

## From Colonialism to Multiculturalism? Totem Poles, Tourism and National Identity in Vancouver's Stanley Park

Renisa Mawani

The totem is an indication of an old and wide culture. It points to the past. (Goodfellow 15)

The Stanley Park totem poles are a bona fide photo opportunity. (Grant and Dickson 48)

Tourism and culture now plainly overlap and there is no clear frontier between the two. (Rojek and Urry 3)

The totem poles in Stanley Park are the most frequented and photographed tourist site in British Columbia (Grant and Dickson 48).<sup>1</sup> Since the first pole was erected in 1903, the colourful display has become an important Vancouver landmark, one that currently draws 3.3 million people annually (Jensen 29). Over the years, the totem poles have come to signify Stanley Park itself. In amateur and professional photographs, tourist brochures, books, postcards, and on government websites, the poles are spectacularized as the symbol of Vancouver's most cherished "urban playground." What is ironic, however, is that the totem poles represent the Kwakwaka'wakw and Haida Nations who reside in Northern BC, and not the Coast Salish<sup>2</sup> who have ancestral and ongoing legal claims to what is now Stanley Park. Several scholars have detailed how this (mis)placement of the poles erases both the presence and the territorial ownership of local Coast Salish communities (Hawker 34–45; Jensen 62–74; Mawani "Imperial" 125–132). Others have told us about the stories and histories of the Kwakwaka'wakw and Haida that are recorded in the carvings on the poles themselves (Jensen 30–47). However, few scholars have explored how the Stanley Park totem poles as a tourist site have figured in the making of Canadian national culture. In the

epigraph above, Chris Rojek and John Urry observe that “[t]ourism and culture plainly overlap,” but how? Whose culture is (re)presented, displayed, and consumed at the totem poles site in Stanley Park?

This paper aims to address the place of Aboriginality in Canadian national culture by approaching the totem poles as an iconic yet shifting symbol of colonial alterity. By Aboriginality, I am referring here not to the changing cultural, legal, and/ or political identities of First Nations that have been documented by legal historians and socio-legal scholars alike (Backhouse 21; Mawani “Genealogies” 323–331), but to the discursive construction of specific Native images and motifs that have problematically come to represent all Aboriginal peoples.<sup>3</sup> To elaborate, the Kwakwaka’wakw, Haida, and several other Northwest Coast communities have traditionally carved freestanding poles. Yet in the popular Canadian imaginary totem poles have come to symbolize “authentic”<sup>4</sup> Native art that is desired and consumed by tourists and visitors. Although totem poles and other Northwest Coast designs and images signify an authentic Native Otherness in mainstream Canada, it is important to recognize that this perceived authenticity is premised on an inauthenticity: on a singular, homogenized, and fixed Aboriginal identity that does not adequately capture the complicated and diverse histories and experiences of First Nations communities in the province of British Columbia (BC).

While totem poles are symbolic of a commodified Aboriginality they have also been incorporated into the nation as a signifier of Canadian heritage. From the early twentieth century onwards, these vast cedar carvings were becoming increasingly scarce and were thus perceived by the federal government as holding significant economic and cultural value. While Canada’s First Peoples were forced onto reserves and placed outside of public view, totem poles were fast becoming important national commodities that were taken from Native communities and placed in public spaces including museums and city parks (Townsend-Gault 189). The ongoing and contemporary popularity of totem poles—(evident in the number of visitors to Stanley Park and in the commercialization of images and replicas sold as Canadian souvenirs)—suggests a continued tourist preoccupation. Art historian, Ruth Phillips,

argues that Native art has long been popular with visitors to Canada and the USA. Importantly, she explains that tourist consumption of Native imagery has been central to emerging nationalisms in both countries (111). Writing about the circulation of First Nations art in BC, Charlotte Townsend-Gault observes that for many tourists, totem poles are particularly resonant of “something Canadian” (185–186).

“National identities,” as Edward Said reminds us, “always involve narratives—of the nation’s past, its founding fathers and documents, seminal events, and so on” (243). Mass spectacle has been (and is) a key site in which nations construct their collective selves. In his important book, *Colonising Egypt*, Timothy Mitchell documents how the world exhibition figured in both the making of Egypt and in Europe’s colonial project (xiii). In the Canadian context, Eva Mackey has similarly argued that museums, festivals, and holidays are times of national performance (13). Like exhibitions and celebrations, tourist attractions are also places in which the nation is constituted. And, as tourism expands, explains Nezar Alsayyad, more countries are “resorting to heritage preservation, the invention of tradition, and the rewriting of history as forms of self-definition” (2). If tourist locales are indeed places of national formation, how does Native imagery figure in touristic representations and in the making of Canadian culture? Specifically, how have the Stanley Park totem poles as symbols of Aboriginality figured in the tourist gaze? What do these signifiers tell us about the Canadian nation? And perhaps, more importantly, what do they obscure about the nation’s colonial past?

This paper focuses on two interrelated moments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, both concerned with colonialism, totem poles, tourism, and national identity. The first moment briefly explores the government-initiated campaign aimed at totem pole preservation in northern BC during the 1920s. It was at this historical juncture of “museum mania” (Francis 31) that totem poles and other cultural artifacts were being appropriated from Northwest Coast communities to be “saved” and displayed in urban locales, including Stanley Park. The second moment entails the first major renovation of the existing totem poles site at Brockton Point. In 2001, a new Visitors Centre and interpretive site was added to the landscape, which intended to provide

tourists and onlookers with relevant First Nations history and cultural context through which to interpret the poles. At both of these historical moments, as I explain below, the totem poles have come to represent specific colonial and postcolonial (post) colonial meanings and have been inserted, albeit differently, into Canada's past, present, and future.

In his discussion of national identity, Said cautions that national narratives "are never undisputed or merely a matter of the neutral recital of facts" (243). Nor are they static and unchanging. What these two episodes illustrate is the shifting way in which Aboriginality and the Canadian nation have been constituted through the figure of the totem pole. In the early twentieth century, totem poles were consumed as "primitive relics," symbols of a "vanishing race" and evidence of a triumphant colonial settler society. During this period, government officials and famous artists actively campaigned to "save" Native material culture including poles, the former through cultural appropriation and the latter by recording the heritage of Native peoples before it "disappeared" (Cole 276; Francis 31). From the twentieth-century onwards, First Nations' political resistance along with changing conceptions of the Canadian nation have generated new meanings. With the new Visitors Centre, the Coast Salish—who long resisted the City's encroachment on their ancestral territories, including Stanley Park—have gained an unprecedented visibility at the totem poles site. However, this perceptibility is double-edged. Despite the ongoing legacies of colonialism, the Visitors Centre problematically incorporates Aboriginality into the Canadian national imaginary as evidence of a new nation that claims to be both (post)colonial and multicultural. I argue that the site tells a very selective story of our national culture, one that emphasizes Canada's mythical characteristics of "lawfulness," "innocence," and "generosity," towards Aboriginal peoples (Mackey 26). Notwithstanding the shifting historical meanings of the totem poles and their place in the Canadian imaginary, there is one element that remains constant—the partial erasure of law and colonialism.

Over the past decade, many scholars have rightly criticized the ubiquity of the "postcolonial" (Jacobs 22–29; McClintock 9–14). As Jacobs explains, this term is especially problematic in colonial settler societies

like Australia where Indigenous peoples continue to experience a colonial relationship with the state (23). In Canada, unresolved land claims, particularly in BC—where Aboriginal peoples living on the mainland and in parts of Vancouver Island never relinquished their land through treaty or otherwise—combined with ongoing legal disputes over resource rights and cultural property, make it increasingly difficult to talk in terms of the “postcolonial.” Throughout, I prefer to approach colonialism as what Ann Laura Stoler describes as “a living history that informs and shapes the present rather than as a finished past” (89). Where I use the term (post) colonial my usage is deliberately bracketed to suggest that despite recent shifts in Canada’s identity, which imply a more inclusive nation, the “post” in the (post) colonial continues to be elusive for many Aboriginal peoples.

In the first part of the paper, I discuss the historical circumstances around the placement of the totem poles in Stanley Park as well as their multiple meanings. Here, I detail the totem pole preservation movement to show more generally how colonial practices underpinned the making of the exhibit. In part two, I discuss the construction of the new Visitors Centre at Brockton Point. In this section I examine the more recent national discourses of (post) colonialism and multiculturalism and how they have influenced what the totem poles represent. In the conclusion, I make some brief remarks about law and the postcolonial.

### **I. Colonialism, Cultural Property, and Totem Pole “Preservation”**

The Art, Historical, and Scientific Association of Vancouver (AHSAV) initiated the totem pole display in Stanley Park as the first permanent exhibit outside of either museum and/ or Indian reserve (Hawker 34). The AHSAV was at the forefront of the totem pole preservation movement that emerged in the 1920s, which I discuss below, and was particularly instrumental in acquiring poles from communities along the BC coast. The first pole, a “gift” from a BC politician, had been brought from Alert Bay in 1903 (Mawani “Imperial” 129). However, the idea of collecting poles for a public exhibition was not formally realized until 1919, when the AHSAV proposed the building of an “Indian village” modeled on the Kwakwaka’wakw of Northern Vancouver Island. According to one

source, the village was intended “to give to the present and succeeding generations an adequate conception of the work and social life of the aborigines before the advent of the white man” (Goodfellow 13). In other words, the Indian village in Stanley Park would be a testament to the progress of settler colonialism over the disorder, barbarity, and incivility that were thought to be characteristic of Aboriginal peoples and the western frontier.

From the time the first Kwakwaka'wakw pole was erected at Lumberman's Arch—at the former village of Whoi Whoi—the poles became a spectacle of Otherness that was highly visible to city residents and travelers. Because the poles were situated in an urban setting on the edge of Burrard Inlet, they lost their cultural and historical meanings and took on a significance that had much more to do with settler colonialism than with Native peoples. To elaborate, totem poles in villages told important stories of family accomplishments and histories. But for one to understand the significance of specific poles, one needed to know about the people who carved and commissioned them and the circumstances around their making (Jensen 17). The removal of totem poles from First Nations villages and their relocation to an urban environment meant that the family stories embodied in the intricately carved cedar would not be readily apparent to visitors. Instead, the naturalized setting of Stanley Park, albeit manufactured, was in keeping with colonial tropes about Native peoples as one with the wilderness (Moore, Pandian and Kosek 12). Inserted into the landscape now known as Lumberman's Arch, the totem poles could be consumed by onlookers as an “authentic” representation of Aboriginal culture that was also illustrative of a “vanishing” race.

Ronald Hawker elaborates that the collection of poles in Stanley Park took on an important symbolic function in the young but rapidly growing city of Vancouver. He argues that totem poles located “in a city setting suggested how life on the Coast had ‘progressed’ from primitive village to urban modernity” (34). Placed in a “natural” park setting, the poles were projected into what Ann McClintock has called “anachronistic space,” where Aboriginal peoples are located beyond history and “as the living embodiment of the archaic ‘primitive’” (30). Drawing from

Walter Benjamin, McClintock argues that, “[i]n the mapping of progress, images of ‘archaic’ time—that is non-European time—were systematically evoked to identify what was historically new about industrial modernity” (40). In the emerging city of Vancouver, the totem poles in Stanley Park could be read as images of “archaic time” which illustrated a progressive shift from prehistory to modernity.

The totem poles in Stanley Park were placed at an important historical moment. To begin with, the initial poles were erected at precisely the same time that the federal government and the City of Vancouver were reterritorializing local First Nations inhabitants from the land now known as Stanley Park. Second, the display was commissioned during a period when government authorities were becoming increasingly concerned with protecting and preserving Northwest Coast Art, especially totem poles. However, the emplacement of the cedar poles tells us little about the City’s encroachment on Coast Salish territory and the government’s appropriation of cultural property, and instead erases these colonial practices from the landscape and from history. I have documented the displacement of First Nations from Stanley Park at length elsewhere (Mawani “Genealogies” 325–331; see also Barman; Mather) and thus only mention it in passing here. Alternatively, I discuss how the totem poles exhibit in Stanley Park was part of a broader colonial movement to preserve freestanding poles as national art forms that were signifiers of both a Native Otherness and of Canada’s national heritage.

While the AHSAV and the City of Vancouver were eager to display an Aboriginal presence in Stanley Park, the creation of Lumberman’s Arch and Brockton Point—locales which housed the totem poles at different times—required the displacement and dispossession of the Coast Salish. Briefly, First Nations inhabitants in the park were being forcefully moved off the land and placed onto reserves on the North Shore and up Howe Sound at the same time that City officials and the AHSAV were collecting and exhibiting totem poles carved by the Kwakwaka’wakw and Haida. Although the process of forced removal had been in effect long before the park was opened in 1888, by the 1920s, the City had prompted a lawsuit aimed at removing eight mixed-race families of (European and Coast Salish ancestry) from what is now Brockton Point

(Barman; Mather; Mawani “Genealogies”). By the 1930s, despite resistance from the mixed-race inhabitants of Brockton Point and from city residents, the families were successfully relocated from Stanley Park into the city and their homes burnt down. Ironically, while city authorities were “sanitizing” the landscape by using the law to construct the region’s original inhabitants as “squatters” and thus legitimizing their eviction, the AHSAV and the Park Commissioners were adorning Stanley Park with specific and selective visual reminders of Aboriginality—totem poles and an Indian Village—that were commercialized and commodified for the “tourist gaze” (Urry).

Initially, the city celebrated the totem poles and proposed Indian village in Stanley Park as a reflection on the nation’s past. Writing about Egypt, Timothy Mitchell explains that, the “preservation of the past required its destruction so that the past could be rebuilt” (*Rule* 192). In the case of Stanley Park, the erasure of the past was partially endeavored through law—through the removal of the Coast Salish who resided there. The rebuilding or remaking of history was then commissioned through the placement of the totem poles and the proposed Indian village, that as one source explained, was to symbolize “a record of a primitive art; as a symbol of a culture that is almost forgotten, and nearly past” (Goodfellow MS 1175). The poles and anticipated village were deemed to be an invaluable addition to Stanley Park. As markers of a commodified Aboriginality, these signifiers would tell tourists and visitors little about how Canadian settler colonialism was implicated in the making of both the nation and the park, but instead would showcase the talents of Northwest Coast communities whose cultural objects and artifacts were, by the early twentieth century, firmly incorporated as the origins and heritage of Canada. Thus, while the totem poles display could be read as a presence—a symbol of Aboriginality—the poles could also and perhaps more accurately be seen as an absence; one which tells us nothing about the local Coast Salish, their histories, culture, and most importantly, their struggles against the state’s colonial legal practices of displacement and dispossession (Hawker 41; Mawani “Imperial” 126).

The exhibit at Stanley Park was part of a broader national preoccupation with the preservation of Aboriginal artistic and cultural arti-



facts, particularly totem poles (Darling and Cole 29). Specifically, it was through the mandate of “preservation” that government authorities and interest groups exported poles to public landscapes including Stanley Park (Jonaitis 243). The movement to protect totem poles illustrates that Canadian authorities perceived these vast cedar carvings as both economically and culturally valuable. As further evidence, the impetus for totem pole preservation came from Canadian authorities rather than Aboriginal communities (Cole 277). Notwithstanding the intentions of government officials, it seems that colonial epistemologies often underpinned and were expressed through concerns about protecting culture, environments, and material objects.

Across the globe, conservation, in its various forms, became critical sites of colonial knowledge and power. Mary Louise Pratt explains that like Christianity which “set in motion a global labor of religious conversion,” natural history “set in motion a secular global labor that . . . made contact zones a site of intellectual as well as manual labor” (27). Natural history provided the impetus for colonists to extract the planet’s life forms out of their organic and ecological surroundings only to be reordered into European patterns of global unity (Pratt 31). In North America, natural history and other knowledges also enabled colonial agents to legitimize and justify the appropriation of Indigenous material culture through newly articulated discourses of protection.

By the early twentieth century, colonial officials in both Canada and the US were actively campaigning to “save” Northwest Coast Art from extinction. Totem poles were especially important objects of conservation (Darling and Cole 30; Jonaitis 237). While authorities expressed anxieties about the natural deterioration of cedar poles due to weather, many insisted that these valuable wood sculptures also needed protection from private capitalists and from Aboriginal peoples themselves.<sup>5</sup> By the turn of the century, totem poles were regarded as “endangered specimens,” largely due to the appropriation of Native artifacts by individuals and museums (Darling and Cole 30). Collectors had long been pilfering First Nations coastal villages for cultural objects, which were then sold to museums around the world (Cole). Although the (il)legal appropriation of totem poles received considerable public attention in

Canada during the 1920s (Darling and Cole 30), few authorities questioned how Canada's own colonial policies contributed to the notable demise in the practice of carving and erecting poles.

Importantly, the federal government's contradictory Indian policies of assimilation and segregation directly contributed to the depleted supply of totem poles along the Northwest Coast. The appropriation of land and resources, the introduction of wage labor, combined with the reserve and residential school system, and the criminalization of ceremonial practices, had a devastating impact upon the individual and collective lives of First Nations (Miller; Tennant). These colonial practices and their legacies undoubtedly also transformed artistic and cultural productions (Cole 244). For example, under the 1884 amendment to the Indian Act, which outlawed potlatching, ceremonial masks and other cultural property were readily confiscated from First Nations communities (Cole and Chaikin). Although some groups continued to potlatch despite the threat of law, many master carvers stopped training apprentices, as there were fewer demands for their work (Jensen 9). At the same time that the federal government was destroying Aboriginal culture through assimilation and regulation, they were actively embarking upon a preservation campaign to protect Northwest Coast material culture from extinction (Francis 103).

In his discussion of cultural artifacts, James Clifford explains that rarity and worth are often guaranteed by a "vanishing" cultural status (223). This was certainly the case for totem poles, as fears about the increasing scarcity of carved poles and "good examples of Indian work" more generally, figured prominently in the perceived urgency for conservation (Goodfellow 13). From the 1920s onward, the federal government alongside the Canadian National Railway took a more proactive stance in totem pole preservation. In Canada, protecting Native cultural production was partly motivated by the growing national significance of Northwest Coast art, and importantly, by its increasing popularity and touristic appeal. In Northern BC for example, tourism had become a budding industry, and colonial authorities argued that totem poles would only increase the numbers of travelers to these remote regions. Concerned especially with promoting travel on the Canadian National

Railway, government officials and entrepreneurs began marketing the scenic wilderness of western Canada through images of “wild Indians” and totem poles (Braun 183–84; Francis 181).

In 1924, in response to the growth in tourism and the decline in totem poles, the federal government established the “Totem Pole Committee.” The Committee’s mandate was to protect the limited supply of poles in British Columbia, especially from export to the US (Gibson 507, 787-2). In the 1920s, there was a growing hysteria about US imperialist expansion and its effects on the Canadian nation. While authorities had previously expressed concerns about the possible American annexation of BC—which led to the creation of a military reserve on what is now Stanley Park—in the early twentieth century, a new threat emerged as rumors about Americans buying totem poles and “depleting” Canada’s precious and limited supply began to circulate.<sup>6</sup> The Historic Sites and Monuments Board, along with the Royal Society of Canada, and other organizations, insisted that the government take immediate action on this matter. Many urged that the federal government must now protect Canada’s national heritage by passing legislation to prohibit the sale of poles outside the country (Darling and Cole 30).

Most members of the Totem Pole Committee agreed that an amendment to the Indian Act was “an excellent one.” Other agencies including the Canadian National Railway also endorsed legislation that would prevent the exportation of totem poles and other carvings (NAC 507, 787-2A). Despite this widespread enthusiasm, however, two issues were raised for deliberation. First, observers explained that the law was somewhat limited, as it would only cover Indian reserves and not the entire geography of BC. Second, others raised concerns about how the Indians—many of whom were uncooperative in conservation efforts to begin with—would react to such legislation. For example, Diamond Jenness, a famous anthropologist who was appointed Chief of the Anthropological Division for the National Museum of Canada, was among those who questioned the reaction of local communities and how their resistance may negatively impact preservation efforts. The “Indians may consider that they are being deprived of their ownership

of the objects which the act desires only to protect,” he warned, “and in their resentment they may embarrass the work of repairing and preserving the totem poles along the Skeena River” (Jeness 507, 787-2).

Given their experiences with the federal government’s colonial policies, particularly those governing land rights, many Aboriginal peoples living in northern and coastal regions of the province were deeply suspicious of the state’s new interest in totem pole conservation. To avoid possible conflicts, Harlan Smith, from the Anthropological Division of the Geological Survey, proposed that the Committee involve Aboriginal peoples in preservation initiatives by educating “the Indians to police [their] own poles” (Smith 507, 787-2A). Other Committee members, however, were far more supportive of passing a law that would “prohibit the exportation of totem poles, [and other] historical relics” across the border (Lett 507, 787-2A). Although the impetus for a law was to keep totem poles and other cultural artifacts in BC and in Canada, the new legislation could potentially alleviate the “Indian problem” by circumventing the question of permission and cooperation altogether.

Despite hesitation, the Indian Act was eventually amended in 1927. Under this new provision, it was now an offence to purchase, acquire, deface, or destroy any Indian grave house, carved grave pole, totem pole, carved house post, or rock embellished with paintings or carvings without the written consent of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. Any person who violated this provision would be punishable by a two hundred dollar fine with costs of prosecution, or a term of imprisonment for three months.<sup>7</sup> While the law was intended to assist the Canadian government in its conservation of Native cultural artifacts, it is unclear as to whether this latest amendment was aimed at protecting or appropriating First Nations’ cultural property.

Although the federal government insisted that their interest was in conserving and not removing Native cultural artifacts from their rightful owners, under the newly amended Indian Act, authorities were now able to express greater ownership over totem poles and other cultural objects. In 1926, just as the new provision was being debated, Chief Seamadeaka from Kitwanga was offered \$350.00 for a pole on his re-

serve. The purchaser, the North-west Biscuit Company, was intent on acquiring a pole for their office in Edmonton. Even though company officials promised to place the pole on their factory lands where it could be monitored and preserved if need be, Duncan Scott, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, intervened in the negotiations. He informed the company of the impending changes to the Indian Act, and cautioned as follows; "I am sure you will appreciate the policy of the Department [of Indian Affairs] in endeavoring to preserve these poles in their original position of the Indian reserves as they are of considerable value to Anthropologists and to the traveling public" (Scott 507, 787-2B). In light of this stern warning, the sale never materialized.

In spite of the government's desire to protect and prevent the removal of totem poles from reserves, the Department of Indian Affairs employed a loose and discretionary policy, allowing the sale and removal of some poles but not of others. For example, while Duncan Scott refused to sell a pole to the Royal Scottish Museum, however he did allow the Royal Swedish Consul in British Columbia to purchase a totem pole for the Royal Museum in Stockholm. The pole was originally located on the Kitlope reserve in Bella Coola. Iver Fougner, the local Indian Agent, supported the transaction, explaining that the reserve was "uninhabited and very isolated." Although the Indian Act had already been amended, the sale and export of the pole was allowed under the pretext of preservation. Fougner urged that the pole should be sold as, "if [it is] not removed, after some time [it] will fall down and be destroyed." Scott agreed to send the pole to Sweden as long as "the Indian owners" were agreeable and "willing to dispose of it."<sup>8</sup> Apparently, Aboriginal communities were consulted about the sale. Notwithstanding their response, the Indian Act ensured that the Canadian state had the final say.

The totem pole preservation movement of the 1920s was intended to prevent the demise of an increasingly valuable cultural commodity by placing these objects in museums and highly visible tourist spaces, including Stanley Park. While First Nations were being displaced from the land and discursively and materially placed outside the parameters of the nation, their cultural productions were fast being incorporated as a vital part of Canadian national heritage. Timothy Mitchell explains that:

One of the odd things about the arrival of the era of the modern nation-state was that for a state to prove it was modern, it helped if it could also prove that it was ancient. A nation that wanted to show it was up to date and deserved a place among the company of modern states needed, among other things, to produce a past. (*Rule* 179)

An initiation rite facing the young Canadian nation then was to locate Aboriginal peoples in premodernity while preserving their culture for display and consumption. In other words, visible markers of Otherness were a necessary reminder to tourists and travelers that while Canada no longer had an “Indian problem” it did indeed have an “ancient past.”

In the early twentieth century, First Nations had to be brought into the nation only to be excluded as “uncivilized savages” who, among other things, could not protect their cultural property. Colonial authorities needed to “save” and “preserve” totem poles and other artifacts as evidence of a “lost civilization.” By the late twentieth century, however, Aboriginal poles resistance and shifting narratives of Canadian-ness both challenged and changed these meanings significantly. Today, the totem poles in Stanley Park signify a new Canada, one that now partially recognizes colonial histories and the contributions of its Aboriginal peoples. As I discuss below, the poles in Stanley Park no longer signify an ancient past but a tolerant present and a promising future, one characterized by national narratives of multiculturalism and (post)colonialism.

## II. Struggles over Aboriginality and Visibility in Stanley Park

From the time Stanley Park was first set aside as a military reserve in 1863 (Mather 38), the Coast Salish have actively resisted the state’s encroachment on their territories. While First Nations inhabitants continued to use the land despite the City of Vancouver’s park-making efforts, the Squamish, Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh have since initiated a legal land claim that centers on Stanley Park and is yet to be resolved.<sup>9</sup> Since the park was first opened in 1888, the Coast Salish have also repeatedly expressed their vocal opposition to various development projects. To begin with, the Squamish fiercely opposed the Indian village

proposed by the AHSAV. Although official accounts suggest that plans for a model village were abandoned due to lack of funding, the proposal was partly rejected on account of Squamish resistance. The Squamish Nation insisted that such a spectacle, which featured a Kwakwaka'wakw village, would further obscure the visibility and rights of the Coast Salish (Hawker 44, Mawani 130). Although they had no objections to a mixed village or to the placement of freestanding poles, the Squamish demanded that if the proposed village was carried through, the Coast Salish must also be recognized and commemorated (Hawker 130).

While many opposed the making of an Indian village, some members of the Squamish Nation viewed the totem poles as an opportunity to increase their visibility on their territories. Several scholars have reminded us that resistance to colonialism often takes multiple forms. As Homi Bhabha explains, resistance "is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention" but is often the effect of an ambivalence produced within colonial power itself (110). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a widespread belief among colonial authorities that an authentic Aboriginal culture existed and could be captured in representations including museum displays and performances (Raibmon 158). In the minds of Canadian authorities and tourists, as I discussed earlier, totem poles were perceived as a signifier of authentic Native Art. Thus, on several occasions, Squamish Chief Joe Mathias, did try and exploit the poles as an ambivalent marker of Aboriginality. Since government officials and tourists recognized totem poles as an authentic, or perhaps more accurately, a commercialized and valuable Native art form, Mathias tried to appropriate the totem poles site as a way to insert a Coast Salish presence.

Writing about intellectual property and the law, Rosemary Coombe explains this contradiction as follows: "Ironically, the most successful way for Indigenous peoples to challenge these stereotypical representations of themselves may be to claim them" (199). Even though the poles were misplaced markers of Aboriginality, Chief Mathias did attempt to claim them as his own. In 1933, he approached the Parks Board seeking permission to set up a booth adjacent to the totem poles exhibit where he could sell "Indian curios." For whatever reason, the

Parks Board refused his request.<sup>10</sup> Although the AHSAV and the Parks Board had long been trying to create an authentic display of Aboriginal culture in Stanley Park, the presence of a real Aboriginal person was unpredictable. Chief Mathias could either enhance the tourist experience or unsettle it.

In 1936, when Vancouver was celebrating its Golden Jubilee, the totem pole display at Stanley Park became a site of major improvements. It was at this time that the City reconsidered Chief Mathias' request. The Vancouver Golden Jubilee Committee and the Department of Indian Affairs acquired several additional poles for this occasion. Furthermore, the physical landscape was upgraded to enhance the viewing experience for visitors (Gunn 21–23, Jensen 69). To prepare for the celebrations, the City agreed to erect a temporary “Indian village” as part of the totem poles exhibition. The modest village included one building and a teepee.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, the teepee, which was not typical of the Coast Salish but instead was a dwelling commonly used by Plains Indians, was also thought to increase the authenticity of the display. To further enhance their display of Aboriginality, and perhaps to avoid any resistance to the village exhibit, the City agreed to allow Chief Mathias to sell curios and model poles and to tell tourists and visitors “Indian stories” (Jensen 69). Although the Squamish did not traditionally carve poles, the City also requested that Chief Mathias carve a pole to mark his peoples' meeting with Captain George Vancouver in 1792 (Gunn 23). The pole—which Mathias carved and dedicated to the City of Vancouver—was erected at Prospect Point, across from the Squamish reserve.

Importantly, the City's commodified exhibit of Aboriginality did in fact create a space for some First Nations artists. From the time of Vancouver's Golden Jubilee celebration, Native art and cultural objects became increasingly valuable tourist attractions. Thus, a real Aboriginal (but not Coast Salish) presence in Stanley Park became more palatable for City officials and park authorities. Several well-known Kwakwaka'wakw and Haida artists were commissioned to refurbish and/ or rebuild decayed totem poles. Doug Cranmer, Ellen Neel, and Bill Reid were among the new generation of artists who were involved in restoring and replacing the poles in Stanley Park (Jensen; see also Nuytten). In fact,



Neel, one of the few women carvers in British Columbia, began selling small poles at Brockton Point and then Lumberman's Arch before setting up a permanent studio at Ferguson Point. She carved there with her family until 1951 (Jensen 71).

In 1962, all of the totem poles were moved from Lumberman's Arch to their current location at Brockton Point. By 1987, given their growing popularity, City authorities proposed a major renovation at the new site. The impetus was to update tourist experiences by building a new Visitors Centre.<sup>12</sup> The rationale was that a refreshment stand and souvenir shop would offer some necessary services to tour bus passengers and other visitors while simultaneously promoting sightseeing. In a memorandum, City officials explained that a new Visitors Centre would "improve the level of service at the Totem Poles," providing "interpretation, washroom facilities, and an improved selection of food and gift items" (Jensen 71). Although the Squamish had long contested various developments in Stanley Park, including the expansion of the Aquarium and whale pool, this time, it was non-Aboriginal interests who strongly opposed the City's plans for a new Visitors Centre.<sup>13</sup>

Local opposition to the new facility centered on questions of cultural authenticity and environmental conservation. It seems that many Vancouverites still held onto the belief that an authentic and unchanging Aboriginal culture existed. For example, several residents feared that new additions to the totem poles exhibit would in fact destroy the visitor experience. Renee Jensen, of the West End Seniors Network argued that, "the introduction of a fake Indian structure alongside the hand carved totems of the Haida and Kwakiutl [Kwakwaka'wakw] would be sacrilege" (Parfitt A3). Others added that further development and commercialization would be detrimental to the natural landscape and that the park should be left as is. In March 1990, a public forum was held on the matter. Again, the majority of the speakers, who were non-Aboriginal, rejected the new facility. Once more, the two central issues were the environment and the cultural meanings of the current site. Elizabeth Anderson, the Green Party Spokesperson dismissed the plan as being "pro-development," while another Vancouver resident criticized the City's plans to change the landscape explaining that we "must

resist the temptation to civilize everything so Coke and a washroom are always at hand” (Easton 18). The fear for many non-Aboriginal opponents was that a new Visitors Centre—especially a modern looking glass and cedar structure—would diminish the authentic and “primitive” display of Aboriginality in Stanley Park.

City authorities had their own concerns, however. In 1997, when an agreement was finally reached on the Visitors Centre, the Parks Board suggested that local Coast Salish communities must be consulted on the construction and content of the interpretive site. While the site would contain information about the poles and their carvers, it would also tell visitors about Coast Salish history. The “present focus of the site is the Totem Poles, which are representative of the North and Central coast Nations,” explained City authorities. They urged that the new display should tell of a Coast Salish presence and would “reflect the Coast Salish Nations’ use of Stanley Park” (Brockton 336, 20367) To further enhance the display of Aboriginality, the Parks Board and City agreed to model the anticipated gift shop on a “First Nations theme.” While the operator of the nearby shop at Prospect Point was concerned about financial competition and thus did not want any golf shirts or generic souvenirs to be sold at Brockton Point, he and others agreed that the shop should indeed sell Native arts and crafts and Native snacks including Indian candy and salmon jerky (Brockton 336). The final justification to support the new Visitors Centre was the lack of sanitary facilities. Mr. Fetherstonhaugh, Chair of the Planning and Environment Committee explained that, “there are 1.7 million people visiting that area each year, and some of them are going behind totem poles and urinating” (Fong A11). Ultimately, development was deemed necessary to ensure that the poles would be protected and preserved.

Despite their opposition to other expansion plans, the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh supported the idea of a new interpretive site. Given that the totem poles display represented the Kwakwaka’wakw and Haida and thus told visitors little about local Coast Salish communities, their alignment with the City is hardly surprising. With input into a new Visitors Centre, the Coast Salish would finally have some discursive visibility in Stanley Park. “We’re not pro-development,” ex-

plained Leah George of the Tsleil-Waututh, “But we’d like to see something representing Coast Salish people there . . . we’d like to have a place where First Nations people could gather for conferences.” She added, in “Stanley Park there was such a strong First Nations presence that the city needs to acknowledge that” (Anderson B5).

In 2001, the City of Vancouver, Kodak Canada, and the Parks Board collaborated to build the new Visitors Centre. The end product was a modern but west-coast styled glass and cedar building, washrooms, and a snack/ gift shop called “Legends of the Moon.” In addition, several new commemorative inscriptions were placed at the site. While most of these plaques explain the meanings of each totem pole and provide brief histories of their carver, the new signs also perform a pedagogical function, educating visitors, albeit selectively, about Canadian colonialism and its effects on the preservation of First Nations culture, including totem poles. “In the early years of the Twentieth Century,” one of the bronze plaques explains, the Canadian government “outlawed important native ceremonies. Aboriginal peoples were compelled to abandon their traditional villages, languages, and ways of life . . . many native communities lost their totem poles.” The commemoration concludes that, “the sculptures at Stanley Park reflect not only the survival of First Nations culture but the continuing vitality of First Nations Art.”<sup>14</sup>

Public recognition of colonialism raises important questions about how Aboriginality and its many signifiers, including totem poles, now figure in the Canadian nation. The work of Australian scholars is particularly useful in this regard. Haydie Gooder and Jane Jacobs argue that reconciliation in Australia “is a self-evident nation-building project” (203). They explain that the “pedagogical arm of reconciliation takes the heroic story of colonial settlement, and reveals the various acts of dispossession and injustice that underscored it” (203–204). Also writing about Australia, Elizabeth Povinelli argues that recognizing the brutality of colonialism is now a “necessary condition of nation-building in late modern liberal democratic societies” (161). In Canada, this historical narrative presents a very limited story of Canadian law and colonialism. Recognition of colonial endeavors to criminalize the potlatch, for example, can thus be read as a step towards redemption. The Visitors Centre

briefly reflects on the past, but telling us very little about Canada's colonial history. For example, there is no mention of the various other colonial injustices including efforts to displace the Coast Salish off their land and onto reserves, for example. Instead, the Centre focuses on Canada's promising future.

An exploration of the other commemorative displays reaffirms that the new Visitors Centre is indeed about a new national performance; the emergence of a changed Canada that not only seeks forgiveness for its shameful colonial past, but which now recognizes the vital contributions of First Nations, the Coast Salish in particular, and celebrates their inclusion in the nation through postcoloniality and multiculturalism. The Visitors Centre is adorned with three commemorative boards which display the following headings: "Traditional Technology: Celebrating Coast Salish Traditions," "First Nations of Stanley Park," and finally "Our Communities Today." Keeping in mind that vision and visibility are multiple and unstable, placed together, the display suggests a teleological reading of history. The first sign, describing "traditional" languages, cultures, and (fishing) technologies, locates the Coast Salish in premodernity. The second, tells of their use of Stanley Park, that the land was once the site of a village, that "there were several settlements in the Brockton Point area," and that First Nations "used the park seasonally to harvest plants, gather their shellfish and crabs, [and] hunt in nearby waters." Interestingly, there is no reference to their forced removal or to the City's lawsuit against the eight mixed-race families. Nor is there mention of the ongoing land claims to what is now Stanley Park. As Chief Bill Williams of the Squamish explained to the Vancouver Province, the "Squamish people have a very strong attachment to that land. It was never ceded, or given away. It is, and always has been viewed by the Squamish people as part of our territory" (Anderson B5). Interestingly, this attachment is not fully articulated in the interpretive site.

Finally, the last plaque that reads "Our Communities Today," brings the Coast Salish into modernity and into the Canadian multicultural nation. A quote from Chief Joe Mathias tells of the Coast Salish and their repeated assertions of sovereignty:

Throughout the period of colonization and the evolution of Canada as a nation-state, we maintained ourselves as a distinct society, as a nation. We continued to possess and exercise our right of self-government, a right recognized in both international and domestic law. We have never relinquished our right of self-determination.

But the commemorative sign also tells of how the Coast Salish have evolved. Although “traditional fishing and hunting remain important activities,” the plaque explains, “First Nations own fisheries, land development businesses, and ecotourism ventures, and participate in the larger metropolitan economy.” Other narratives tell of the blending of traditional and “modern techniques” in artistic endeavors as well as “sustainable” partnerships between the Coast Salish and the Canadian government.

While keeping in mind that the new Visitors Centre provides a much needed historical and political context to the totem poles site and now visually represents the Coast Salish, I would like to offer a reading that questions the disciplinary forms of power embedded within these representations. Once again, Elizabeth Povinelli’s work is useful. Povinelli encourages us to critically examine the disciplinary dimensions of liberalism, not when liberalism is failing, but when it appears to be working (13). The totem poles site with its new Visitors Centre celebrates a new Canadian nation—one that is constituted as more reflexive, tolerant, and multicultural. A nation that now fully recognizes that First Nations are “our Communities” who, notwithstanding the effects of Canadian colonialism, now enjoy the full benefits of multicultural citizenship. Importantly, the “Our Communities” plaque also displays a “Millennium Coin” that reads, “Family 2000 We Canada.” The coin is inscribed with a First Nations motif that according to the Royal Canadian Mint, honors “our country’s vibrant character and expresses Canadians’ celebration of life . . . It sends a signal from east to west that Canada is a nation looking forward to a future filled with promise.”<sup>15</sup>

Although the Coast Salish have now finally been formally recognized at the totem poles site, the effects of recognition can be read as contra-

dictory. On the one hand, the site tells us about the Coast Salish and their use of the land now known as Stanley Park. On the other hand, the City's acknowledgement of the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh has been problematically framed through liberal notions of multiculturalism, a condition captured in the title of Povinelli's book, *The Cunning of Recognition*. Povinelli explains that:

The hopes and optimisms of [multiculturalism] and the individual and national telos they describe seduce critical thinking away from an analysis of how dominant social relations of power rely on a multicultural imaginary and discourse in order to adjust core state conditions, not to transform them. (183)

I would slightly revise Povinelli's arguments by adding another layer. These representations can be read and consumed by tourists and travelers as signs of recognition and redistribution—further evidence of Canada's mythical characteristics of pluralism, lawfulness, and tolerance (Mackey 26). The national telos described here seems to suggest that we have moved from colonialism to multiculturalism. This reading not only absolves the City and the Nation of its colonial past, suggesting that we have transcended it, but also facilitates new resentments about Aboriginal peoples as “wanting too much” and as having “too many rights,” a situation that Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs have aptly named “postcolonial racism” (65).

### III. Conclusions

In this paper, I have traced the changing meanings of Aboriginality and its place in Canadian national culture through a critical reading of the Stanley Park totem poles. Freestanding poles have long been perceived as important national art forms in Canada. From the early twentieth century onwards, totem poles became a vital tourist attraction and came to symbolize Canadian heritage. While First Nations were being displaced onto reserves and outside of the emerging settler society, Aboriginal culture—particularly the figure of the totem pole—was constituted as having some national value and was thus in need of gov-

ernmental protection. But as I show throughout, the meanings of these cedar monuments and their place in the nation were never static, nor fixed, but rather shifted in response to changing national narratives. In the twenty-first century, the new Visitors Centre has provided a much-needed context to the totem poles site and has brought with it fresh meanings. While the totem poles at Stanley Park were once evidence of a “primitive,” “uncivilized,” and “vanishing” race, this colonial narrative is now disrupted by a (post)colonial one that partially and cautiously recognizes how law and colonialism have historically figured in the making of Canada. Despite these national confessions however, the totem poles are now understood through liberal narratives of multiculturalism, as a testament to the nation’s past, present, and future, a present and future that now appears to include and celebrate the contributions of Aboriginal peoples.

Recently, several scholars have problematized the relationship between colonialism and multiculturalism (Gunew, Povinelli). In Australia, as Elizabeth Povinelli points out, multiculturalism “is represented as the externalized political testament to the nation’s aversion to its past misdeeds, and to its recovered good intentions” (18). Like Australia, Canadian multiculturalism also implies redemption for settler colonialism. Although multicultural discourses in Canada suggest that there is indeed a break between the colonial past and multicultural present, several scholars have told us that colonialism continues to shadow multiculturalism in significant ways (Anderson 180, Gunew 37). Accordingly, narratives that uncritically celebrate Aboriginality, as evident in Stanley Park, are deeply problematic for several reasons. To begin with, such displays run the risk of diminishing the nation’s violent origins, its’ histories, and legacies. In other words, the Visitors Centre may tell us something about Canadian colonialism, but it obscures the law’s role as a violent force of colonial power. For example, the interpretive site tells us nothing about the legal displacement that the Coast Salish faced during the park-making process. Nor are we told about the ways in which the government used law to appropriate cultural property, including totem poles. Instead, the Visitors Centre conveys the impression that in multicultural Canada, First Nations are now accepted as full citizens who

enjoy successful social, political, and economic partnerships with the state.

Contrary to the national display at the totem poles site, conflicts between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian government persist. Given that First Nations in BC have never relinquished their territorial ownership through treaties or otherwise, these tensions are particularly acute in Canada's most westerly province. As Nick Blomley explains;

land in British Columbia remains profoundly unsettled. For over a century, First Nations in British Columbia have sought recognition of their rights to land through delegations, legal petitions, and direct action. It was not until 1991 that the province of British Columbia gave partial acknowledgement of aboriginal title, and began treaty negotiations with native peoples, that continue, often proving fractious and controversial. (107)

Given these ongoing contestations around legal recognition and land and resource rights, the Visitors Centre does not adequately capture the contemporary political situation in BC and Canada. Inclusion in the nation does not simply hinge on the discursive acknowledgement and appreciation of Aboriginal peoples, but requires a redistribution of material resources, and economic, social, and political power. Although the display at the totem poles site maintains that we have now transcended colonialism, the material realities facing First Nations in Canada suggests otherwise—that legal dispossession and dislocation continue to unsettle the nation in old and new ways.

## Notes

- 1 A version of this paper was presented at the Race and Empire Conference at York University in April 2004. I would like to thank the participants as well as Cheryl Suzak, David Sealy, and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier drafts.
- 2 The Coast Salish include the Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Watuth.
- 3 Throughout, I use the terms Native, Aboriginal, and First Nations interchangeably, unless I am referring to a specific Nation.
- 4 I am using scare quotes initially to suggest that authenticity is a contested category, but I do not use them throughout the paper.



- 5 This is a theme that repeatedly emerges in discussions about totem pole preservation. See National Archives of Canada (NAC) volume 4086, file 507–782, 507-782-2A.
- 6 See, for example, “Preserve Totem Poles: Americans are Depleting Supply,” *Edmonton Journal* circa 1925. NAC RG Volume 4086 file 507, 787-2.
- 7 See 17 George V. Chapter 32. Assented to March 31, 1927.
- 8 For the transcripts of this conversation see Scott to Fougner. January 11, 1928. NAC RG 10 Volume 4086 File 507, 787-2A.
- 9 See, for example, Charlie Anderson. “A Beautiful Place to Grow Up.” *Province* 21 June 21 1998: B5+.
- 10 Records of the Boards refusal can be found in the Parks Board Minutes. 11 May, 1933. 48-A-4 File 2. City of Vancouver Archives (CVA).
- 11 This scene is captured in a photograph. Vancouver Public Library (VPL) Special Collections, VPL 4941.
- 12 See “Brockton Totem Poles Concession/Visitor Centre—Marketing Strategy.” CVA Vancouver City Council Minutes. June 1997, Volume 336, 20367.
- 13 For more details see Chief Phillip Joe to Wainborn, March 20 1984. CVA Series 93. Operational location files 1984-5. 57-E-8 reel 4.
- 14 For complete transcripts see “Totem Pole Interpretive Station.” CVA, PD2344, p.1.
- 15 For more information about the coin see “Canadian Coin News.” <http://www.canadiancoinnews.ca/previous/year2000.html> (Accessed October 29, 2004).

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