

Tyler McCreary. *Indigenous Legalities, Pipeline Viscosities: Colonial Extractivism and Wet'suwet'en Resistance*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2024. 376 pages. ISBN 9781772127041. \$36.99 paperback.

When the Royal Canadian Mounted Police raided Wet'suwet'en territory in 2020, solidarity protests and rail blockades sprang up across the country – momentarily grounding the transportation of goods and people to a halt. This violent encounter is part of a long history of struggles around rights to land and settler colonial industrial development. In *Indigenous Legalities, Pipeline Viscosities*, Tyler McCreary traces Wet'suwet'en engagement with and resistance to another pipeline project – the now cancelled Enbridge Northern Gateway. In doing so, McCreary tackles essential questions about the politics of industrial development and reconciliation in a settler-colonial context.

Rather than looking at pipelines as ‘cases of’ or ‘sites of’ resistance as others (including myself) have done, McCreary focuses on how Wet'suwet'en territorial sovereignty encountered the authority of the Canadian state and power of pipeline giant Enbridge in the proposed mega oil sands pipeline project (xvii-i). In the mid-2000s, Enbridge proposed Northern Gateway to transport diluted bitumen over 1,100 km from the Athabasca tar sands in Alberta to the coast of British Columbia coast, crossing many Indigenous territories, including that of the Wet'suwet'en. *Indigenous Legalities, Pipeline Viscosities* is a story about “how colonial forces seek to control Indigenous claims, and how the Wet'suwet'en resist” (xviii). McCreary carefully traces the historical and contemporary settler colonial dynamics and Wet'suwet'en law, governance, and resistance.

McCreary describes how this book results from “deeply entangled personal and research contributions” as a settler growing up in Wet'suwet'en territory (vii). The book relies on his doctoral fieldwork between 2010 and 2012, though he also draws on over a decade of listening and relationships with members of the Wet'suwet'en nation. Methodologically, McCreary undertakes a close critical analysis of historical, regulatory, and legal documents. Though he does not describe his work as such, it is also a form of community-engaged research. If I had a minor quibble, I wish more was said about some of these methodological decisions and processes.

The book opens with a key moment in the mid-2000s when Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared Canada a ‘global energy powerhouse’, and the oil industry was planning unfettered growth (1). Yet this was met with quickly forming opposition to tar sands expansion, and the seeds for Wet'suwet'en mobilization to the Enbridge Northern Gateway Pipelines project were planted. The book proceeds in three parts. The first situates Wet'suwet'en-settler relations' historically, moving through the fur trade, Wet'suwet'en territorial governance, the establishment of the settler-colonial administration and machinery of dispossession in the nineteenth century, including its ‘regime of resource extraction’ based on fishing, commercial forestry and its impacts on Wet'suwet'en societies and economies (22). The first chapter concludes with the (re)-assertion of Indigenous rights in response – including opposition to the 1969 White Paper and struggles for recognition of Aboriginal title in settler courts. Throughout the book, McCreary develops this kind of double tracing of settler colonial extractivism and Indigenous responses.

The second chapter centres on the 1997 case, *Delgamuukw, Gisdaywa v. British Columbia*, which required the settler provincial government to recognize Indigenous forms of authority through Aboriginal title. McCreary describes the case as “monumental not only in Canadian history but also in the global history of anti-colonial legal struggles” (45). Still, these issues of land were far from settled – and the case set in motion processes that have shaped how Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en authority interact with colonial systems and institutions (84). In this context, McCreary traces Indigenous-settler relationships after this landmark case.

Part II of the book examines state and corporate attempts to reconcile Indigenous peoples and development in the context of the Enbridge Northern Gateway project (176). The chapters centre on two phenomena: land use and occupancy studies (Chapter 3) and industry-Indigenous partnerships and agreements (Chapter 4). Chapter 3 develops a deep understanding of how two different Wet'suwet'en governance bodies – the Office of the Wet'suwet'en and Skin Tyee band – undertook traditional land use and occupancy studies as part of Enbridge's consultation efforts with the Northern Gateway proposal. These studies identify areas of significance for Indigenous peoples living on their traditional territories and how the project impacts them (104). The Office of the Wet'suwet'en and Skin Tyee took vastly different approaches to their studies. While Skin Tyee worked with Enbridge to identify changes to the project to address and limit the project's harms on their territory, the Office of the Wet'suwet'en developed an independent study that challenged the project and also the "authority of Canadian regulators to determine the conditions shaping the project without Wet'suwet'en consent" (119). McCreary notes that although both bodies acted according to their authority, he argues that Enbridge screened forms of Indigenous knowledge to fit within what it called Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge studies while ignoring larger territorial questions (113).

Chapter 4 examines Enbridge's offer of corporate partnerships – through its Aboriginal Economic Benefits package – and attempts to provide and promise economic benefits to Indigenous communities and nations conditioned on support of the project. In the wake of uncertainty about land claims from *Delgamuukw*, *Gisdaywa*, McCreary situates these as part of efforts to reconcile Indigenous territorial governance with the historical and contemporary injustices of settler colonial extractivism. While these are new spaces of negotiation between Indigenous interests and corporate power, McCreary argues these partnerships are "not simply a mechanism of economic inclusion"; rather, they "integrate Indigenous peoples within the structure of a colonial legal order that approaches the land as a commodity to exploit" (145). The chapters in Part II treat with nuance how Indigenous nations variously engage with a corporate proponent and navigate a constrained settler colonial and capitalist development. Yet, at the end of this section, McCreary takes a more direct critique, suggesting such corporate-Indigenous partnerships lock in communities to fossil capitalism (171).

In Part III, McCreary shifts to the Canadian government's contested regulatory review process for the Northern Gateway project. He argues that contestation over the project was fundamentally about how competing forms of authority attempt to "determine what can and cannot be" (177). McCreary critiques how the review process sought to constrain Indigenous participation, reducing "Indigeneity to a different way of knowing, not a way of enacting territorial jurisdiction" (176). More broadly, McCreary illustrates a shift throughout the book, where settler institutions no longer explicitly aim to erase or deny Indigeneity but instead "suspend recognition of Indigenous sovereignty" (185). Yet, as McCreary describes, Wet'suwet'en members asserted their sovereignty through enacting Wet'suwet'en law. In the final chapter, McCreary takes the reader from the approval of Northern Gateway to other contested fossil fuel infrastructure, including fracked gas via Coastal GasLink, while centering Wet'suwet'en resistance.

In characterizing what McCreary calls the enduring violence of reconciliation, he observes that successive federal governments – both Conservative and Liberal – have maintained strikingly similar approaches (227). Informed by Glen Coulthard's work on the colonial politics of recognition, McCreary argues that delimited forms of recognition are used to reconcile settler colonial resource development with Indigeneity. Returning to this broader question, McCreary concludes:

The conjoining of colonial development and Indigenous empowerment remains a fragile assemblage constituted on the basis of a selective recognition of Indigenous claims, ignoring those that are irreconcilable with colonial extractivism (248).

Yet a central lesson is that the fate of mega projects like Northern Gateway is not determined by the imposition of either colonial or corporate will but rather by the entanglements of competing authorities and relations (215).

McCreary provides a powerful account with a clear voice – offering rich analysis. Indigenous resistance is ongoing in this new era of so-called economic reconciliation in British Columbia, characterized by a liquified fossil gas boom and an explosion of corporate-Indigenous partnerships. Assertions of Indigenous sovereignty have reshaped the business of pipeline development; at the same time, pipeline proposals have shaped the politics and governance surrounding Indigenous engagement with and ownership of resource extraction more broadly. McCreary’s analysis serves to help understand these dynamics around Wet’suwet’en-settler colonial relations and beyond. McCreary concludes by calling readers to rethink relations of responsibility for environmental governance alongside the renewal of Indigenous authority (243-9). Ultimately, *Indigenous Legalities, Pipeline Viscosities* challenges readers to reconsider the relations of land, law, and reconciliation in an era of intensifying social and environmental struggles.

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