a well-known early Chinese immigrant in New Westminster” who was also known as Huang Dusheng and went on to become a major leader of the local Chinese Benevolent Society.¹³

Dukasang explained his decision to move to Canada in the following passage:

Because I cannot build upon my own land in this country, it is right that I should attempt to seek land over the ocean. ... Perhaps it will prove to be too strange and foreign a land to which to adapt myself and bring Lin, but I must try it and have experience of it in the event that it is better land that will allow me to once again establish a real home.¹⁴

He planned to make this move permanent from the beginning and he was able to make it so.¹⁵

This plan stood in contradiction to what many Canadians believed—that Chinese labourers came to Canada only as sojourners, to make their fortune and then return home to China. Macdonald

¹² Wong, “The Diary,” 10; 53-34; 58; 81.

¹³ Chen, “In Search of the Lost Chinese Canadian Story,” 83.

¹⁴ Wong, “The Diary,” 34. Dukasang was engaged to Lin. After he completed his work on the railway, Dukasang returned to China, married Lin, and brought her back to Canada.

¹⁵ This is somewhat contradicted by his words, written in his diaries in 1899, saying: “I wish for my children one day to return to China and establish themselves, to hold good names in our homeland. We must not be buried on foreign land!” However, this contradiction is mitigated by the fact that he and his descendants stayed in Canada, so that Wanda Joy Joe would one day uncover her grandfather’s diaries and write a paper about them at a Canadian university. Wong, “The Diary,” 90.

espoused such a belief in support of refusing Chinese immigrants enfranchisement, saying: “They come from a foreign country; they have no intention, as a people, of making a domicile of any portion of Canada; they come and work or trade, and when they are tired of it they go away, taking with them their profits.”¹⁶ This belief stemmed from how the immigration and labour contract systems were set up.

The temporary nature and gendered dynamics of railway work lent to the perception of Chinese immigrants as sojourners. The CP and other industries in Canada sought to hire male labourers and so it was predominantly men who immigrated from China. Thus, the lack of Chinese women and children arriving in Canada gave the appearance that the men would be returning to China to be with their families once the railway was completed. However, Dukesang’s diaries demonstrate the goal of at least some men to establish themselves in Canada and to make enough money to bring their wives and families to Canada.

Racism and cultural differences also dissuaded permanent settlement. Consul-General for China, Huang Tsun Hsien, explained:

You must recollect that the Chinese immigrant coming to this country is denied all the rights and privileges extended to others in the way of citizenship; the laws compel them to remain aliens. I know a great many Chinese will be glad to remain here permanently with their families, if they are allowed to be naturalized and can enjoy privileges and rights.¹⁷

National belonging and the associated privileges were exclusive to the national subject. As Chinese people would not assimilate, they were not granted belonging. In reality, Chinese

¹⁶ House of Commons Debates, 5th Parliament, 3rd Session: Volume 2, 1582, https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC0503_02/2.

¹⁷ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration: Report and Evidence* (Ottawa, 1885), 41.

immigrants were not permitted to assimilate as racism limited their economic and social opportunities. In discrediting the sojourner myth, Anthony B. Chan explained that “institutional racism forced the Chinese into their ethnic businesses” and into Chinatowns.¹⁸ White Canadians then criticized their ethnic businesses, such as laundromats and restaurants, as being easily liquidated, which therefore advanced the perception that Chinese immigrants intended to send their money back to their families in China and/or return to China themselves. The institutional racism that excluded Chinese immigrants from White society also dissuaded and prevented Chinese immigrants from assimilating into Canadian society, encouraging them to maintain their ties to their homeland and to create their own overseas Chinese identities and Chinatown communities. This failure to assimilate and perceived sojourner-status was then used to justify Chinese exclusion from Canada following the completion of the CPR in 1885. There was a circular nature to Chinese exclusion wherein Canadian racism restricted Chinese integration into society and this lack of assimilation reinforced stereotypes in which Chinese immigrants were considered foreign sojourners.

White Canadians desired a nation of “our own race and religion—a population that will, while building the railway, build up a British nation of prosperous communities on the shores of the north Pacific.”¹⁹ White immigrants were required to create such a nation and the railway was required to enable such immigration into Western Canada. For that, Chinese immigration was required by leaders in the CP and federal government and it was opposed by White politicians, newspaper-writing men, and labourers in British Columbia.

¹⁸ Anthony B. Chan, “‘Orientalism’ and Image Making: The Sojourner in Canadian History,” *The Journal of Ethnic Studies* 9, no. 3 (1981): 41, 39-42.

¹⁹ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), October 7, 1882.

Many White British Columbians were united on the topic of Chinese immigration, particularly in their distaste for it. *The Port Moody Gazette* argued “there is probably no other question upon which the people of this province are so nearly a unit as upon this one of the admission of more Chinese into our country.”²⁰ *The Inland Sentinel* estimated that “nine-tenths” of the White population of “Victoria, the capital, if not the whole Province,” held anti-Chinese sentiments.²¹ Chinese immigrants were a racialized Other against which White Canadians defined and organized themselves. This comparison, as well as to First Nations, helped to solidify the Canadian identity as White and Christian. Where Chinese immigrants were perceived as a corrupting force invading Canada and First Nations were perceived as uncivilized people who would benefit from settler colonial development, White Canadians considered themselves the rightful and civilized proprietors of the nation.

However, Chan argued that “The fact that [Chinese immigrants] were willing to endure all these negative forces succinctly demonstrated their commitment to making Canada their home. If there was a sojourner mentality, it would have cracked under such racial pressures.”²² Indeed, Dukasang’s diaries support such a conclusion.

Dukesang made note of some of his experiences of White prejudice and racial violence :

in this Land of the Golden Mountains, the westerners make rules to control our movements and prevent further ships from China and Japan landing here, call us savages and non-Christians, accuse us of taking from them positions of work which they refuse to do, say we take their money and return it to China, and burn

²⁰ *Port Moody Gazette* (Port Moody, BC), December 29, 1883.

²¹ *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), April 5, 1884.

²² Chan, “Orientalism and Image Making,” 43.

down the opium houses, into which they also come. It is indeed a strange land and a very strange time to live.²³

He pointed out some of the inconsistencies of White supremacist rhetoric, such as the belief in racialized job competition over jobs White labourers refused to take and the burning of establishments that they also frequented. These instances of White prejudice and violence seemed inconsistent with the ways he understood himself and the ways White people talked about themselves. On arriving in North America, Dukesang noted the irony of being quarantined on the ship to prevent the spread of disease, which prevented Dukesang and his fellow travellers from being able to clean themselves on land as they so wished to do.²⁴ He wrote of the “barbaric justice” of White men after watching one man beat another as others watched and disregarded the violence as part of “the honour code of their traditions, to thus settle their differences.”²⁵

The discrimination Chinese immigrants experienced also helped to unify them and create a collective identity for the overseas Chinese. In the nineteenth century, Chinese peoples associated with clan and regional identities more than a national Chinese identity. Different regions within China had their own dialects and Dukesang noted that it was difficult to communicate to speak with immigrants from different regions “as their language is hard to understand, and they aren’t able to write.” When he heard that three men from his village were in a nearby town in British Columbia, he expressed hopes to visit them, writing “It has been a very long time since I have heard any words spoken in my own language and about the news of my homeland.”²⁶ Although he was working on the railway with other Chinese immigrants, he related more to people from his village in China. Nevertheless, there was a sense of community in their

²³ Wong, “The Diary,” 90.

²⁴ Wong, “The Diary,” 53.

²⁵ Wong, “The Diary,” 55.

²⁶ Wong, “The Diary,” 58, 62.

suffering and labour. For Dukesang, this might have derived from his elite education, which would have made him aware of the imperial Chinese traditions through which he was connected to other Chinese people. Hau-hon wrote of his fellow Chinese railway workers more collectively as “the Chinese”, likely due in part to the brevity of his reminiscences and the fact that he wrote them in 1926 after the formation of a Chinese Canadian identity.²⁷

Timothy J. Stanley argued that: “The terms ‘Chinamen,’ ‘Chinese,’ or ‘Chinatowns’ were originally ascriptions rather than accurate statements of the self-identities of Guangdong migrants. These terms really said more about migrants from England or Canada West than they did about migrants from Guangdong.”²⁸ White people projected onto China western conceptions of nations as the predominant community and therefore national identities as the foremost identities. The collectivization of Asian immigrants enabled White discrimination and the stereotyping of Chinese immigrants. This racism also drove the development of a ‘Chinese’ identity, as the community reactively formed to support one another. Together, in 1884, they established Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Associations (CCBA) and they called for the development of a Chinese consulate in British Columbia. Dukesang would become the president of the Chinese Benevolent Association in New Westminster and the head of the Wong clan association in New Westminster.²⁹

²⁷ Wong, “Reminiscences,” 6; Stanley, “Chinamen, Wherever We Go,” 479. Timothy J. Stanley, who studied the formation of Chinese identities in Canada, suggested that “Members of the educated elite, which included some of the wealthy BC merchants, may have held a different view of China. They were certainly aware of a literary tradition in classical Chinese stretching back thousands of years, and they were active participants in the examination system through which they hoped their sons would become officials.”

²⁸ Stanley, “Chinamen, Wherever We Go,” 486.

²⁹ It was not until 1914 that the overseas Chinese, led by ethnically Chinese young men born in Canada, began to identify as Chinese Canadian. Stanley, “Chinamen Wherever We Go,” 477; Stanley, “By the Side of Other Canadians,” 109; Lisa Rose Mar, “Beyond Being Others: Chinese Canadians as National History,” *BC Studies* 156 (2007-2008): 13-34; Li Donghai, *Jianada Huaqiaoshi*, 20-21; Wong, “The Diary,” 84, 86; Chen, “In Search of the Lost Chinese Canadian,” 84.

The place Chinese railway workers occupied in the nation was one of marginalization. That in recent decades we have rewritten and used this history to include it as place for the creation of belonging does not change the fact that this discrimination was carved into the nation. This is not to say that historians have not written about the discrimination and exclusion experienced by Chinese immigrants but that nationalist narratives write over this exclusion to find inclusion. Nationalism often requires a short memory. Homi Bhabha argued that

It is through this syntax of forgetting—or being obliged to forget—that the problematic identification of a national people becomes visible. ... To be obliged to forget—in the construction of the national present—is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problematic totalization of the national will.³⁰

Forgetting is part of the rhetoric of nationalism and rhetoric is the instrument through which the borders of the nation are defined. Hau-hon reflected on this forgetting, writing:

I am proud of the fact that we Chinese contributed much to the development of the transportation system in Canada. Yet now the government is enforcing 43 discriminatory immigration regulations against us. The Canadian people surely must have short memories!³¹

The nation forgot the contributions of Chinese railway workers when it was perceived as White and then it forgot the exclusion of those workers when the nation was perceived as multicultural.

Nationalism requires that we forget our roots to create new ones. Remembering disrupts the

³⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 2004), 310-311.

³¹ Wong, “Reminiscences,” 6. Hau-hon writes this statement regarding the passing of the Chinese Immigration Act of 1923, which increased restrictions to essentially prohibit Chinese immigration into Canada.

image of the nation. Remembering reminds us that White supremacy is part of the legacy of the colonial nation.

Chinese Blood, Sweat and Life on the Railway

The positioning of Chinese immigrants as group marginalized by White society was shaped by the distinction of the Chinese as a racialized labour force separate from White and Indigenous labourers, and other ethnic labourers who did not make up a large enough force to form a distinct labour force. Karuka explained that, as a “racially distinct labor force”, the position of Chinese railway workers was “a reduction to the status of a tool for grading earth and drilling a mountain. It was to be expendable, interchangeable, replaceable. Chinese workers were instruments of labor, constant capital”.³² This racialized socioeconomic group was established through systems of importing and contracting labour, as well as informal racial segregation and White supremacy.

Some Chinese railway workers came up from California, having previously worked on the construction of railways in the United States. However, the majority of Chinese railway workers—some 8,000 of 10,000 total Chinese railway workers on the CPR—came to Canada from China through the labour contract system. Chinese labourers sold their labour to Chinese labour contractors who, in turn, paid for their transport from China to North America. There were four major Chinese labour contractors for the CPR who were from the same Lee lineage of Shuilou Township in the Guangdong Province and who maintained a close relationship with Andrew Onderdonk to fulfill their contracts.³³ Through the management of these labour

³² Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 86, 85.

³³ Faustino-Santos, “Race of Cuckoos,” 51-52; Chen, “Vancouver Island and the Chinese Diaspora,” 60, 51; Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 19, 25, 29. The labour contract system succeeded a debt-bondage system in which Chinese labourers were advanced the cost of transportation to North America which they would pay back through free labour. These systems were functionally the same but the contracts ostensibly protected labourers by provided limits to the period for which they would work.

contractors, Chinese railway workers were socially segregated, divided into work gangs, provisioned, and housed separately from White labourers, thereby structuring their labour as different.

The construction of a racially distinct labour force through the importation of labour also allowed the CP to underpay Chinese workers. British imperialism in China and Canada shaped the formation and racialization of Chinese immigrant labour. Britain had forced the opening of China to the global market through the Opium Wars. Prior to the First Opium War (1839-1842), China had strict limitations on where and how European powers could trade with China. Chinese products were also very desirable in Britain, whereas British products were much less desirable in China—until British traders took advantage of Chinese recreational and addictive opium use to trade opium for Chinese products. The political setting in China following the Opium Wars and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing gave Britain much political authority. In a gender analysis of Chinese migrant labour, Michelle Tam argued that, with this new authority, the British Empire used the narrative of needing to protect British subjects in China from corrupted Chinese addicts to criminalize Chinese bodies and traffic them into the migrant labour work force. A continent away, Canada's economy was developed as part of the British Empire and, therefore, primarily extracted resources for the empire. Resource extraction required both labourers to do the extraction and railways to transport these resources. The construction of the CPR further required male labourers; in this cycle of demand and supply, Chinese men came to Canada without their families to work on the railway. Canada did not need to support their families who lived elsewhere, thereby avoiding the costs needed to support the development of

new generations of labourers and creating a system in which the outsourced labour could be paid less than domestic labour.³⁴

Onderdonk saved millions of dollars through the exploitation of Chinese railway workers. Chinese railway workers were paid \$1.00 for a day of work, whereas White railway workers earned between \$1.50 and \$2.50. The wages Chinese railway workers earned also had to be spent in stores owned by the CP, giving the CP a monopoly on supplying Chinese labourers. Their wages would be reduced from \$1.00 to \$0.80 if they bought from elsewhere. The average Chinese labourers in British Columbia made \$25 per month or \$300 per year. With deductions for loss of wages in the winter, provisions and clothing, rent, tools and fares, taxes, religious fees, doctor fees, and costs of oil, light water and tobacco, Chinese labourers were typically left with \$43 at the end of the year. According to Robert Dunsmuir, M.P.P., Chinese labourers undercut White men who “could not live in this country at the present prices of products on the wages paid the Chinamen.”³⁵ While Chinese labourers could and did live on these wages, they did so because this was what the capitalist market valued their labour. Chinese strikes on the railway have demonstrated that Chinese labourers did not wish settle for this exploitive treatment. In April 1881, some Chinese labourers went on strike to be compensated for their travel between work sites, which had taken five days. In May 1881, 2,000 Chinese labourers

³⁴ Faustino-Santos, “Race of Cuckoos,” 45, 49-50; Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks*, 93; Michelle Tam, “Perverse Aliens: On Chinese Indentured Labour, Sodomy, and Canadian Nation-Building,” *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 45 (2022): 195, 197-200.

³⁵ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, Gray-xviii, 364-366; Lee, “Chinese Construction Workers,” 50; *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), January 4, 1882, March 10, 1883; *The Inland Sentinel* (Emory, Yale, BC), August 5, 1880; Chow, *Blood and Sweat*, 37; Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 23, 27.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration contains the reports of Commissioners Chapleau and Gray, which are paginated independently. Within the single published document, Chapleau’s report is paginated in Roman numerals from i to cxxxiv and Gray’s report restarts the pagination from i to cii, followed by the Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, which are paginated with Arabic numerals. To make the distinction in pagination between the commissioners’ reports, I’ve included the names of the commissioners as part of the pagination.

went on strike in protest of the Lee contractors, one of whose agent took a commission of two percent off their wages and provided them with supplies of poor quality.³⁶ The Lee contractors and their agents held a complicated space in Canada's socioeconomic hierarchy as merchant capitalists who benefited from and sometimes upheld the systems that oppressed Chinese labourers, while also supporting those labourers as their racialized peers. All benefactors of this capitalist project were implicated in the undervaluing and exploitation of Chinese labour, which was exasperated by but not dependent on race.

The fear that labour competition undercut White standards of living and working conditions was expressed largely by labourers who were not in direct competition with Chinese labourers for work.³⁷ Chinese labourers took unskilled work, while the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration argued that "It is fortunate that, in a young sparsely settled Province, this cheap labor can be obtained, for it enables those whose minds are capable of higher development, and whose ambition looks to more ennobling industry".³⁸ The Commission felt that Chinese immigration met the province's need for unskilled labour, leaving the skilled and more desirable jobs available to White men. Dukesang's diary supports this division of labour when he reflected that White men "accuse us of taking from them positions of work which they refuse to do".³⁹

Indeed, there were not enough White labourers in British Columbia to meet the labour force needs of the CPR. Onderdonk expected to hire 10,000 men to work on the railway by August 1882.⁴⁰ In November 1881, *The Inland Sentinel* reported that "Liberal inducements are

³⁶ Chen, "Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers," 27-28; *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), May 19, 1881.

³⁷ Goutor, "Constructing the 'Great Menace'," 554, 559.

³⁸ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, Gray-lxix.

³⁹ Wong, "The Diary," 90.

⁴⁰ Chen, "Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers," 20; *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), March 10, 1883; *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), June 3, 1882.

held out to men to get out timber, saw logs and ties, as well as chop cord wood, but very few are willing to remain to follow such work.”⁴¹ On February 4, 1882, *The British Columbian* warned that “There is every prospect of the supply [of labourers] being still further short of the demand this year.”⁴² White and Chinese labourers were so far from being competition from each other that Onderdonk raised wages for White labourers at the same time when the immigration of Chinese labourers peaked in 1882-83. Onderdonk frequently ran an advertisement in *The British Columbian*, seeking “White Labor on the Canadian Pacific Railway.” In 1882, White labourers could earn \$1.50 to \$1.75 for 10 hours of work per day. On March 10, 1883, Onderdonk raised the advertised wage for White labourers to between \$1.75 and \$2.00.⁴³

The undervaluing of Chinese labour and lives by White people also put Chinese railway workers at increased risk on the CPR. The accounts from both Dukesang and Hau-hon are infused with suffering and loss in labouring on this nation-building project. The labour progressed slowly and in poor conditions. On his trip to North Bend, Hau-hon recounted that:

The weather was bad, for it rained all day, and we were all wet and cold. Among our travelling companions there were some new arrivals who were unaccustomed to exposure to the rigorous Canadian climate and consequently became ill. Some died as they rested beneath the trees or laid on the ground. When I saw this I felt miserable and sad.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), November 17, 1881.

⁴² *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), February 4, 1882.

⁴³ Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 23; *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), January 4, 1882; *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), March 10, 1883. Onderdonk distinguished between carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, drillers, hewers, choppers and labourers. In 1882, a hewer could earn between \$2.50 and \$3.00 per day, while a chopper could earn between \$1.50 and \$2.00 per day. Skilled labourers, like carpenters and masons, could earn between \$2.00 and \$3.50 per day. In 1883, a hewer could earn \$3.50 per day, while a chopper could earn between \$2.00 and \$2.50 per day. Carpenters and masons could earn between \$2.50 and \$3.50 per day.

⁴⁴ Wong, “Reminiscences,” 6.

CP Division Superintendent Thomas Daly reported on November 24, 1881 that many Chinese labourers were still sleeping in tents, as cabins with walls to protect from the cold had not been built early enough in the season. Daly explained that their exposure to the cold made it difficult to work the next day and then followed that with the conclusion that he would have cabins made shortly; the reference to the fact that Chinese labourers were less productive in the cold implies that Daly's main goal was to keep the Chinese labour force productive. In 1883, Dukesang also reported a lack of medicine and "good food", which allowed disease to spread easily through the Chinese camps.⁴⁵ Hau-hon recalled people dying from an epidemic and they could not bury the bodies because there were no coffins. Some of the dead "were stuffed into rock crevices or beneath the trees" to await coffins and others were buried quickly in makeshift boxes, blankets, or grass mats.⁴⁶ Hau-hon recounted some of his traumatic memories in his reminiscences. In one example, they were using explosives to remove rocks when his co-worker, Leung, was killed in a hiding spot that he thought was safe from the debris. In another similar occurrence, a White foreman ordered Chinese labourers into a cave to resume work after using dynamite to remove rock. However, two charges had yet to go off and 10 to 20 labourers were killed in the following explosions.⁴⁷

Hau-hon recalled that "more than three thousand Chinese died during the building of the railroad from diseases and accidents."⁴⁸ A newspaper also reported "that about 2000 Chinamen died" in 1882 on the railway.⁴⁹ However, in the 2006 reprint of Hau-hon's reminiscences, historian Him Mark Lai noted that the CPR said that approximately 600 Chinese labourers were

⁴⁵ Wong, "The Diary," 59; Thomas Daly to Edward G. Tilton, CP Chief Engineer and General Superintendent, Nicoman, November 24, 1881, in University of British Columbia Archives, Petley Fonds, box 1, file 2; Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 85.

⁴⁶ Wong, "Reminiscences," 6.

⁴⁷ Wong, "Reminiscences," 6.

⁴⁸ Wong, "Reminiscences," 6.

⁴⁹ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), June 13, 1883.

killed during the construction period. Lai broke this number down as follows: “This averaged four Chinese lives for every mile of track laid [in British Columbia].”⁵⁰ However, he noted that there were likely more than 600 deaths, though fewer than Hau-hon’s estimate. This leaves a large range of possible deaths, anywhere from a 6% to a 31% death rate for Chinese railway workers. The Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration similarly reiterated that “from no authority, either Dominion, Provincial or municipal in British Columbia, has any return been attainable of the outgoing numbers or the death rate during these eight years [1876-1884].”⁵¹ Dukesang perhaps captured this unquantifiable loss most accurately in saying, “So many of us Chinese suffered and died recently; I cannot recount them all.”⁵²

The way the White populace wrote about Chinese railway workers in newspapers furthered this dehumanization of Chinese people. These newspapers were written by White men for White consumption and were mostly concerned with the affairs of White people. When Chinese people were mentioned, it tended to be for the following reasons: 1) they were peripheral to the experience of a White person; 2) the story could be used to spread fear and hatred (e.g., tales of violence, disease, opium, and competition); or 3) the narrative was about trauma that could be used for entertainment. One article in *The British Columbian*, titled “An Exciting Scene”, recounted a story originally told in *The Inland Sentinel* about a Chinese labourer who was decapitated by a flying rock when explosives were used to remove rocks from the path. Two working gangs of Chinese labourers then chased the White foreman into a river where he “got away safe.”⁵³ This article exemplifies all the reasons White people had for writing

⁵⁰ Him Mark Lai, introduction to “Reminiscences,” 39.

⁵¹ Lai, introduction to “Reminiscences,” 39; *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, Gray-viii. I calculated this death rate of 6% to 31% based on Chen’s estimation that at least 9,500 Chinese labourers worked on the railway.

⁵² Wong, “The Diary,” 60.

⁵³ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), December 20, 1882.

about Chinese immigrants: 1) a Chinese man was killed but it was really about the foreman's escape from the angry Chinese men; 2) it spread fear about the dangerous, angry Chinese "mob"; and 3) the man's death and his friends' fear and anger were "exciting".⁵⁴

Injured and dead Chinese railway workers were largely reported on in numbers, unless Chinese men were involved in conflict with non-Chinese men and then their names were reported on likely because they were included in court proceedings. *The British Columbian* noted that "no less than thirteen" Chinese labourers died at Port Moody between the fall of 1882 and January 1883. However, these deaths were "to be accounted for"; in other words, Chinese labourers were expected to die as a result of their work on the railway.⁵⁵ This report was included as one of many local updates, which included reports about the post-office, a steamer reaching its destination, and a city clerk appointment. *The British Columbian* also wrote: "A number of Chinese bodies buried near the edge of the water are so near the surface that the stench is shocking. The authorities should do something in this matter."⁵⁶ In this instance, the article was more about the inconvenient and unpleasant smell from the dead Chinese than their being dead. The deaths of Chinese labourers were largely only reported as they related to the White population and/or could provide insight into the progress on the construction of the CPR.

The racist and exploitive treatment of Chinese railway workers becomes even more obvious when contrasted with the experiences of White railway workers. *The Inland Sentinel*—which had the most neutral reporting on Chinese labourers of the three British Columbian newspapers I reviewed, and which provided updates on the employment of Chinese labourers by the CP, construction updates, reports of strikes by Chinese labourers, Indian and Chinese

⁵⁴ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), December 20, 1882.

⁵⁵ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), January 24, 1883.

⁵⁶ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), May 19, 1883.

conflict, and politicians' anti-Chinese stances—wrote little on the deaths of Chinese railway workers despite the large number of Chinese men who died on the CPR. In contrast to the newspaper's reticence on Chinese deaths, it reported heavily on the injuries and deaths of White railway workers. Among such reports, Duncan Macbeth burned his hands and broke two fingers in an explosion, John Haley died after an accident in the gravel pit, George Kirkup broke his legs after being caught between a train engine and car, and John McLellan lost his eye and arm to an explosion in the construction of the railway.⁵⁷ The comparatively namelessness of Chinese labourers highlights how they were expendable and interchangeable to the White public.

Furthermore, White men were generally sought for more experienced, skilled labour on the railway, whereas Chinese immigrants would be exploited as cheap labourers. Therefore, they undertook different jobs on the railway with different risk levels, divided partially along racial lines. Captain John Fennessy, for example, worked as a carpenter on the railway and reflected very positively on his experience working on the CPR in an article originally published in the *Free Press* and reprinted in *The British Columbian*. Like Hau-hon, Fennessy had to walk to his workstation. However, where Hau-hon and his company of 400 Chinese labourers walked the whole way, Fennessy took a car and a train part of the way and then a mule train took his baggage to his camp. Once he reached as far as the train went, he wrote: "We walked ourselves. Some had to walk five miles, and some ten miles."⁵⁸ By my calculations using Google Earth, Hau-hon would have walked seven times that distance. A direct route, not accounting for

⁵⁷ In my sampling of *The Inland Sentinel*, I found only one reference to the deaths of Chinese labourers in relation with their labour; this reference does not mention the railway, but I infer that Chinese railway workers died due to disease and exposure as the newspaper clip began by discussing the harsh winter and followed that with the statement that: "There had been quite a number of deaths among Chinamen and Indians lately." *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), April 13, 1882; *The Inland Sentinel* (Emory, Yale, BC), September 9, 1880; *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), September 20, 1883; *The Inland Sentinel* (Kamloops, BC), August 28, 1884; Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 85.

⁵⁸ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), February 17, 1883.

topography, from New Westminster to Yale is approximately 115 kilometers (71 miles) and a route following the Fraser River is roughly 140 kilometers (86 miles).

The walking distance and types of available labour were just two examples of the disparity between the treatment of Fennessy and Chinese railway workers. Fennessy described gaining weight while working on the railway, whereas Dukesang talked about not having enough food. Although Fennessy stated that “It is very hard to get provisions to the camps”, the White workmen had a Chinese cook and Fennessy ate “so much of Mr. Coleman’s pudding” that he gained 66 pounds. Fennessy wrote: “I was never treated better on a railroad before. I am an old railroad man. I have been foreman on more than ten or twelve roads in my time and I never saw a man treat his men with more respect than Mr. Onderdonk.”⁵⁹ He was rather effusive in portraying the benefits of working on the CPR. However, *The Inland Sentinel* criticized his account of the CPR, noting that Fennessy “was discharged from one of the camps, owing to his grumbling with the bill of fare” shortly after making these statements. Fennessy’s account stood alone amongst several other accounts from White labourers who “all were condemnatory of the treatment received from Mr. Onderdonk and those connected with him.”⁶⁰ Later that year, *The Inland Sentinel* reported that “nearly every mail from the East brings complaints respecting the treatment of workmen received while here in the employ of the Railway contractors—noted for hospitality to Government officials, engineers, etc.”⁶¹ White people criticized the conditions and safety of work on the railway, but they were named in death and injury, treated with respect as humans. Dukesang, on the other hand, wrote the following about witnessing his peers sick and dying: “My soul cries out. I wish I had never experienced such bad days as those in which we

⁵⁹ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), February 17, 1883.

⁶⁰ *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), November 29, 1883.

⁶¹ *The Inland Sentinel* (Yale, BC), October 25, 1883.

now live.”⁶² The experience of harshness on the CPR was not exclusive to racialized labourers, but Chinese railway workers were dehumanized as a racially distinct labour force.

The anti-Chinese rhetoric published in British Columbian newspapers also reveals the different experiences of White and Chinese labourers and how the nation appropriated the economic and racial arguments of White settlers to define the nation. White Canadians exaggerated their fears about Chinese labourers to strategically support the image of the invading Chinese labour force that would corrupt the Canadian nation. The vocal anti-Chinese movement castigated anyone who challenged these narratives. Challengers were disregarded as benefactors of Chinese labour, belaboring that this was a class issue.

The relationship between racist ideology, economics, and fearmongering in defining the place of early Chinese immigrants in Canada has been the subject of much research over the last forty years. In 1984, Patricia E. Roy argued that the “evil” of Chinese labour was accepted by British Columbians because it was needed to complete the railway and the railway was needed to create a White province. She expanded this research in her 1989 book that examined how fear of Chinese labour competition “became part of the provincial identity.”⁶³ Like Roy, Gillian Creese argued that a combination of economic and ideological factors informed the anti-Chinese movement, but Creese examined the cyclical relationship between these factors. Chinese immigrants came to Canada as cheap labour, which threatened White labour interests, which reinforced perceptions of Chinese moral and labour inferiority.⁶⁴

The Port Moody Gazette, for example, published an article challenging Reverend J.S. McKay for suggesting that wages for White labourers had not been cut because of Chinese

⁶² Wong, “The Diary,” 59.

⁶³ Roy, “A Choice between Evils,” 34; Roy, *A White Man’s Province*, viii.

⁶⁴ Gillian Creese, “Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the ‘Oriental Problem’,” *BC Studies* 80 (1988/89), 26, 48.

labourers but rather that White “Laborers in the past have had a monopoly; and the trouble now is that their wages are finding a proper level.” The newspaper editor disregarded the reverend as one of the “masters” of Chinese “slaves”. *The Port Moody Gazette* argued that “The preachers, the politicians, and all those who employ labor are in favor of keeping the Chinaman here” because they benefited from this labor.⁶⁵ It created this divisive narrative in which you were either for or against Chinese labour. To *The Port Moody Gazette*, the reverend here was a profiting capitalist.

In the 1880s, economic arguments against Chinese immigration and labour were intertwined with White supremacist ideology to create a distinct narrative in which Chinese labourers were agents of capitalism corrupting the moral and White fabric of the nation. This debate was driven in part by new fears about the industrialization of the nation. In the late nineteenth century, British Columbia was beginning to feel the impact of rising capitalism and new conflicts between capital and labour.⁶⁶ The White working class began to fear that capitalists, like Onderdonk, were replacing them with cheaper labour: Chinese immigrants. Chinese immigrants were depicted as “blood-suckers” who came to Canada “to infest our shores, and by working so cheaply cut the wages of the poor white man who is obliged to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow.”⁶⁷ White working-class men and politicians in British Columbia disparaged Chinese immigrants in newspapers and Parliament alike, wherever they could be heard.

Chinese immigration was less of a concern in central Canada and British Columbians frequently expressed their frustration with the Dominion Government for not listening to their

⁶⁵ *Port Moody Gazette* (Port Moody, BC), October 4, 1884.

⁶⁶ Roy, *A White Man's Province*, 39.

⁶⁷ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), February 16, 1884.

concerns. In June 1885, *The British Columbian* expressed the belief that “if a vote were taken tomorrow on the question of separation and return to the old independent status, it would be carried out by an overwhelmingly popular voice.”⁶⁸ Many White working-class British Columbians opposed Chinese immigration for fear that Chinese labourers would steal their jobs, but railway leaders and Dominion politicians allowed—and even pushed back against British Columbia’s motions to disallow—Chinese immigration in order to meet the labour needs of the railway and because Chinese labourers were a cheaper labour force. In 1884, the Legislature of British Columbia passed a bill making it “unlawful for any Chinese to come into the Province of British Columbia” and any who entered the province would have to “forfeit and pay the sum of fifty dollars”.⁶⁹ However, the bill was vetoed by the Dominion Government in April 1884. The Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration was established shortly thereafter in part to quell discontent in British Columbia and delay the Dominion’s response to anti-Chinese immigration advocates.

The Royal Commission noted that Chinese immigrants were judged against exceptionally high standards and that any wrongdoing by one Chinese immigrant was attributed to all Chinese immigrants. This led the Royal Commission to characterize White people’s treatment of Chinese immigrants as follows: “Not merely are they judged by an unfair standard and painted blacker than they are, things innocent in themselves, because different from what we are used to, are in the true spirit of barbarism, treated as badges of degradation.”⁷⁰ Commissioner John Hamilton Gray identified three stances on Chinese immigrants: 1) espousing absolute

⁶⁸ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), June 10, 1885.

⁶⁹ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), March 5, 1884; *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), April 19, 1884; *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, Chapleau-v; Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 310.

⁷⁰ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, Chapleau-xiv.

exclusion from “a well meaning, but strongly prejudiced minority”; 2) opposition to any legislation on the matter from “An intelligent minority”; and 3) moderate restrictions from “a large majority”.⁷¹ Commissioner Gray was in agreement with the third stance that “there should be a moderate restriction, based upon police, financial and sanitary principles, sustained and enforced by stringent local regulations for cleanliness and the preservation of health.”⁷² He recommended that a duty of \$10 be collected from every Chinese immigrant entering Canada. Nevertheless, Gray’s recommendation was dismissed not long after publication.

Once the railway was completed, the CP’s needs were satisfied, and Chinese labour was no longer needed, the Dominion Government passed *An Act to restrict and regulate Chinese immigration into Canada* in 1885. Under this Act, “every person of Chinese origin shall pay into the Consolidated Revenue Fund of Canada, on entering Canada, at the port or other place of entry, the sum of fifty dollars”.⁷³ This was a restrictive amount of money for Chinese immigrants and a large increase from the amount recommended by the Royal Commission. In fact, the head tax was the same amount proposed to prohibit Chinese immigration by the province and struck down by the Dominion a year prior. Chinese migrants were the embodied threats of capitalism; therefore, their exclusion from the nation gave the appearance of quelling the public’s concerns about capitalism and the railway. Canada used the White working-class’ economic fears to inform national belonging. CPR capitalists and Canadian politicians aligned their White supremacy with their goal of a national economy through the exploitation of Chinese railway workers and the subsequent expulsion of Chinese migrants once they were no longer required on

⁷¹ *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, Gray-cii.

⁷² *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, Gray-cii, Gray-lxxxvi.

⁷³ An Act to restrict and regulate Chinese immigration into Canada, S.C. 1885, c. 71, <https://pier21.ca/research/immigration-history/the-chinese-immigration-act-1885>. This is also known as the Chinese Immigration Act of 1885.

the railway. To mediate the worker versus capitalist sentiments on the “Chinese question”, the White versus Chinese attitudes were emphasized in the national discourse. In this way, the government and the CP co-opted the economic interests of White working-class men to enable the subjugation of Chinese labourers and inscribe this marginalization into the fabric of the nation.

The passing of anti-Chinese legislation, however, was not indicative of universal support for the bill. Some senators, like Alexander Vidal and William Almon, were vocally opposed to the Chinese head tax in the Senate debates. The bill was understood to be contrary to the ideology of rights-based liberalism and was also opposed for labour reasons regarding access to the cheap labour Chinese immigrants provided. Almon attempted to scuttle the bill, but a clerical error and a misunderstanding of the debate process on Almon’s behalf allowed the bill to pass on the third reading. The law itself was debated throughout the passing of subsequent amendments, sometimes for its prejudicially discriminatory nature and sometimes for not being restrictive enough.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, once the capitalist enterprise of the railway was completed, Chinese railway workers were no longer needed. They were left to fend for themselves in their unemployment. The provincial government was aware of and had anticipated the destitution of unemployed Chinese immigrants following the completion of the line. However, the Provincial Government dismissed any responsibility for Chinese immigrants because the government had not wanted to allow Chinese immigration into the country and had actively sought to stop it. As their efforts had been thwarted by the Dominion government, the provincial government argued that “the duty of providing relief for these starving people devolves upon that [Dominion]

⁷⁴ Anderson, “The Senate and the Fight,” 22-25.

Government through whose intervention the unhappy necessity has arisen.”⁷⁵ However, both the CP and the Dominion Government refused to provide aid.

New fears about labour competition arose again once thousands of Chinese railway workers became unemployed and re-entered the job market. *The Port Moody Gazette* questioned “Would it not, therefore, be a wise scheme for our local Government to charter a few vessels and send the Chinese back to their native land, free.”⁷⁶ However, the Provincial and Dominion Governments, and the CPR offered less than no relief, by implementing restrictions on Chinese immigration. Instead, the CCBA of Victoria was established by the Chinese community in 1884 to provide relief. The CCBA collected funds, distributed food, and established plans to evacuate many Chinese immigrants back to China. Chinese immigrants looked to each other for support when none was offered by the state.⁷⁷

The CPR recreated racial and class distinctions within its labour force, which in turn reinforced these distinctions in the social sphere. White settlers infused the developing society and economy with White supremacy, relegating racialized peoples to the margins. In the margins of railway capitalism were the racialized labourers. The CPR carved racist oppression and segregation into the bodies of Chinese railway workers and the nation. The CP contributed to the construction of a national system through the exploitation of racialized bodies for profit and the provincial government reinforced this marginalization in its quest to disallow Chinese labour on public works based on racist and xenophobic ideas.

⁷⁵ “Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia—Destitution among Chinese recently discharged from Canadian Pacific Railway Works,” file 2235, volume 60, RG6-A-1, Library and Archives Canada, <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=1600030&new=-8585683895893231244>.

⁷⁶ *Port Moody Gazette* (Port Moody, BC), October 24, 1885.

⁷⁷ “To Commemorate Victoria’s CCB 1884-1959—Chinese Public School 1899-1959,” file 21, box 1, Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association Fonds, University of Victoria Archives; Chen, “Chinese Labor Contractors and Laborers,” 28; Chen, “In Search of the Lost Chinese Canadian Story,” 84; Wong, “The Diary,” 100. The Lee contractors were also major contributors and leaders of the CCBA.

Conclusion

The history of the CPR reveals the railway as a tool of colonial capitalism in which racialized labour was imported and exploited to colonize the nation. Canadian nationalism appropriated the bodies of Chinese railway workers for the construction of its colonial and capitalist infrastructure and systems. Chinese immigrants were marginalized in the construction of the railway and further excluded from Canadian society after its completion. That nationalist narratives forgot the contributions of Chinese railway workers when the nation was perceived as White and then forgot the exclusion of those workers when the nation began to be perceived as multicultural speaks to the role of memory—specifically forgetting—in nationalist rhetoric. It also shows us how remembering this history can disrupt the image of the nation. Remembering the ways that the bodies of Chinese railway workers are overwritten with colonialism, capitalism, and nationalism disrupts the image of the nation as a good or benign construct.

The colonial, capitalist nation is an inherently violent construction. Settlers of all races contribute to the colonization of the land and benefit from its colonization. Racialized immigrants can be both victims of White supremacy and agents of colonialism. Karuka noted, for example, that “Chinese labor was an instrument, not a subject, of colonialism.”⁷⁸ Michael Rothberg provided a digestible way of understanding the complex positioning of colonial entanglement in *The Implicated Subject*. He argued that implication in White supremacy is too complex for a victim-perpetrator binary and, so, he discussed the dynamic position of the implicated subject. He explained that “Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit,

⁷⁸ Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 82.

or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes.”⁷⁹

Colonialism implicates all settlers in the perpetual occupation of the land. And all settlers benefit from that colonization, as the existence of the colonial nation provides us a home.

We Chinese Canadians can only claim national belonging based on the history of the transcontinental railway because the CPR first colonized and occupied the territory. This history does not give us a right to the land. This history, however, demonstrates that First Nations and Chinese Canadians have in common a shared but different struggle against White supremacy and capitalist exploitation.

⁷⁹ Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1.

CONCLUSION: A NATION CREATED AND ANOTHER REMEMBERED

A Nation Created and Divided

The history of the CPR has always been more complicated than nationalist histories have allowed. In the late nineteenth century, the railway was perceived by many First Nations people, Chinese immigrants, and White settlers alike as a divisive and oppressive instrument of the nation. For First Nations, it was a symbol of colonial capitalism that took the land with which they had historic relationships and carved it up, and on which more settlers arrived. For Chinese immigrants, it was a site of opportunity that quickly became exploitative and isolating. For White settlers, it was the extension of federal politics into regional spaces and it was an imperial, capitalist tool that infringed on their own privileges. White settlers disliked it in large part because of how the implementation of the CPR failed to provide them with the land and labour they expected, the nation they expected. The CPR failed them because it was always a colonial capitalist project that benefited the upper levels of Canadian society.

The White public opinion—as expressed in newspapers—recognized the settlement of Western Canada as one of the most important benefits of and reasons for the construction of the transcontinental railway. *The Calgary Herald* explained that: “Population is needed, and nothing helps to secure that for any country so much as this modern system of locomotion.”¹ The

¹ *The Calgary Herald* (Calgary, AB), July 23, 1884. I look at 5 newspapers published in Alberta and British Columbia between 1880 and 1885 to broadly cover the opinions settlers in Western Canada on the railway: *The Inland Sentinel*; *The Edmonton Bulletin*; *The Calgary Herald*; *The British Columbian*; and *The Port Moody Gazette*. I sampled *The Inland Sentinel*, which was a newspaper dedicated to published news related to the railway in British Columbia and available only on microfilm. The other four newspapers were available online and word searchable. *The British Columbian* was published twice a week and is available online through the University of British Columbia from 1882 to 1890; I looked at the issues published from 1882 to 1885. *The Port Moody* was published weekly beginning in December 1883 and is available online through UBC from 1883 to 1887; I looked at the issues published from 1883 to 1886. *The Calgary Herald* was first published in 1883 and I looked at the issues published from its first issue to 1885. *The Edmonton Bulletin* was first published in December 1880; I looked at the issues published between 1880 and 1883. *The Edmonton Bulletin* and *The Calgary Herald* were two of the few newspapers

newspaper recognized the clearing of the land and the circulation of information in the promotion of settlement in the west as ways the railway contributed to the settlement of the prairies, in addition to the actual transport of immigrants. However, the CP's monopoly on land—and therefore settlement—in the prairies was the subject of criticism. Needing additional money to fund construction, the CP sold 4,450,000 hectares (almost half its land subsidy) to the Land Corporation, which was expected to sell the land for twice what the CP would have but saved the CP from the responsibility of finding settlers to buy the land. Land speculators, like the Land Corporation, had “influence enough so that they are not required to adhere to the letter or spirit of their bargain.”² Despite the success of immigration—based on numbers alone—to the prairies in 1882, *The Edmonton Bulletin* characterized it as “simply a failure” in 1883 because of the high cost of land.³

In the west, settlers were particularly concerned with the monopoly the CP had on both land and traffic. The CP did not have to pay duty or local taxes, but settlers along the railway still had to pay the CP's monopoly for the transportation of surplus produce to markets elsewhere and to receive materials from other markets. *The Edmonton Bulletin* argued that “There can be no doubt that the settler whether rich or poor, who settles near any of the principal points on the river will be much better off and much more independent than the one who mortgages himself to the C.P.R. by taking up a half section on the bleak prairies of Regina”.⁴ *The Inland Sentinel* similarly expressed concern with the CP's monopoly on rail transportation in British Columbia. Onderdonk was accused of having “extortionate rates of freights and passages”, which were only

available from the early 1880s in the North-West Territory. Calgary was incorporated as a town in 1884 and these cities developed as people immigrated westwards with the railway.

² *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), November 25, 1882

³ *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), October 20, 1883.

⁴ *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), January 20, 1883.

slightly reduced due to the availability of transport by boats and carts pulled by bulls. It was noted that “Hundreds of men have walked down the road to Yale rather than pay full fare through to Hammond as is demanded.”⁵ British Columbians were also displeased with the management of the railway, calling it “a public curse” that used the “worst methods of monopoly management”.⁶ *The British Columbian* blamed the Dominion for the management of the railway due to the contract it signed with the CP. The railway was not serving White middle-class Canadians in the ways they were expecting. In both the prairies and British Columbia, transport and communication by river provided an alternative the CPR and its expensive monopoly.

The land subsidy, the lack of taxation, and the ostensible monopoly on land and trade that the federal government had given the CP inspired anti-Dominion sentiments amongst the people. Settlers believed themselves to be contributing to the national project that was the construction of the CPR by providing land to the CP and participating in the construction, but the benefits of the railway primarily went into the hands of the Dominion and the CP. Such a stance stemmed from the belief that the land within the region belonged to its citizens—namely the White settlers. On the basis of this belief, *The Edmonton Bulletin* was quite critical of Canada’s relationship with the prairies, arguing that the prairies were

so naturally fertile and readily brought under cultivation, that railroads would be built in any case quite independently of the Dominion government, and even now, handicapped as these minor railways are by the opposition of the C.P.R. and by the monopoly enjoyed by that company, they are being built and no doubt they will prove paying investments. Indeed the central prairie section was the only part that could afford to be independent of the C.P.R., but the Ontario and British

⁵ *The Inland Sentinel* (Kamloops, BC), June 11, 1885, May 7, 1885.

⁶ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), June 10, 1885.

Columbia sections are not only extremely expensive to build but they have no land to offer as a subsidy and can promise no local traffic to produce dividends when the line is completed.⁷

Canada had given the CP a monopoly that drew predominantly from the resources in the prairies, to which settlers felt entitled and therefore felt like they benefited the least. Prairie settlers conceived of “Manitoba and the North-West as the part of the Dominion on which the future greatness of the whole depended”. The newspaper argued that the older provinces were too stuck on the cost it took for the Dominion to buy the North-West and that any money the prairies made was considered an “unexpected gain” for the Dominion, reimbursing the Dominion for its purchase costs. The Dominion ostensibly took advantage of the economy of the North-West, which, as a territory, exercised only authority delegated by the Dominion. Some settlers felt excluded from the national community. However, *The Edmonton Bulletin* argued that the prairies would “be the centre, the heart, the moving power of the whole Dominion”.⁸

While *The Edmonton Bulletin* railed against the nation, not all agreed as demonstrated by the 1883 General Election in Manitoba. The issues highlighted in this election were the railway and land monopoly in the west, colonization societies, and the National Policy. In this election, a pro-nationalist approach won. Conservatives won twenty seats in the House and Liberals took ten. The newly elected premier, John Norquay, regarded “the return of his Government as an evidence of the people’s confidence in them, and also as evidence of their support of the Federal Government at Ottawa.”⁹ Speaking on the separate territory, *The Edmonton Bulletin* characterized Manitoba and the North-West as “an ass kneeling between two burdens” having

⁷ *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), August 18, 1883.

⁸ *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), May 20, 1882.

⁹ *The Brandon Daily Mail* (Brandon, MB), January 27, 1883.

“deliberately [knelt] down so that the burdens [of the monopolies and Dominion policies] may be fastened on more securely as in this election.”¹⁰ *The Brandon Daily Mail*, however, expressed a differing opinion. A letter-writer noted that “Since election day in this country, certain campaign stars of the so-called Provincial Rights stamp have mysteriously disappeared from this vote of disappointment and ingratitude.”¹¹ While some people disapproved of the railway and the national setting, these people were proven to be a minority in Manitoba and subsequently quieted following the election.

In British Columbia, discussions of the nation and the railway more often centered around the subject of Chinese immigration and labour. The CPR was meant to promote immigration in Canada to settle the West, but Canadians had expected and desired that to be White immigration. Asian immigration was seen as a degradation of immigration and the nation, so the continued allowance of Chinese immigration and the large Chinese labour force in the province was perceived as an insult to White settlers: “Here the Caucasian race, the Englishmen, Irishmen and Scotchmen, are told right to their face that they are inferior to the Mongolian slaves”.¹² In June 1885, *The British Columbian* expressed the belief that “if a vote were taken tomorrow on the question of separation and return to the old independent status, it would be carried out by an overwhelmingly popular voice.”¹³ This dissatisfaction largely derived from the fears of White working-class British Columbians that Chinese labourers would steal their jobs. White labourers took it as an insult that Dominion politicians allowed—and even pushed back against British Columbia’s motions to disallow—Chinese immigration in order to meet the labour needs of the CP and because Chinese labourers were a cheaper labour force.

¹⁰ *The Edmonton Bulletin* (Edmonton, AB), February 17, 1883.

¹¹ *The Brandon Daily Mail* (Brandon, MB), February 14, 1883.

¹² *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), July 12, 1882.

¹³ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), June 10, 1885.

The question of Chinese immigration was both a divisive and unifying force for White settlers. White British Columbians largely united behind this effort to restrict Chinese immigration. *The British Columbia* reported: “It has been said that the Chinese question in this province has been made a political hobby-horse upon which opposing parties have attempted to ride into power. Possibly there may be a good deal of truth in the remark.”¹⁴ However, the “Chinese question” also highlighted other divisions: British Columbia versus the rest of the Dominion; worker versus capitalist; White versus Chinese. *The British Columbian* reported that “the presence of these celestials in Manitoba indicates the approach of the Asiatic invasion, and has opened the eyes of Ontario to personal danger; and now the newspapers begin to howl!”¹⁵ The Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration furthered these divisions. British Columbians felt that there was no need for the inquiry “because the evils incident to Chinese immigration are obvious”.¹⁶ *The Port Moody Gazette* wrote that “The people of the Eastern Provinces and of the Mother Country cannot conceive, or account for, the inexpressible and all but universal repugnance with which the Chinese are regarded by the whites of this coast.”¹⁷ When the testimonies of British Columbians did not echo exactly what the most vocal anti-Chinese British Columbians said, these British Columbians disregarded the Commission as a sham. *The British Columbian* reported that “The people of British Columbia had lost all faith in the Chinese Commission as soon as they began to perceive the superficial character of the enquiry.”¹⁸ *The Inland Sentinel* also thought poorly of the Commission, writing that they “cannot say that anything new has been brought to light” and that a “pretext of a pretended necessity for

¹⁴ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), February 10, 1883.

¹⁵ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), May 17, 1884. “Celestials” was another word for Chinese people.

¹⁶ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), July 26, 1884.

¹⁷ *Port Moody Gazette* (Port Moody, BC), December 29, 1883.

¹⁸ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), October 29, 1884.

importing thousands of uncivilized Chinamen, was well known to be humbug from the beginning.”¹⁹ The subject of Chinese immigration divided the working class from the business owners and the province from the nation, while also bringing these groups of White people together against a common Other.

The railway came to represent Dominion authority and, through this, its imperial nature. In February 1884, *The Calgary Herald* reported that “The military authorities in England all speak of the Canadian Pacific Railway as a military line”.²⁰ Britain anticipated a war with Russia as both empires expanded into Asia. In case of war, the CPR could act as an alternate route on which to transport British troops to the Pacific and to India and China. In July 1885, *The Calgary Herald* described the railway as “the best garrison a country can have” because of the way people settled along the railway and its ability to transport troops.²¹ Although Britain did not go to war with Russia in the 1880s, the military value of the railway was demonstrated when troops were transported along the line to quell the North-West Resistance of 1885.²²

Despite the recognition of the imperialist character of the CPR, few newspapers considered First Nations in their reflections on the railway. When First Nations were mentioned in relation to the CPR, it tended to be in regards to a construction or CP employment update. *The British Columbian* noted that “The more Indian labor can be utilized in these avenues the better for the country and for the Indians themselves.”²³ Indigenous labour on the railway and in other industries allowed for the slow integration of Indigenous peoples into the capitalist economy to replace their native economies which were being destroyed by the development of the land. This

¹⁹ *The Inland Sentinel* (Kamloops, BC), August 28, 1884.

²⁰ *The Calgary Herald* (Calgary, AB), February 27, 1884.

²¹ *The Calgary Herald* (Calgary, AB), July 22, 1885; *The Calgary Herald* (Calgary, AB), March 26, 1885.

²² Nadine Schuurman, “Constructing and Deconstructing the Railway through Reserves in British Columbia,” *Native Studies Review* 13, no. 1 (2000): 21.

²³ *The British Columbian* (New Westminster, BC), April 19, 1882.

slow integration was seemingly more successful in British Columbia where the main means of subsistence had not been destroyed within the span of a few short years as the buffalo were in the North-West Territory. Accordingly, *The Calgary Herald* looked to British Columbia to see how the province was dealing with the “Indian question”, writing that British Columbia “put to shame our industrial schools and model farm instructors by the ease and content with which they do their chores on the Pacific coast as any Chinaman or Christian does.”²⁴ Settlers understood that the railway impacted First Nations, but, as it was seen as a positive part of the process of progress and civilization in which Indigenous peoples were assimilated into Western society, the impact of the railway on First Nations was largely overlooked by the settler population.

To Canadians in the early 1880s, the railway was a controversial subject. The railway represented the development of the nation, but it also represented the ways in which that nation upheld monopolies to the detriment of the people. The railway helped to consolidate the authority of the state, but it did so to the detriment of local authority. It represented a great feat of engineering, but it included First Nations and Chinese labourers in ways with which White Canadians were uncomfortable and in ways that exploited First Nations and Chinese people. That the CPR ever represented national unity is nationalist rhetoric.

A Nation Remembered and Remembered Again

Today, Canadian nationalism is centered around ostensibly benign symbols and comparisons to the U.S. We compare ourselves to Americans on topics like universal healthcare and racial, police, and gun violence to tell ourselves that Canada is better than the U.S. We also identify with symbols like maple leaves, beavers, and the Canadian flag. These seemingly benign animals and plants hide the ways in which symbols inform the underlying consciousness which

²⁴ *The Calgary Herald* (Calgary, AB), July 8, 1885.

reinforces and reproduces national identities. This is a concept that Michael Billig called “banal nationalism”—nationhood as flagged by the use of a symbol with an understood meaning within the nation. Billig argued that these symbols move “from symbolic mindfulness to mindlessness”, an unconscious part of our identity.²⁵ The CPR is one such seemingly benign symbol of Canadian nationalism. The deeper meanings that the railway flags include settler colonialism, settler industry, capitalist infrastructure, and the exploitation and/or contribution of racialized labourers. These meanings are sometimes hidden beneath the most recent or popular meaning, but they are all still present. The CPR is still a functioning train system; it is still a feature of the Canadian landscape.

Karuka defined countersovereignty as a project of balancing colonial violence and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty with the establishment of settler sovereignty.²⁶ I argue that nationalism is a tool of countersovereignty, creating the rhetorical and cultural space for the nation through the reimagination of history. But where a history has been reimagined twice before, it can certainly be reimagined once more. Remembering that the railway dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands, destroyed traditional Indigenous ways of life, incorporated First Nations into the capitalist economy, and exploited Chinese railway workers can disrupt the image of the nation and the power these systems wield. The concept of Canada as a nation is bound up in colonialism and capitalism in a way that we cannot erase however much we might try. While our nationalism might try to hide those aspects of our history, it is nevertheless integral to our past, present, and future. Consciously or not, forgetting this foundational character of the nation only works to hide the colonial, capitalist function and maintain its authority. This thesis is intended to bring awareness to the systems in which Canadians operate. It is also a

²⁵ Michael Billig, *Banal nationalism* (SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 1-12, 37-59.

²⁶ Karuka, *Empire's Tracks*, 2.

reminder that the nation was constructed over top of Indigenous lives and land, and around Chinese bodies.

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