

CHAPTER TWO

“a narrow world, strewn with prohibitions”¹

The Transformation of Indigenous Territory

UNTIL RECENTLY, NORTH AMERICA WAS PROMOTED BY MANY non-Indigenous academics and popular writers alike as vacant territory waiting to be moulded by the arrival of Europeans. The project of countering this notion has begun, but is often met with opposition created by a naturalized set of historical reasonings and a political and social imperative to preserve the heroic story line. The related front of dating the occupation of First Nations people of the region that became western Canada, and the meaning of this occupancy, is equally contested and similarly of potentially considerable political and economic significance. Some scholars appeal to the illusory racelessness of Canada’s history and graft it onto liberal notions of equality to advance a political position that denies any special Indigenous rights by arguing that First Nations were simply the first wave of immigrants, therefore, “[t]o differentiate the rights of earlier and later immigrants is a form of racism.”² It should not be surprising that First Nations resent suggestions that they have no more connection to their territories than the European settlers who usurped them. Nor should it be unexpected that they have little tolerance for the continual shifting of archaeological theories concerning the timing and route of their migration from elsewhere.³ Contrary to the

“scientifically” based speculations that ignore, depreciate, or patronize First Nations understandings, Indigenous peoples of North America recognize the territories that supported their ancestors as the lands of their origin.

The important and seemingly obvious point in the context of this study is that at the time of their first contact with Europeans, the First Nations residing in the regions of southern Alberta and the southern interior of British Columbia were actively using the land and harvesting its resources, and had been doing so for a very long time, or they could never have survived to make contact with the newcomers. Their use of resources was not based on a haphazard wandering or a fortunate blundering into edible products, but on a systematic, organized, complex, and sustained array of activities learned from generations of living in particular territories. In other words, for each region and within the culture of the group occupying it, a successful economic strategy was developed. While those recognized as the owners of specific tracts of land or resource sites differed according to the cultural requisites of particular groups, and shifted over time as the result of conflict, disease, combinations, demographic shifts, or resource paucity or abundance in this or nearby territories, each group protected its borders and reserved the right to control access to its resources. In each group under discussion here, prior to the imposition of colonial rule, there was relative gender parity and flexible gender roles, diverse economic strategies and egalitarian economic structures, and distributed and relational leadership and authority.

In the two regions discussed in detail here, the area of southern Alberta covered by Treaty 7 and the region of south central British Columbia that at various points was known as the Kamloops-Okanagan Indian Agency, the time between initial contact and overt imperial expansion with its attendant imposition of colonial governance, legal framework, social structures, and economic modes, was very short. There was no extended period of military alliance as there was in eastern Canada, and the respect, to the degree that it existed, that was accorded Indigenous people by Europeans during the fur and resource trades was much abbreviated in western Canada.⁴ Even in southern Alberta, where the apparent unsuitability of the land for agriculture slowed settlement, there were barely 120 years between the first written record of contact with the arrival of Anthony Henday, and the administrative expansion of imperialism following the signing of Treaty 7.⁵ In the interior of British Columbia it was even later, by almost four decades, when Alexander Mackenzie, with the help of Secwepemc guides, entered the northern part of their territory.⁶ It was eighteen years later still when a party of Astorians led

by David Stuart traveled up the Columbia River to the Thompson through Okanagan territory in 1811.⁷ Here, it was less than eight decades between first recorded contact and the establishment of this region as an Indian agency administered and controlled by the Canadian Government.

The Peoples of Treaty 7

By 1877, the Indigenous peoples occupying the territory that became southern Alberta had already experienced some historic population movements as suggested by the three language groups represented in the area. The three Blackfoot nations, the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani, probably the first of the Treaty 7 signatories to enter the furthest reaches of the northern plains by about 1500,⁸ belong to the Algonquian language group like the neighbouring Cree and the distant Mi'kmaq. These three believe themselves to have come from a common ancestor and supported each other to form the strongest military alliance on the northwestern plains, but they remained politically independent.⁹ Until early in the nineteenth century, the Blackfoot nations and the Tsuu T'ina were for the most part allied militarily and through trade with the Cree.¹⁰ By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, though, the Cree were working to isolate the Blackfoot and raid their horses. Soon they were in open warfare. As the buffalo herds sought refuge further west, the Cree and their Nakota allies moved assertively into the territory of the Blackfoot. While there were occasional cessations in hostilities, in 1870 this animosity came to a final climax in a battle at the confluence of the Oldman and St. Mary's rivers. The Cree were decisively defeated, but by the end of 1871 they had entered into a formal treaty with the Blackfoot nations and, with their agreement, were allowed to continue to hunt what buffalo remained.¹¹

It is somewhat unclear when the Tsuu T'ina, originally part of the Dene Nation in the north, who are Athapaskan-speaking people like the Apache and Navajo to the south, arrived on the northern plains. Perhaps their split with the Dene occurred as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, but in any case they were present and allied with the Blackfoot prior to the arrival of the first European fur traders.¹²

The Nakoda (Stoney) are most closely related to Nakota groups to the east often referred to as Assiniboine.¹³ These groups speak a dialect of the same language as the Dakota and Lakota most often referred to as the Siouian linguistic grouping. Archaeological evidence indicates that the Nakota were located in the Lake of the Woods–Lake Winnipeg region by the sixteenth century. Though both the timing and the reasons are now unclear, the

Nakota divided from the Dakota (Sioux) by late in the seventeenth century, and eventually allied themselves with the Cree, in opposition to the Dakota. There are also a variety of interpretations concerning the arrival of the Nakoda in the area that became southern Alberta.¹⁴ Some suggest that the later division of the Nakota was caused by their over-extension into Blackfoot territory and the subsequent isolation of the group that became known as the Stoney.¹⁵ Another interpretation argues that the three Nakoda groups now resident in southern Alberta had separate origins. This interpretation places the Bearspaw and Chiniquay bands' arrival in southern Alberta in the early nineteenth century from southeastern Manitoba. The Wesley band in contrast, arrived from the parkland regions in the north at the end of the eighteenth century and then moved south.¹⁶ After considering the various positions put forward by the time of his writing in early 1970s, perhaps the most detailed textual account of land issues faced by the Nakoda, John Lerner states that it is not possible, based on existent archival or historical evidence, to confirm that the Nakoda were in the vicinity of the North Saskatchewan headwaters by 1800.¹⁷ Assiniboine author Dan Kennedy seems to confirm this in stating that the Nakoda or Stoney branch was created as a result of a devastating smallpox epidemic that struck in 1837. The survivors of several camps regrouped and together with surviving orphans traveled west through hostile Blackfoot territory until they found a safe haven in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.¹⁸ Lerner concludes that the Nakoda "enjoyed exclusive occupation of the mountains and foothills from the Athabasca to the Bow valleys at least a generation before 1877."¹⁹

Even though their boundaries changed, the economy of each of these peoples was based on the use of the land and resources of a large territory.²⁰ The significance of the connection to land should not be underestimated or trivialized. According to Kainai scholar Leroy Little Bear, "Tribal Territory is important because Earth is our Mother (and this is not a metaphor: it is read). The Earth cannot be separated from the actual being of Indians." This is because, to the extent that the Kainai case is generalizable, Indigenous philosophy is "holistic and cyclical or repetitive, generalist, process-oriented, and firmly grounded in a particular place."²¹ The territory of the Blackfoot nations straddled the international border as far south as the Yellowstone River and as far north as the North Saskatchewan. As one commentator noted, contemporary to the signing of the treaty, a line could be drawn that "would measure six hundred miles in length, and yet lie wholly in the country of the Blackfeet."²² The long-term allies of the Blackfoot, the Tsuu T'ina,

harvested the territory south of the 49th parallel as well, but also moved far to the north.²³ The Nakoda, rivals of the Blackfoot and Tsuu T'ina since early in the nineteenth century, also occasionally hunted south of the 49th and as far north as the North Saskatchewan River. In addition, they routinely traveled east onto the prairie and west into the Rockies.²⁴

These territories were primarily grassland with some parkland areas in the northern and western reaches. They provided a wide range of foodstuffs including a broad assortment of roots and berries, large and small game, fowl, and edible roots.²⁵ Within this range of potential sources of food, most writers stress the importance of the buffalo to the Blackfoot and all plains peoples, though this has caused an undervaluation of other food sources.²⁶ The buffalo herds were, to twenty-first century sensibilities, almost inconceivable in their size and provided not only food, but their hides could be converted in lodge covers, shields, warm clothing, or containers for various goods. Their sinew was used for a multitude of binding purposes and to make bowstrings, while their horns could be used as drinking vessels, and their bones as tools.²⁷ Certainly the buffalo were important to all five First Nation signatories to Treaty 7, even if the Nakoda were more likely than the others to also hunt in the mountains. Still, while the seasonal round of economic activities included assembling at locations that skill and experience indicated the buffalo would most likely frequent, they were also synchronized to the movements of other animals and by the sites and harvest readiness of various vegetable products used for food or medicine.²⁸

While women took on the important role of preparing both the hides and meat of the buffalo killed by male hunters, they also were primarily responsible for gathering the vegetable products that accounted for a significant portion of the total calories consumed by plains peoples.²⁹ Further, plants played important ceremonial roles, were significant for their value to human and veterinary medicine, and were used for cosmetic, household, and many other purposes.³⁰ Paying attention to the production of plant-based materials and other foodstuffs beyond the buffalo goes some way to recovering the economic contributions of women, which are understated, if presented at all in the historical record.

Women also played a larger role in the spiritual and political life of the Blackfoot and other plains societies than many writers have acknowledged. The authority of women is presented by Beverly Hungry Wolf, a Kainai woman, in a legend of Napi, who is a helper of the Great Spirit, but also a trickster.

...Napi divided up the people into different tribes. But the women couldn't get along with the men, so Napi sent them away in different groups. Not long after, he got together with the chief of the women so that they could decide about some important things.

The chief of the women told Napi that he could make the first decision, as long as she could have the final word. He said that was all right, and the old people say that ever since then it has been this way between men and women.

The next time Napi came to the chief of the women, she exercised her prerogative about having the last word and she decided:

[f]rom now on the men and women will live together so that they can help each other....

Now, at that time the men were living real pitiful lives. The clothes they were wearing were made from stiff furs and hides, and hardly tanned at all. They couldn't make moccasins or lodges, and they couldn't even keep themselves clean. They were nearly starved because the food that they ate was always plain and usually burned. When Napi told them what had been decided, they were very anxious to join the women.³¹

Esther Goldfrank reported that the Kainai's Trim Woman and the southern Blackfeet's Empty Coulee, engaged in raids and were respected for their military prowess by men in their communities.³² Indeed, there was a special place in Piikani society for *minauposkitzipxpe*, or "manly-hearted women." Piikani men referred to Running Eagle, a woman from their community, as "chief" and followed her into armed conflict as a result of military successes which earned her their respect and loyalty. According to the 1941 observations of Oscar Lewis, those designated as manly-hearted women were seen as independent, ambitious, assertive, bold, and self-assured sexually.³³

In the millennia before the adaptations necessary in the reserve period, the cooperation essential for collective hunting of buffalo and the distribution of the goods it produced ensured the institutionalization of egalitarian structures. This is confirmed by Alan Klein for the Blackfoot and Diamond Jenness for the Tsuu T'ina, especially for the time before these groups obtained sufficient numbers of horses and guns. Alan Klein argues that this egalitarianism was shattered by the introduction of the horse and gun, which individualized

the hunt and ownership of the horse as the means of production while at the same time created differential access to the benefits that wealth could provide.³⁴ It is important to note, though, that guns had a limited impact on the hunt at least until the introduction of the repeating rifle in about 1870. Inaccurate smooth bore muskets were no improvement on bows, especially when shot from horseback, and the noise of the weapon and the subsequent stampede of a sea of animals that weighed up to 800 kg each would undoubtedly make a hunter reconsider the efficacy of such a weapon.³⁵

Even more importantly, while Klein points out that the individual accumulation of wealth and status was attenuated by “a framework of collective ownership of resources,” he is operating under the assumption that this acquisitive impulse is a natural preoccupation of all people. Gerald Conaty, senior curator for ethnology at the Glenbow Museum, argues in contrast that while wealth measured in horses influenced status, ownership of medicine bundles too earned community respect. Further, one’s herd of horses could be decimated by a single raid or might succumb to a single blast of particularly severe weather leaving the owner impoverished. While wealth judged by horse ownership, then, could be transitory, the “knowledge that went with bundle ownership was a source of secure income for those who possessed it. . . . Knowledge, however, was not lost when a bundle was transferred. Instead after a man had owned several bundles, and his knowledge of ceremonies grew, respect of him increased.”³⁶

Leaders in these egalitarian societies were chosen by consensus based on ability to provide a particular function or coordinate a specific undertaking. Leadership of the Blackfoot, for example, could only be gained and held by the will of the community and its judgment of the personal attributes and influence of the leader. If a leader went against the wishes of the group, it simply abandoned him in favour of someone else.³⁷ This not only ensured that a chief served the wishes of the community, but also that he achieve consensus between various centres of influence: elders, spiritual leaders, military leaders, particularly successful hunters, and other groups. Similarly, according to Jenness, a Tsuu T’ina leader was not chosen by election, but rather “recognized by common consent of his prestige.” A leader “possessed no formal authority, and had no means of enforcing his wishes except by popular support. . . .”³⁸ For the Nakoda, a compound leadership, that took advantage of the specific leadership skills of several community members concurrently was, as John Larner confirms, “held at the informal pleasure of the membership.”³⁹ Nakoda Chief John Snow stated that while special

situations, as in the case of a military conflict or in a coordinated hunt, might require the split second decision of one of these specialized leaders, but for the most part consensus was sought. A leader was a steward or guide, not a ruler. Decision-making was based on consensus that was made possible by the necessity of cooperation. If an individual family could not agree to consensus, they could leave the community.⁴⁰ In contrast to Euro-Canadian forms of governance then, authority in these societies was more diluted and a leader's main role was as a guide toward consensus.

The Peoples of the Kamloops and Okanagan Regions

The peoples of the southern interior of British Columbia perhaps had much less difficulty communicating with one another historically, both in actual linguistic terms and in common cultural understandings, than did the First Nations of southern Alberta. The Secwepemc, Okanagan, and Nlha7káp̓mx, who were included at various times in the Kamloops-Okanagan Indian Agency, all spoke dialects of the Interior Salish language. According to historian Duane Thomson this "common linguistic and cultural heritage... greatly facilitated travel and cooperation between tribes in matters such as economics, marriage and warfare."⁴¹ As in the Treaty 7 area there was historic movement and shifts in territorial control between nations resident by 1877, but these seem to have resulted in less diversity among populations.⁴² While it may not be particularly relevant to the Indigenous people now living on the plateau, available archaeological evidence indicates that the ancestors of Interior Salish speaking peoples occupied the region in which the Okanagan and Secwepemc now live 7,000 years ago and the southern portion of Okanagan territory 9,000 years ago.⁴³

Like that of the Blackfoot, the territory operated by the Okanagan, or Syilx people, extended well south of the 49th parallel. In the latter's case, this territory extended to a point south of Grand Coulee in present-day Washington State. Their lands also extended north and east to a point above Mica Creek and from there in an arc to just south and west of Kamloops. In all, the lands drawn on by the Okanagan included about 72,000 sq km (27,799 sq mi).⁴⁴

The Secwepemc, the largest of the Interior Salish speaking nations, occupied the territory north of the Okanagan and shared some of the territory, particularly around Arrow Lakes in the east, in common with them. Secwepemc territory consists of 180,000 sq km (69,498 sq mi) of the region that is now south central British Columbia. This vast territory extends from an area west of the Fraser River to inside the Alberta border at Jasper National

Park in the northeast and to below Arrow Lakes in the southeast.⁴⁵ While most Secwepemc communities were and are positioned along the Fraser and Thompson rivers, they accessed the resources throughout their territory.

As in the Treaty 7 area, there were conflicts between the Okanagan, Secwepemc, and their neighbours, usually as the result of a dispute over territory, resources, or a matter of honour that required resolution. According to Franz Boas and James Teit, the Okanagan, for example, were attracted by the bountiful hunting and grazing lands and agreeable trading position to their north and northwest and seem to have gradually extended their territory into Secwepemc lands.⁴⁶ Conflicts between the two in the eighteenth century led to a formal peace treaty between Okanagan Chief PEIkamū'lōx and Secwepemc chief Kwoli'la which confirmed boundaries between the two nations and recognized Okanagan control of Douglas Lake and Nicola Valley, formerly occupied by the Secwepemc.⁴⁷ There was also, of course, conflict between each of the Secwepemc and Okanagan and others from both west and east of the Rocky Mountains.

There are similarities in the terrain and climate occupied by some groups of Okanagan and some Secwepemc, those around Okanagan and Shuswap lakes for example, but both Okanagan territory and Secwepemcul'ecw (Secwepemc territory) are diverse in climate, topography and in the life that the land supports. The nine bioclimatic zones in Secwepemc territory range from wet cedar forests to the dry sagebrush belt and many variations in between. Annual precipitation ranges from less than 30 cm annually in the Kamloops region to up to 250 cm in the Columbia Mountains.⁴⁸ Similarly, in the arid portions of the Columbia Basin and Okanagan highlands summers are hot and dry, and winters harsh. Annual precipitation can range as low as 25 cm and most of it in snow. Moving to the east into the Selkirk and Monashee ranges though, is an area known as the "Interior wet belt" where the annual precipitation ranges from 50 cm to 170 cm and the temperature is much milder. The territories of both the Okanagan and Secwepemc contain a marked diversity in vegetation and edible plant material as a result of significant variations in climate and elevation.⁴⁹ With this variation in topography, climate, and resources, clearly the economic strategies differed not only between the Kamloops-Okanagan and Treaty 7 First Nations, but within the territories of the Okanagan and Secwepemc as well.

The complex economy of the Okanagan included hunting, fishing, and the production of plant materials, according to seasonal and local availability of each across the breadth of their territory. Importantly, their economy also

included trading with other First Nations both near and distant. Together, these strategies ensured that the pre-contact Okanagan economy was flexible and adaptable. The variety of products allowed for one to take the place of any shortage of another. Probably this made the Okanagan less susceptible to any periodic shortage that may have effected the Secwepemc who were more dependent on fishing.⁵⁰ The Secwepemc too, though, accessed the considerably varied bounty of their large territory by traveling between resource sites in an annual cycle. As Okanagan communities met at fishing sites at Kettle Falls and Okanagan Falls, the spring gathering of Secwepemc families from various villages at local lakes as soon as the ice cleared allowed cooperative fishing, renewal of relationships, and collective political discussion. The seasonal rounds of both the Okanagan and Secwepemc permitted the accumulation of necessary sustenance for the winter while at the same time the camps provided a place for equally important cultural transmission from elders to younger community members. Traveling between resource sites and for trade also ensured the distribution of food and other goods more broadly, which tended to smooth out any local or seasonal variation or shortage in resources.⁵¹

While there was variation between specific communities, both the Okanagan and Secwepemc engaged in extensive trade outside of their own territories. Teit points out that the Secwepemc living in the Fraser Canyon, probably the Xgat'temc (Dog Creek) and others, traded dried salmon and salmon oil to the Tsilhqot'in for dentalium shells, woven goat's-hair blankets, small animal pelts, "in fact anything of value they had to give." These items were in turn traded to other Secwepemc groups.⁵² Even before European contact, interior groups had acquired iron goods through trade with coastal First Nations.⁵³ The North West Company's Alexander Ross, for example, in attempting to locate a route used by the Okanagan in their trade with coastal groups noted in 1814 that they "had formerly been in the habit of going to the Pacific on trading excursions" in which they traded hemp used to make fishing nets for marine shells and other goods.⁵⁴ The trade networks of both the Secwepemc and Okanagan also linked them to plains nations, sometimes through the Ktunaxa (Kinbasket or Kootenay).⁵⁵ These trade networks not only provided access to an increased variety of goods and helped to ensure economic well-being, but also served to maintain social and political relations.⁵⁶ The introduction of horses early in the eighteenth century, well before the arrival of Europeans, transformed water-based trade routes to overland ones.⁵⁷

Most interior groups had access to some fish species in their own territory, but many traded salmon as well. Various species of salmon made their way up the Fraser and Columbia river systems into Secwepemc and Okanagan territories at different times of the year so that fishing peoples did not have cause to rely on a single run. Each First Nation had its own way of assessing which kinship groups would be allowed access to particular fishing sites, but most had some restrictive component. However, bilateral kinship recognition and an apparent preference for exogamy led to the development of networks of kin that could be relied on to provide specific help in times of resource shortage in a particular part of the region and also afforded each individual access to a wide variety of resource sites, internationally, throughout the interior. Clearly this access and diversity added security for both the Secwepemc and the Okanagan.⁵⁸

Preserving fish for the winter was a necessary strategy as dried salmon was a kind of currency on the plateau and was traded widely beyond.⁵⁹ Salmon also became an important commodity during the fur trade era. Records from Thompson's River Post (Kamloops) in Secwepemc territory for 1842, for example indicate that in addition to fresh fish, 14,000 dried salmon were traded into the post between October 4 and October 22, 1841.⁶⁰ At Fort Okanogan 18,411 dried salmon were eaten in ten months by twenty six adults and fourteen children.⁶¹ While clearly salmon kept the traders and their families alive, people were not happy about having to rely on "rotten salmon" and "such poor stuff" when what they really wanted was animal flesh.⁶² This perception of salmon could not help but negatively impact on how the traders viewed, and so wrote about, fishing peoples.⁶³

In addition to fishing for several species of salmon and other fish, the Okanagan and Secwepemc hunted a variety of large animals like deer, elk, and big-horn sheep. These seasonal hunts too were communal and included all family members. Secwepemc families, for example, set up base camps from which men hunted deer, elk, and caribou in higher elevations, while women and children set snares for smaller animals and then dried the meat brought in by the men.⁶⁴ In the nineteenth century at least, plateau peoples also traveled across the Rockies to hunt buffalo.⁶⁵

As in the Treaty 7 area, men were primarily the hunters, fishers, and tool and weapon makers, while women were responsible for plant production, making lodges and household utensils, and the care of children. As in the Treaty 7 area as well, the actual division of labour was a good deal more flexible. Some women were accomplished hunters, while men sometimes picked

berries and made their own clothes.⁶⁶ Similar to plains women processing buffalo, the availability of plateau women's labour to process fish determined the number taken regardless of the quantity allowed by Indigenous technology.⁶⁷ Since buffalo was less important than on the plains, though, there was less impact resulting from the growth of the hide trade. Elizabeth Vibert argues that while polygyny was widely practiced by groups on the plateau, there is "no evidence" of any increase as a result of the trade.⁶⁸

James Teit noted that "[i]n some parts of the country the chief means of sustenance was hunting, in other parts fishing, while in many places these two were of about equal importance" but "[r]oot digging and berrying were important everywhere."⁶⁹ As in the Treaty 7 region then, plants were significant for their role in making tools, weapons, canoes, dwellings, domestic items, medicines, for religious and ceremonial purposes and for food.⁷⁰ While it is impossible to be certain, one estimate placed the caloric input from plant foods consumed by Sahaptian groups on the middle Columbia at as high as 60 percent of total calories. Others have calculated the average for plateau communities collectively at between one-third and one-half of total caloric intake.⁷¹

Harvesting plant material was not simply based on fortuitous discovery. Anthropologists Douglas Hudson and Marianne Ignace argue that the Okanagan and Secwepemc used techniques to harvest root crops that were not dissimilar from those used in European-style horticulture, therefore blurring the distinctions applied by anthropologists between hunter-gatherer peoples and horticulturalists.⁷² Sk'emtsin (Neskonlith) Secwepemc elder Mary Thomas has pointed out that plant and soil management practices like replanting corms, loosening soil, and pruning berry bushes, among other practices, made each plant area "just like a garden."⁷³ Plant management on the plateau was performed primarily by women and preceded the arrival of Europeans.⁷⁴

These pre-contact strategies help to explain the ready incorporation of domesticated plants, like the potato, into the seasonal rounds of Okanagan and Secwepemc communities when they were introduced by the Hudson's Bay Company in the nineteenth century. By 1860, potato cultivation was a commonplace activity for Indigenous groups throughout the British Columbia interior and produced another staple that the fur traders depended on.⁷⁵ Since vegetables were viewed by the fur traders as inferior foods, even compared to salmon, eating vegetables as a main part of one's diet clearly represented poverty. This evaluation, in turn, worked to deemphasize and obscure the economic contributions of women in this and the later settlement period.

This is especially ironic considering that the adaptation of plant production techniques to European species as mentioned above allowed for relatively favourable impressions of European observers. In 1873, Israel Wood Powell, the DIA's Superintendent for British Columbia, reported of the Secwepemc "[t]heir prospects in agriculture are most favorable and in addition to the favorite product of the Natives generally, Potatoes, they have without much encouragement produced Cereals of all kinds in considerable quantity."⁷⁶ Expertise and adaptation to the cultivation of domesticated plants in addition to the raising of livestock was widespread amongst Secwepemc and Okanagan communities and by the time of non-Indigenous settlement in their territories. These were added to older established economic strategies such as those discussed above.

The Secwepemc, Okanagan, and Nlha7kápmx attempted to explain their complex economies in 1910 in the hope of convincing Canadian officials that the justification used to appropriate their land as "unused" and so "unneeded" was not legitimate. In a memorial presented to then Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier at Kamloops their chiefs patiently tried to explain their land use strategies in terms that they hoped would resonate with Euro-Canadians: "The country of each tribe was just the same as a very large farm or ranch belonging to all the people of the tribe from which they gathered their food."⁷⁷ For reasons that will be discussed below the continual reduction and uncertainty of their land base, though, eventually mitigated against their success as farmers of any sort.⁷⁸

Despite the common access to resources and collective identity evident in both Secwepemc and Okanagan territories, and despite the connections between villages as the result of kinship and proximity, each community or cluster of communities within each of these nations was autonomous and composed of independent kin-based households. Village membership was flexible with each individual and family moving freely between communities.⁷⁹ This flexibility does not however imply a situation in which there was no leadership or where leaders had no authority.

As with those who would sign Treaty 7, both Okanagan and Secwepemc chiefs required the constant support of their communities. This was dependent on their influence and their ability to represent their community to the outside, to mediate conflicting views or interests between individuals and families, to admonish those who disrupted community harmony, and to guide their fellows toward consensus, rather than on their ability to dictate a particular action or their reliance on institutions or structures of

coercion.⁸⁰ As Ignace said of the Secwepemc, successful chiefs did all of this and set “a good example for all others, without having any material or other privileges.”⁸¹ The flexibility of community membership made it likely that a chief who demonstrated these abilities tended to attract more members which in turn increased a village’s political and economic security and political influence.⁸²

There were two classes of chiefs recognized by both the Secwepemc and Okanagan. To a certain extent there were political leaders who were chosen through patrilineal heredity, but these individuals also had to demonstrate their fitness to hold the position through their own abilities and achievements, or they could be bypassed. The second category of chiefs were not hereditary positions, but rather were filled by those who attained respect and authority solely through their proven abilities in a certain area, so that for example, there were fishing chiefs, hunting chiefs, war chiefs, and dance chiefs, among others.⁸³ There does appear to be a difference between the Okanagan and Secwepemc in regard to overall national leadership. While a particular Secwepemc chief may have been selected based on strengths as an orator and negotiator, to represent all to outsiders, there was no paramount chief or overall political leader for all Secwepemc.⁸⁴ The Okanagan on the other hand seem to have recognized a “high chief” responsible for international affairs and territorial protection.⁸⁵ While Teit and Carstens both contend that there were no Okanagan women chiefs, there is some reference in the anthropological literature of female chiefs among both the Secwepemc and Okanagan. Even if women were not the primary political leaders, it is clear that they exercised roles akin to chieftainship in some, and considerable authority in many, plateau societies. In the southern Okanagan these women were referred to as *skʷúmalt* or “women of great authority.”⁸⁶

Beginning in the last part of the nineteenth century seven Okanagan “bands,” each composed of single villages or groups of villages with its own elected chief, have been recognized by the Canadian Government. Almost certainly there were more villages than this at contact. Teit identified thirty Secwepemc communities before 1860, each with a primary village, but after the ravages of introduced disease, only twenty remained at the time of his writing in 1909.⁸⁷

European Disruptions

Each of the major attributes of the societies resident in southern Alberta and the British Columbia interior discussed above—extensive territory, relative

gender parity and flexible gender roles, diverse economic strategies and egalitarian economic structures, and distributed and relational leadership and authority—came under particular pressure from church and state. It needs to be remembered that by 1877, each of the societies in both regions discussed here had already undergone significant stress and population losses as the result of introduced diseases. It seems beyond doubt that this would have had significant impact on how these societies dealt with changing circumstances and the pretensions of the new rulers of western Canada.

The devastating smallpox epidemics of 1780–81, 1837–38, and 1869–70 decimated the First Nations resident in the area that became southern Alberta. While early Indigenous population figures are notoriously difficult to ascertain, according to Hudson's Bay Company traders, up to 75 percent of the populations of Treaty 7 nations were lost to the disease in the outbreak of 1837–1838 alone.⁸⁸ While plains populations were likely beginning to recover from the 1781 epidemic by 1837, they were also hit, in the interim, by recurring bouts of scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough, and influenza.⁸⁹ The populations of Treaty 7 First Nations began to rebound again after 1838 when they were struck by smallpox once more in 1869, which almost completely eliminated the Tsuu T'ina.⁹⁰

Only 4,392 individuals accepted their annuity in the year that Treaty 7 was signed.⁹¹ Two years later 6,159 took the payment and in 1880, 7,549.⁹² Of these, the largest component was the Kainai followed by the Siksika and Piikani. Although the reserve populations of all Treaty 7 nations, with the exception of the Nakoda, declined significantly under the federal government's surveillance between 1871 and 1917 at least, the Kainai remained the largest single First Nation resident throughout southern Alberta.⁹³

By 1877, the First Nations of the British Columbia interior, like those of Treaty 7, suffered enormously from the effects of introduced diseases. Overall, the Okanagan seem to have felt the impact somewhat earlier and more deeply than the Secwepemc, but the losses for both were staggering. Boas and Teit say that whereas the Okanagan lost three-quarters, the Secwepemc are estimated to have lost more than two-thirds in the two generations following 1850.⁹⁴ There were, however, earlier epidemics: the first in the 1770s or early 1780s, and the second at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ Overall, population losses were likely 90 percent for the first 100 years after the 1770s for British Columbia as a whole.⁹⁶ They also endured population losses during the early period of DIA surveillance, even if not to the extent of the First Peoples of southern Alberta. When the Indian Reserve Commission traveled

through the region in 1877, an apparently rigorous census was conducted. According to the commission's census taker, George Blenkinsop, the Okanagan population was at that time 576 and the Secwepemc 986, but these figures are exclusive of several groups that should have been included.⁹⁷ The population given by the DIA for the combined Kamloops and Okanagan agencies was 4,394 in 1883.⁹⁸

In addition to the disruptive impact of epidemic disease, governmental policy was constructed in the century and more before 1877 in such a way that would further destabilize Indigenous communities in western Canada. Where the spread of disease may have been unintentional, the consistent effort to de-Indianize the indigenous populations and to alienate their land and resources for the benefit of others was premeditated and deliberate.

Canadian Indian policy has its roots in the expansion of European imperial conflicts into the North American theatre. Following the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, the British Government deemed it prudent to enter into written treaties with the Eastern First Nations who had previously been more inclined to establish military and trade relations with the French. Like the later numbered treaties, these "Peace and Friendship Treaties" most often recognized Indigenous rights to hunt and fish in exchange for a stipulation that British law would apply. Unlike later agreements though, they did not include any surrender of Indigenous territory. From 1713 until the end of the European imperial struggle in North America in the 1760s, the British entered into a number of similar treaties with the Abenaki, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy and others in the United States and the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet in Canada.⁹⁹

By mid-century, the British Government had come to the conclusion that it was in the interest of empire, and its position vis-à-vis France, that Britain establish a uniform policy toward First Nations resident in the North American territory that it claimed.¹⁰⁰ Already Indian commissioners were appointed in at least one of the American Thirteen Colonies at the end of the seventeenth century and in 1755 William Johnson and John Stuart were appointed as Indian superintendents for the north and south branches of the Indian Department responsible to the British military commander for North America.¹⁰¹ These Indian superintendents were charged with ensuring that trade with Indigenous peoples and use of land that they still claimed met specific and uniform guidelines. Soon, policy was also adopted that territory designated as "Indian Country" could only be purchased by the Crown through treating with the First Nation involved. Individual speculators could

not buy lands from Indigenous people and any surrender had to be approved by a majority of the First Nation concerned at a public meeting.

All of these policy features were codified in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. The Royal Proclamation, in turn, informed Britain's policy toward Indigenous peoples in North America for the next half century at least and is the foundation for the later numbered treaties in western Canada. Its applicability, though, was consistently denied by British Columbia.¹⁰² Following the American revolutionary war colonial authorities moved, as the Royal Proclamation dictated, to purchase land from Indigenous people north of the eastern Great Lakes, to supply Loyalists who fled North and for the Iroquoian allies of the British whose lands were now in American territory.¹⁰³

With the need for military allies removed after the war of 1812, the British shifted policy to include "civilizing the Indian" as an important component. L.F.S. Upton points to the 1828 report of Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs Major General H.C. Darling as "the founding document of the whole 'civilizing' program." While this is perhaps somewhat overstated, the document does refer to many of the features that would remain at the heart of policy throughout the period under discussion here. Darling proposed "elevating" Indigenous peoples by inducing them to settle on self-sufficient farms, educating them in European values and Christianizing them.¹⁰⁴ Throughout the 1830s, 1840s, and most of the 1850s, Indigenous peoples, through their tribal councils, had a degree of self-governance in that they had control over the lands that remained to them, any funds received as compensation for lands alienated, and the pace at which European values would be inculcated.¹⁰⁵ Even this degree of autonomy though was shattered over the next two decades as the final pieces of the supervisory edifice were put into place. *The Gradual Civilization Act* passed by the legislature of the United Canadas in 1857 represented this shift in focus away from mere "civilization" and the autonomy guaranteed in the Royal Proclamation toward full-out assimilation into the Canadian political, economic, social, and cultural fabric. To this end, liberal notions of individual property ownership and land tenure became central to policy, which also continued to include promotion of agriculture, Christianization, and education in European values.¹⁰⁶ By Confederation it was becoming clear to policy makers that their "encouragement" of those people who were defined by the 1857 Act as Indians toward the above objectives was being undermined by Indigenous leaders. As a result, in an attempt to breakdown existing political structures, the new Canadian Government moved in 1869 to pass *The Gradual Enfranchisement Act*. This new

legislation considerably strengthened Canada's ability to dictate the means and pace of assimilation. It declared that, regardless of pre-existing political structures, Indigenous leadership would be elected by adult males for a three year period, but that these leaders could be removed by the Governor for "dishonesty, intemperance, or immorality." At the same time, the authority of that leadership would extend to little more than enforcing what in other jurisdictions might be covered by municipal bylaws. Further, even regulations to this end had to be approved by Ottawa.¹⁰⁷

With the passage in 1876 of the first *Indian Act*, all of this was strengthened even further. After 1876, meetings of band councils could only be held in the presence of an Indian agent or other representative of the State, a provision that seems clearly meant to allow this individual to survey those in attendance and to guide the agenda and conduct of the meetings. Further, a somewhat amorphous category of "incompetency" was added to the list of justifications by which a chief could be removed from office. In addition to the responsibilities listed in 1869, Chiefs now were also to develop procedures for "[t]he locating of the land in their reserves, [for individual cultivation] and the establishment of a register of such locations."¹⁰⁸ Clearly then, collective control and mutual responsibility as well as the right to determine their own political structures, economic strategies, and social structures appropriate to each First Nation's cultural framework had already begun to be undermined by 1877.

Even though the legislation enacted up to and including the 1876 *Indian Act* applied to British Columbia, the province's earlier existence as distinct colony within the British Empire put it in a somewhat more privileged position than the prairie west. For example, despite the fact that Rupert's Land was expressly excluded from the Royal Proclamation, treaties were still entered into there. On the other hand, even late in the twentieth century, British Columbia grasped upon the phrase in the document that states that it applies to "Indians with whom we are connected" to argue that since there was no "connection" between Britain and Indigenous peoples in British Columbia in 1763, the Proclamation did not apply there.¹⁰⁹ This position is better seen as part of its historic argument that Indigenous people never held title to the land so there is no legal necessity to enter into treaties with them. When British Columbia entered Confederation in 1871, Article 13 of the Terms of Union stated "[t]he charge of the Indians, and the trusteeship and management of the lands reserved for their use and benefit, shall be assumed by the Dominion Government, and a policy as liberal as that

hitherto pursued by the British Columbia Government shall be continued by the Dominion Government after the Union.”¹¹⁰ As will be discussed in later chapters, this allowed British Columbia to argue that it had the right to continue to pursue a course distinct from the rest of Canada in issues related to Indigenous lands and resources. This in turn helps to explain the lack of treaties in British Columbia and the relative diminutive size of reserves there compared to southern Alberta.¹¹¹

While they differed in approach, though, the British Columbia and Dominion governments and their representatives on the ground, generally speaking, shared a set of assumptions concerning the natural correctness of individual property ownership and land tenure, the superiority of European style agriculture over what they perceived to be Indigenous economic strategies, the moral superiority of Christianity over Indigenous religious systems, and the incapability of Indigenous people to function as citizens in the new Canadian liberal democracy. All of this is evident in the legislation leading to and including the 1876 *Indian Act*. Applying it as an “advancement” program for Indigenous peoples, though, was an irregular, even contradictory, affair in practice.¹¹² With all things considered, and despite public pronouncements to the contrary from both church and state officials of various capacities and functions as well as from average citizens, the transfer of land and resources from Indigenous to newcomer control stood above all other policy considerations. At the same time, the fundamental principle operative in all DIA tactics in furthering this strategy of reassigning land and resources was, as James Halbold Christie, former North West Mounted Policeman in the late nineteenth century and advocate for Okanagan rights early in the twentieth century, commented, “it’s all right if they are quiet.”¹¹³ Similarly, in his twist on an infamous phrase, Harold Cardinal stated “the only good Indian is a sleeping Indian.”¹¹⁴ Like the owners of a steel mill, auto plant, or logging operation, who could only profit if there was no industrial unrest, Anglo-Canadians could only benefit from Indigenous lands and resources if First Nations people could be kept quiet.

While the operational specifics will be discussed in Chapter Four, in the late 1860s and early 1870s, the Canadian Government accepted responsibility for “Indian affairs” in the regions now known as southern Alberta and the southern interior of British Columbia. It was not until 1877, though, that the federal government made formal moves to simplify its administration of these regions and to remove any threats that Indigenous peoples or their potential claims to land and resources might have to the non-Indigenous settlement.

Even if all of the area defined by Treaty 7 in 1877 had been acknowledged as the territory of the five signatory First Nations, and their exclusive right to harvest its resources confirmed, this 50,000 square mile area would still have constituted a significant reduction of the pre-contact territories described above. Not only did the treaty fail to recognize the historical movement south of the US border, but First Nations use of the territories north and west of the treaty area was not acknowledged. Additionally, the treaty further reduced the land available to Indigenous people to reserves, which themselves would soon be subject to significant reduction.

The same year that Treaty 7 was signed, the Indian Reserve Commission toured the interior of British Columbia and established and confirmed reserves for First Nations people residing in the region. The Indian Reserve Commission, established the previous year to resolve “the Indian reserve question,” was also designed to alleviate the growing conflict between the Dominion and the Province in regard to these lands. Here too, little attention was paid to movement or land use associated with the seasonal rounds of economic activity when assigning diminutive reserve lands that had little connection with the range of pre-contact territories.

Reserves as Reformatory Spaces

This chapter has established a baseline by briefly exploring the traditional territories, gender and familial relations, political organizations, and economic structures and access to resources and trade of the First Nations resident in the regions under discussion here and their associations with other peoples. Virtually all of this was altered or placed in jeopardy with the arrival of epidemic disease and the acquisitive disposition of Euro-Canadians. Moreover, it occurred on a dwindling and insecure land base available to Indigenous peoples. While southern Alberta and the southern interior of British Columbia were and continue to be populated by a number of distinct First Nations, the borders of the regions, and the bounded space these perimeters created, have little in common with the expanse of the territories used by the resident First Nations prior to 1877. The geospatial entities created by Treaty 7 and shortly later the Kamloops-Okanagan Agency were constructions of the Euro-Canadian newcomers, created in large part to facilitate the management of Indigenous peoples, to reduce the potential for resistance, and to facilitate unfettered settlement of those non-Indigenous people upon whom liberal Canada deemed fit to bestow the benefits of citizenship. While there was limited consultation with First Nations peoples regarding the lands that

would be reserved for them, and while some groups had a greater ability to resist further erosion of these lands over time, ultimately the size and shape of the splinters of First Nations territories that remained as reserves were the design of non-Indigenous politicians and bureaucrats for the benefit of non-Indigenous farmers and businessmen. The restriction to reserves and then the limitation of activities and movement allowed to reserve residents was central to Canada's policy towards those it defined as Indians.

Although the conditions and tactics varied, with the establishment of administrative regions in Alberta and British Columbia, the DIA systematized and hierarchically organized its supervision and reform of the resident First Nations populations. The final stage in the removal of First Nations people from their land and resources was clearly articulated by long-serving DSGIA, Duncan Campbell Scott: "[t]he happiest future for the Indian race is absorption into the general population, and this is the object of the policy of our government." Scott stated further that a "paternal policy of protection and encouragement has been pursued from the earliest times" by the British and later by Canadian governments. As a result, in the older provinces of Ontario and Quebec "the natives [have] advanced more than half way towards the goal, and the final result will be this complete absorption. The great forces of intermarriage and education will finally overcome the lingering traces of native custom and tradition." Scott could see "no reason why the Indians of the West, who have been subject to the policy of the government for less than fifty years, and who have made remarkable advances, should not follow the same line of development as the Indians of the old Province of Canada."¹¹⁶

Alexander Morris, who served as Canadian negotiator for Treaties 3 through 6 and as Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, argued that placing Indigenous peoples on small "band reserves" was preferable to the system adopted in the United States where the large tracts allotted to entire nations became "the object of cupidity to the whites" and often led to armed conflict when broken up. Further, the dispersal of Indigenous people to diminutive reserves had "a tendency to diminish the offensive strength of the Indian tribes, should they ever become restless."¹¹⁷ While the people who lived on these pieces of land made homes and the best of their conditions, for the DIA they were reformatory spaces "like so many small theatres" where Indigenous people could be kept under surveillance until they could be "de-Indianized." Not unlike prisons, asylums,

hospitals, or schools, Indian reserves were constructed as sites where individuals could be reformed, healed, or socialized to behaviour acceptable to the Anglo-Canadian majority.¹¹⁸ They were places where “Indianness” would be instructed, cajoled, legislated or, if necessary, coerced out of the original inhabitants of western Canada. This is where colonialism was and remains at its most obviously aggressive and in contradiction to the stated goals of liberalism. While Frantz Fanon did not have this region in mind when he uttered the phrase, for Indigenous people in western Canada this was indeed “a narrow world, strewn with prohibitions.” After more than a century of this onslaught it is remarkable that First Nations were able to retain any of the cultural elements identified above let alone functioning cultural systems and structures.¹¹⁹