

# The Idea of Progress, Industrialization and the Replacement of Indigenous Peoples: The Muskrat Falls Megadam Boondoggle

## **Preface: Maya and the Trip to Muskrat Falls**

I was staying with my friend Marcel, a former Band Council manager, and his 10-year-old granddaughter Maya in the Innu village of Sheshatshiu in Labrador, Canada. Over bowls of caribou stew we talk about the Muskrat Falls dam. Marcel looks after Maya while her mother works two week shifts at the construction site. I ask Maya what she thinks of the dam. "It destroys nature. The trees are cut down with chainsaws, the river is now like quicksand. It sucks you down." she stridently tells me. "But, does it affect you?" I reply. "Yes, because my Mom works there. If she quits, she won't have any work and can't support us...but when she's away I miss her a lot."

A few days later we drive along the paved highway adjacent to the dam site, which is not open to the public and photography there is banned. We can see the gouged-out granite hillsides near the highway. Rock has been drilled out and broken down for boulders to support the banks diverting the floodwater. Vast undulating straight lines of clear-cut spruce stumps give the transmission lines a wide berth. New cabins belonging to Euro-Canadian settlers are fanning out from the industrial hub of Goose Bay. Clean trucks and snowmobiles are in the driveways. There is a sense that the Innu are being replaced.

No one has much to say.

## **Introduction**

Discussions around dams often pose modern industry and technologically driven progress against backward and impoverished cultures which dams replace (Routledge, 2003: 245). While all megaprojects are linked by politicians to the identity of the state as progressive, their colossal scale makes dams particularly apt national symbols. For proponents, dams are 'harnessing' a power easily conflated with that of the state. Because dams are mostly built on mighty rivers far from the urban centres that will receive the electricity generated, indigenous and other land-based peoples are the most likely to be displaced (McCully, 2001: 70) and the least likely to benefit (Nixon, 2011: 165). As Maya said, they also lose nature, and their common land-based histories is what has bound Innu society together. By using the Muskrat Falls megadam project as an illustration, this essay explores the links between the idea of progress and the imposition of industry. Progress, I argue, justifies not only the industrial transformation of indigenous peoples, but their replacement as meaningful constituents in the uses of lands and waters.

The idea of progress is integral to Western thought. It derives from a conviction that universal principles derived from philosophy and science explain how and why various attributes of the physical and social worlds change over time. By using empirical observation and rational argument, European Enlightenment

thinkers originally addressed epistemology and metaphysical questions. This was redirected as sceptics revealed the limits of the faculties of human reason, and discussions moved towards social, political and economic concerns (Matytsin, 2016: 273), arenas in which subjective interests are so crucial. In their various works, Enlightenment figures such as Locke (Arneil, 1996), Hobbes (Kraynak, 1983) and Kant (Fidler, 2001) depicted humanity moving from a prior state identified by terms such as 'barbarism' or the 'state of nature' to 'civilization'. The attributes of civilization were variously recognised as rationality, science, the social contract, private property, the nation state, agriculture, intellectual and artistic pursuits, and commerce (Todorov, 2009:15-16). With the growth of capital, heavily dependent on internal working people and forced colonial labour, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial production and machine technologies were added to the list of signifiers of civilization. Because colonization was thought to bring these qualities to peoples lacking them, colonialism itself could be depicted as a humanitarian agent of improvement of backward peoples by Western powers. Indeed, principles of justice were invoked by the 'individual men charged with the task of ensuring that a settler invasion of indigenous peoples' lands' (Lester and Dussart, 2014: 25) was carried out within the British Empire. The problem was how to culturally and economically transform subject populations in such a way that colonialism could be seen as improvement. This in some measure meant devising wage labour schemes for indigenous populations. Industry was, and I shall argue still is, a crucial part of the purposeful replacement of one way of life by another and as such is integral to the idea of progress.

### **Industry as the Means of Progress**

Britain owed its rise to economic pre-eminence to its Empire. The Industrial Revolution, which began in England, was intimately tied to the imposition of fossil fuel technologies such as the steam engine and this necessitated mass or forced wage labour (Malm, 2016: 19). In turn, colonial expansion, including slavery, supplied many of the raw materials that these technologies used to manufacture goods. The possession of industry itself generated great wealth and luxury, and became a basis for the assertion of British cultural superiority, industry being a sign of progress or improvement in what Slack (2015:4) calls, 'a conviction fortified by complacency.'

Grandiose national self-perceptions were supported by European social scientists who conceptualised industrialism as the most profound manifestation of progress. In doing so, few referred to slavery, the purloined lands upon which raw materials were produced, and the unequal terms of trade that enabled the technologies to be applied to industrial production in Britain and other European countries. Industry was incorporated into 'stage' theories of human history which simply formalized earlier Enlightenment notions of inevitable increments of progress towards a European summit. These included foundational theories of anthropology such as those developed by E. B. Tylor, who made European market industrialism the apex of cultural evolution because it allegedly served all peoples (Stocking, 1968: 86).

Not only was industry the peak of human endeavour, but it became a basis upon which the notion of 'modern' society itself was constructed in social science. While the disastrous humanitarian results of the fusion of industry with capitalism had provoked satires such as Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees*, a host of social reformers' criticisms, and exposés such as Frederick Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, these all concerned the British internal population. While social scientists prominently noted ill effects of industry such as personal and collective alienation resulting in the fragmentation of communities (Emile Durkheim (1951) [1897]), bureaucratic control, depersonalization and status inequality (Max Weber (1958, [1922]) economic inequality, alienation and poverty (Karl Marx in almost all his writings), few averred from the broad conceptual linkage between industry and global progress. None, at least, depicted it as a backward step. Indeed, the ability of colonial powers to export industry was an indication of colonialism's progressive nature, even for Marx:

England, it is true, in causing a social revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution. (Marx, 1978: 658).

British administrators assisted this ultimate human 'destiny' by breaking down 'the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing' (Marx, 1978: 654-55).

Many British politicians and intellectuals from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards saw industrialization not only as a route to capital accumulation, but a sometimes-painful means to effect indigenous upliftment, and importantly, if it could be managed properly, the social stability needed to maintain colonial rule. Aspengren (2013:48-49) argues that these sentiments animated British Liberal opinion of the 1920s towards India. The creation of wealth in the colonies was seen to reduce poverty in England while also demonstrating moral responsibility towards subject peoples:

...many British liberals and socialists argued that this set-up of modern industrial relations reflected a stage in the historical progress of societies...the image of industrialising areas outside Britain – such as Bombay [Mumbai] – was now put up as mirroring Western progress (Aspengren (2013:49).

The forebear of these Liberals, John Stuart Mill (1975: 174), [1861] took the argument to extremes by asserting that slavery, although 'repugnant', could be justified if it gave 'a commencement to industrial life, and enforcing it as the exclusive occupation of the most numerous portion of the community, may accelerate the transition to a better freedom than that of fighting and rapine [the natural condition of the uncivilized]'.

In many instances, however, 'industrial life' had the opposite effect because it was imposed by colonial agents with such brutality. After the hard-fought banning of African slavery, systems of forced labour replaced it in many parts of the world. To cite just one example, the conditions of the indigenous labourers during the rubber boom which was meticulously documented in the Putumayo region of Amazonia by the British consul Roger Casement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century revealed the massive scale of whipping, amputation of limbs, macabre torture, and murder. Terror was used to induce labour discipline by the British Peruvian Rubber Company. Casement's reports revealed that an industrial process under a company financed by the City of London had committed atrocities greater than those of King Leopold in the Congo (Taussig, 1987: 51-73, Mitchell, 2003: 59). Another common effect of industrialization within the British Empire was to spread fatal infectious diseases. Ships shuttling between colonial outposts with soldiers, indentured labourers, raw materials and manufactured goods transported pathogens between continents. The plague, for example, took about 12 million lives in India between 1896 and 1933 mostly from this cause (Beinart and Hughes, 2007: 174). In other places, disease was accompanied by forced labour, with attendant violence bordering on genocide.

Eventually, criticisms within Western society of the view that industrialism was uplifting resurfaced in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century both through journalistic revelations like those of George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* and by scientifically documenting its harms to the physical environment. Early on in her influential book *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson (1962:18) set out the central problem of our age as 'the contamination of man's total environment with such substances of incredible potential for harm - substances that accumulate in the tissues of plants and animals and even penetrate the germ cells to shatter or alter the very material of heredity upon which the shape of the future depends'. This indictment of industrialization pointed to its ability to cause problems that were not limited by geography. Although catalyzing a vast ecology movement, it coincided with transferring environmental problems caused by industry to non-Western countries and the ancestral territories of indigenous peoples. Writing in the 1970s, the time Western public opinion took stock of the environmental devastation caused by industrialism, Kumar (1978:234) remarks:

The 'clean' tertiary sectors of the international economy predominate in the cities of the wealthy industrial societies while the 'dirty' secondary manufacturing industries, on which the tertiary sector depends, are sited elsewhere, in the societies of the Third World or the less developed industrial nations...

Indigenous peoples' lands worldwide are now sites not just for what Kumar called 'dirty secondary manufacturing' but for primary resource extraction and extreme energy generation.

### **Contemporary Extractive Industry and Energy Projects on Indigenous Lands as Vehicles of Progress**

If there has been less philosophizing about progress in recent times, governments, corporations and advertisers have not ceased to appeal to it. One of the positions widely articulated is that extractive industries and energy projects will assist the world's most poverty-stricken communities. Industrial development is held to be a means to national advancement and the parallel improvement of indigenous peoples. Groups whose lands are targeted for such progress are often distant from metropolitan centres and are peoples who have maintained cultural continuity based on largely communal engagements with local landscapes. The contemporary exhortation that these ecocultures (Böhm, Bharucha and Pretty, 2014) make room for extractive industry and abandon their land based lifestyles parallels the global Great Land Rush and the US Westward expansion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Not only is current extractive industry similarly rapacious in its land grabbing (Liberti, 2013), it is also heavily justified by progress.

In Latin America, for example, post neoliberal governments have emphasized more state control of extraction policies and processes. This is in part motivated by socialist appeals to redistribute funds from extraction undertaken by multinational corporations to large swathes of the poor, while at the same time rejecting appeals to environmental justice. This includes justice for indigenous peoples whose protests of mineral and other extractive industries on their territories have been violently suppressed and chided by politicians such as Ecuador's President Correa as 'infantile indigenism' (Hogenboom, 2012: 152). Likewise, the government of Aymara President Evo Morales in Bolivia has led a *proceso de cambio* to encourage indigenous acceptance of 'progress' and 'development' through unsustainable fossil fuel extraction (Hollender, 2016).

In Peru where indigenous peoples have been battling natural gas exploitation in the Camisea project, extractive processes are articulated by the state, the press and corporate spokespeople as 'inevitable.' A cultural evolutionist narrative has been implicit in the state rhetoric of inevitability. Described by Urteaga-Crovetto (2012: 106-108), gas exploration *needed* to happen by whatever means because it was consistent with general goals of national advancement. It would be a valuable means of enhancing the national economy by exporting energy and providing employment for indigenous and other workers. Because the Urubamba area around the development is among the poorest regions of Peru and indigenous Machiguenga have suffered disturbingly high rates of malnutrition, the state can put forward a strong rationale to present the development as alleviating suffering and creating social stability. The fact that the suffering of the Machiguenga was partly caused by prior extractive activities which displaced them from their subsistence livelihoods in the first place goes unmentioned in the state narrative. Indicating how convincing the promissory note of development may be, Urteaga-Crovetto (2012: 118-120) suggests that the idea of progress has also been embraced by many Machiguenga and they have equated progress with material consumption and the abandonment of their cultural practices in favour of more technologically mediated activities, non-indigenous foods, and alcohol consumption.

Suzanna Sawyer's *Crude Chronicles* (2004) documents a similar use of the idea of progress in her interpretation of a meeting between a British company representative and a local indigenous group in neighbouring Ecuador where the ARCO oil company sought drilling rights in the indigenous Pastaza region. Sawyer (2004: 7) argues that the company used the language of 'democracy, rights and the liberal subject' to create a kind of dichotomy between the modern and the primitive, showing that oil drilling would bring 'progress and democracy to isolated lands' (Sawyer, 2004:8). The common theme in state promotion of resource extraction is the advocacy of economic growth not just for the good of society, but for the numerous marginalised populations in need of financial help. To this end, a wide variety of state bodies, international organizations and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank provide material support for extractive industrial activities on indigenous lands around the world. Although the World Bank Group has incorporated some consideration of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) of indigenous peoples in funding development projects, it has historically rejected the principle, and states see FPIC as a threat to their sovereignty (MacKay, 2004).

While the claim to benign improvement legitimates industrial takeovers of indigenous lands, this almost always uses the lever of violence. The condoning of violence to extricate indigenous peoples from their lands has long been Brazilian policy. The NGO Survival International which has been documenting indigenous rights there for decades, recently reported that President Michel Temer accepted a 2017 legal opinion to strip indigenous peoples of rights to land deemed not to be occupied by them after 1988, even if they had been driven away from it, as many were, with weapons (Survival International, 2017).

### **Case Study: Innu of the Labrador-Quebec Peninsula**

Recently Canadian officials have made promises to bring stability, security, modernisation and even riches to Aboriginals from the siting of industrial projects on their lands. Articulated at length by Bernard Valcourt, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in the Stephen Harper administration, indigenous leaderships have been incentivised to participate in extractive industry and energy projects (Samson, 2016: 98). The exhortation that Aboriginal peoples accept industrialization follows from earlier forced transformations of indigenous peoples that were based on the idea of progress. However, once their lands have been appropriated for such purposes, the aboriginal population is no longer needed, and therefore legitimization of the project can proceed largely without referencing them and focusing, as is the case with the project I describe below, on wider economic goals.

The turn to extractive and energy projects is a continuation of Canadian Aboriginal assimilation policies since it compels Aboriginal peoples to partly abandon their land-based ways of life and adopt Euro-Canadian norms. The notorious Indian Act, the creation of reserves, and boarding schools which all began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had this intention. However, in the less temperate zones of the Subarctic and Arctic, the implementation of assimilation measures are more recent and were not fully completed until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. They

coincide with the sedentarization of migratory peoples such as Inuit, Athapaskan, and Algonquin peoples into government settlements, a policy that has had disastrous results. Across these vast territories, the scale of sickness, suicide, and alcohol abuse is linked to the loss of communal activities and autonomy and the corresponding substandard forms housing, education and basic infrastructure (Adelson, 2005, Kral et. al., 2011). Village life in the Far North has not turned out to be any improvement on migratory life. Rather than celebrating progress through assimilation, as we shall see Canadian authorities have turned to amelioration through industry.

The Innu of the Labrador-Quebec peninsula, useful to British and French colonists principally for fur trading until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, are an example of peoples to whom the more recent appeal to progress has been applied. Early explorers and scientists depicted Innu as 'savage', 'primitive', 'pre-Columbian', and 'stone age', a people whose 'lack of material progress' was consistent with the Mesolithic age. Such epithets continued into the 1990s (see Samson, 2003: 134-142). From the 1950s onwards the sedentarization campaign waged by Canadian authorities stressed salvation through village settlements. The campaign explicitly referenced the inevitability of Innu incorporation into a new industrial order that was to be unleashed on their lands (Samson, 2013: 20). Hence, in the 1950s and 60s, Innu were transferred to government settlements across two Provinces, Quebec, and Labrador, which is part of Newfoundland.

Men were encouraged to pursue wage labour in various logging, milling, mining, and commercial fishing operations and women were to be housewives in nuclear family dwellings. Meanwhile, Innu lands and waters were appropriated for energy and extractive projects with huge increases in the building of infrastructure such as roads into their unceded territories (Samson, 2003: 96-107). Throughout the pre- and post- sedentarization period, Innu were represented by scientific, administrative and other intermediaries as in need of cultural elevation, and in asserting this need they often invoked the metaphor of evolution. This helped make a process that was imposed by the state appear normal, inevitable and ultimately altruistic (Samson, 2003: 142-149). But, Innu employment in such activities has been insufficient to mop up the huge numbers who went from being full time hunters to unemployed householders (Samson, 2013: 82), and social problems such as family destabilization caused by government authorised child removals, alcoholism, substance abuse and suicide have not abated.

1948 marks the first attempt to move the Northerly Mushuau Innu peoples off their lands. Under the ultimate authority of the British home rule colony of Newfoundland's government, about 100 Innu were loaded onto a ship and transported from the fur trading post at Davis Inlet 300 kilometres North to Nutak. Government documents reveal that a prime motive was to transform Innu into settled wage labourers. At the time a government statement, argued that to 'make white men' of the Innu, the Nutak relocation was a 'monstrous but necessary' act (McCrae, 1993: 36). Moving them beyond the treeline and their beloved lands in the boreal forests proved to be 'monstrous' because many died and they suffered from inadequate housing, extreme cold, and serious health

problems. Nutak became one of the least known of several acts of enforced exile of Northern peoples in Canada at mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Tester and Kulchyski, 1994, Marcus, 1995, Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart, 1997, McGrath, 2006).

These forced relocations were justified by Canadian officials for indigenous betterment. As at Nutak, the state spokespeople made unrealistic promises of abundant wildlife and wage labour opportunities in semi-mechanised production such as cod salting and lumber processing. But there was also a powerful economic driver for relocation in the plummeting fur prices of the early 1950s that had adversely effected the Inuit who had been diverted away from egalitarian subsistence hunting (Marcus, 1995: 27-28, McGrath, 2006: 95). Similarly, a motivation to relocate the Innu to Nutak was the closure of the government trading store at Davis Inlet because it could not turn a profit from trade with the Innu due to the collapse in the European fur market. In these cases, the failure of one indicator of progress – induction into market relations – was remedied by the imposition of another exercise in progress - relocation. In turn, the Nutak relocation failed because the new commercial arrangement was also ‘unremunerative’ (Kleivan, 1966: 140). Due to several tragedies and lack of subsistence hunting, the Mushuau Innu all walked back to Davis Inlet where they resumed their migratory hunting life (Sandring, 2013) until they were eventually sedentarised in 1967 at Davis Inlet.

Many Innu who were subsequently sedentarised on the Quebec side of the border, were also presented as beneficiaries of the idea of progress. More Northerly travelling ‘Naskapi’ Innu were brought together with Southerly Innu to the iron-ore rich area about 100 km from Caniapiscau, a favoured hunting and fishing location. The explicit purpose was to make them miners housed at purpose-built town of Schefferville (Samson, 2013: 114-116, Cassell, 2015: 7-10). Beginning with a mining concession given to prospectors by the Quebec government on Innu lands in 1939 (Boutet, 2015: 173), and proceeding through the opening of the Iron Ore Company of Canada’s mining operation in 1952, Canadian officials believed that wage labour at the mines would encourage sedentarisation and job opportunities that would last a century and Innu would ‘climb the ladder’ to industrial society (Boutet, 2015: 175, 179). As it happened, Innu were employed only on bottom rung levels at the mine and got few benefits from the company. Operations closed just 28 years after opening. To some of the Innu people of Matimekush, one of the two Innu villages around Schefferville, their rich, beautiful land became a wasteland (Samson, 2013: 121-122). Boutet (2015: 182) describes the contemporary landscape around Matimekush and the sister Naskapi community, Kauauautshikamats as a scarred ‘red coloured, cratered, barren and dangerous landscape’, hundreds of metres deep, extending over many hundred square kilometres. Not only did the Innu here endure the mining, but also the flooding of their lands at Caniapiscau made possible by unilateral extinguishment of their Aboriginal title. One man I interviewed about this in Matimekush in 2007 told me, “that our land was taken is a wound in the heart. We lost our land, our heart. We were not killed by a bullet, but we might have well as been because our land was taken without our consent.”

### **The Muskrat Falls Hydroelectric Development and Its Narration**

The Upper Churchill hydroelectric complex was completed in 1974 by a British-Canadian consortium. It was heralded as a 'great imperial project' on Mishtashipu, (which was re-named Churchill River by Newfoundland authorities), one of the most important rivers to the Innu (Samson, 2003: 102). With no consultation or forewarning, the Newfoundland provincial government authorized the flooding of 65,000 square miles of the beloved Meshikamau area, rendering it useless for hunting or fishing, and reducing the massive waterfalls Innu called *Patshetshunau* ('steam rising') to a dribble.

The effects of the project were particularly destructive for a people who depended heavily on hunting and fishing and for whom these activities and the local environment provided meaning and purpose. While the dam, infrastructure and subsequent flooding completely altered the entire local ecology and reversed the flow of some rivers, Innu hunting families noted the drowning of wildlife, losses of caribou calving grounds and waterfowl, and methylmercury poisoning that was triggered from decomposing trees and other organic matter (Tanner, 2000: 79). So serious was the fear of contamination, that Innu interviewed by Armitage (2007: 83-84) believed that none of the large variety of fish in the mighty river itself were safe to eat. One man I interviewed in the 1990s about it said that not only were the Innu not consulted, they were specifically prevented from watching the construction of the dam in the early 1970s (Samson, 2003: 104). When Innu hunters learned of what became called Churchill Falls, they stood by bewildered not realizing that their lands were considered the property of the state. Within a short time, Innu were simply replaced.

The fact that the Innu were not mentioned at the time of its building suggests that although the dam was certainly framed through a narrative of industrial 'power' as progress by the Newfoundland government and its populist Premier Joey Smallwood (Gwyn, 1972: 274), it was not part of an extension of progress to indigenous peoples. This was not because such an extension was totally absent. Indeed, the appeal to progress was explicit at Schefferville and during the sedentarization campaign across the Labrador-Quebec peninsula of the 1950s and 60s. The lack of any acknowledgment of hunting peoples near Churchill Falls indicates both that their interests were considered irrelevant and that they had no meaningful title to their lands, a position maintained by Canada for all indigenous groups that had not signed a treaty or had a 'land claim' approved at that time. The obliteration of hunting and fishing that the Upper Churchill project accomplished symbolized the triumph of technology, energy and power over hunting, fishing and travelling. Signifying that it also represents a triumph over democracy, Innu lands were handed over to Hydro Quebec without any of the formalities of law or recognition of prior indigenous ownership of land. Through an agreement with Newfoundland, Hydro-Quebec has the rights to the power on Innu lands until 2041.

Although always in the minds of Innu, the Upper Churchill project did not resurface as a serious policy concern until the advent of the Comprehensive Land Claims (CLC) process to resolve the question of unceded lands in Labrador. CLC's

aim is to ensure that underlying Aboriginal Title is extinguished or not exercised. The Innu Nation has had a 'claim' called Tshash Petapen under negotiation with Canada since the early 1990s. If a final agreement that follows from the Agreement in Principle (AIP) is ratified by the Innu voters of the two Labrador villages (but significantly not by those in Quebec who are equally heirs to Labrador land), it will provide recognition of limited rights to circumscribed territories, cash compensation (set against loans to cover the costs of the negotiation itself), business benefits to Innu entrepreneurs, privatization of collective Innu lands and self-government rights. They also will receive monetary 'redress' for the Upper Churchill hydroelectric project and an Impact and Benefit Agreement providing royalties that depend on the success of a future hydroelectric project.

Crucially, the CLC is further linked to the siting of the Lower Churchill hydroelectric project at Muskrat Falls and Gull Island, downstream from the 1970s Upper Churchill project. Scheduled to be completed in 2020, it is undertaken by Nalcor, a public utilities company. Estimated to cost C\$12.7 billion and projected to produce 824MW, the Muskrat Falls megaproject on unextinguished Aboriginal Title land has proceeded ahead of the signing of the final agreement that supposedly makes it legitimate.

Nalcor's (nd) website, replete with numerous links, videos and professional photographs of the river, the dam, and workers, promises great things to come. Hydroelectric power generation is depicted as a benign way to meet the ever-growing energy needs of Newfoundland and Labrador. It boasts that the project and associated 2,225MW generation facility at Gull Island will 'significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions - equivalent to taking 3.2 million vehicles off the road each year.' As well as claiming that hydroelectric power provides 'boundless energy', the accompanying video calls the project an 'energy warehouse' that will 'facilitate future industrial growth' while being the 'least cost option for consumers' (Nalcor, 2012, Nalcor, 2015). Whereas the power itself is asserted to be clean and renewable, it could be used to power neighbouring 'industrial growth' such as mining.

But, this incarnation of progress as affordable clean energy omits seeking the consent of the peoples on whose land it is located. Canada has clearly not elicited FPIC and any future consent will be sought only after the land has already been taken. Even the CLC negotiations that could supply a fig leaf of legitimacy are with only one artificially segmented group of Innu, those who fall under Innu Nation, and not all Innu who have ties to the area. Contrary to standards in the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on FPIC, the Innu are given few meaningful choices other than to relinquish their lands, enjoy a few short-term benefits and accept an increase in social, health and environmental problems (Samson and Cassell, 2012, 16-17). Although there has been consultation between the government and the Innu Nation leadership, which has then been translated into Innu-aimun and relayed onwards in fragments at sporadic meetings in the Innu villages in Labrador, all this information and the future vote to ratify the AIP is superfluous since the dam is a *fait accompli*.

When Newfoundland officials unveiled the project, the main mention of indigenous peoples was about the financial benefits and economic stakes they may have at Muskrat Falls. The Newfoundland and Labrador government (2012) news release on the plan to develop Muskrat Falls featured Premier Danny Williams stating:

"This is a day of great historic significance to Newfoundland and Labrador as we move forward with development of the Lower Churchill project, on our own terms and free of the geographic stranglehold of Quebec which has for too long determined the fate of the most attractive clean energy project in North America...The benefits of this project for our province will be enormous, including thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity. From day one, our government has taken a long-term, strategic approach to developing this project. Our priorities have remained steadfast; that is to achieve maximum benefits for our people, and to secure stable rates and markets with a good return for the people of this province..."

Apart from an earlier reference to Innu Nation as an economic partner, Williams did not acknowledge indigenous peoples and their land-based lifestyles. They were submerged under the undifferentiated promises of jobs and dollars. In 2012, Williams' successor Kathy Dunderdale announced at a Press Conference in the settler community of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, a short distance from both the Innu community of Sheshatshiu and the dam site. Here the Innu and neighbouring Inuit are rendered invisible, folded into the Provincial political constituency:

"Harnessing the vast hydroelectric power of the Lower Churchill is a promise that has been hovering on the horizon for 50 years but has remained just out of reach for successive governments of Newfoundland and Labrador...The most important benefit of this development is that it allows us as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to stand tall and proud on the national stage, knowing that as our forebears persevered to etch an existence on the edge of the North Atlantic, so will we with unrelenting focus and steadfast determination overcome all obstacles and transform challenges into success."

The statement also summons up the characteristic technological triumphalism over nature in national narratives of resource development (Nixon, 2011: 151). As well as the indigenous peoples and their ways of life that are banished from the imagination of the future, nature too disappears. It is not the river that is being 'harnessed' but 'hydroelectric power'. Although there were many objections to the project at the time from native and non-native parties, and there was no political consensus in the Provincial seat of St. Johns about it, the statement brims with confidence about the progress to be realized in what was then a C\$7.7 billion undertaking. Dunderdale promised a future made possible by nameless 'forebears' who 'persevered to etch an existence'.

**Replaced by a Boondoggle**

For the Innu, being ‘partners’ involves various job and business opportunities, training programmes, free power and compensation indexed to the financial success of the venture. However, at C\$12.7 billion, the cost has almost doubled from the original estimate just 5 years ago. It is backed by Federal loan guarantees of C\$5 billion at the outset of the construction and a top-up guarantee of C\$2.98 billion courtesy of Premier Trudeau (Boone, 2016). There have already been losses of C\$66.9 million on a hedging loan (McLoed, 2017a). Therefore, royalties flowing to the Innu Nation and Innu entrepreneurs will depend on how rapidly these considerable debts are cleared and profits accumulated.

Although there is scarcely a mention of the Innu in the ongoing press coverage of Muskrat Falls, there is much discussion of the ‘boondoggle’ (Jones, 2017) with editorials, letters and articles in the *St. John’s Telegram* almost unanimously excoriating the megaproject for excessive financial risk. It is not any violation of indigenous rights that commentators fear, but increases in their taxes to pay for the boondoggle and price hikes for electricity rather than the decreases they were promised (Reade, 2017, Frampton, 2017). In 2016, the Nalcor CEO Ed Martin resigned triggering a C\$1.4 million severance package (Sampson and Cowan, 2016). The incoming CEO Stan Marshall quickly expressed doubts about the financial viability of the project. Even the current Premier, Dwight Ball calls Muskrat Falls “ill-conceived and reckless” and a damning verdict on a megaproject dependent on selling power to the sparsely populated Provinces of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, was provided by *The Economist* (2017). Despite all this, 18 Nalcor executives awarded themselves C\$766,752 in bonuses in 2017 (McLoed, 2017b). So parlous are the finances, that the Newfoundland government commissioned a forensic audit of the project (Cowan, 2018). Indeed, megaprojects including dams have a calamitous history of cost overruns with ‘whole nations...affected in both medium and long term of the success or failure of just a single project’ (Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter, 2003: 4). A major World Bank study showed that demand for the power from dams was on average one-fifth lower than projected when the projects were planned (McCully, 2001: 134).

With the financial stakes so high, the indigenous owners of the lands around Muskrat Falls are easily forgotten. For them, the quick injection of cash from employment is unlikely to address the endemic health problems in Innu villages such as high diabetes and suicide rates that are 14 times more than Canadian levels (Pollock et. al., 2015) and poor community infrastructures, including a periodic lack of potable water. While Innu are employed at Muskrat Falls, the numbers make a dent in the substantial numbers of the unemployed only periodically. Subcontractors, for whom they work, have had periodic lay-offs (Barry, 2017). Those who do work there have faced racism, and it is doubtful that much employment will be available to Innu beyond the construction phase (Samson, 2016: 100). The use of ‘embedded contractors’ on high salaries hints at vast disorganization (McLoed, 2017c) and little chance for Innu to have any meaningful long term job prospects in association with the megaproject. Finally, the very high costs of living in Labrador have always been offset by subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering, but with Muskrat Falls now joining a network of

other hydroelectric projects spanning Innu territories across the Labrador-Quebec peninsula such activities are compromised.

The environmental implications of Muskrat Falls are equally alarming. The megadam will destroy much of the habitat for fish and animals, reduce biodiversity and possibly result in the displacement of people. In May 2017, the downstream community of Mud Lake was flooded and evacuated. Residents there blamed the dam (Tobin and Bartlett, 2017). A study of the causes of the flooding exonerated the dam project, but residents claim that crucial data were overlooked. The study lacked impartiality as all the data it used were supplied by Nalcor and the Newfoundland government (Breen, 2007). More ominously, a measurement and modelling study by Harvard researchers showed higher concentrations of methylmercury in the waters surrounding Innu and neighbouring Inuit and settler communities, and predicted that 'increases in methylmercury concentrations resulting from flooding associated with hydroelectric development will be greater than those expected from climate change' (Schartup, et. al., 2015: 11789). There was a sudden landslide in 2018, provoking fears of dam collapse (CBC, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

One common factor that enables the claim of progress to be maintained in dam projects globally is that indigenous peoples often 'lack of official title deeds to the ecosystems that have sustained them for centuries or in some cases, millennia' (Nixon, 2011: 152). But in this case, it is Canada, which has no deeds. By authorizing a public company to build Muskrat Falls, it is violating the underlying Aboriginal Title of the Innu because a final land claim agreement to permit it has not been ratified. A second feature of the imposition of these supposedly progressive projects is state suppression of opposition. Here, Innu, Inuit and settler protesters and a journalist at Muskrat Falls were jailed and the Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs building in Goose Bay had to close because of protesters (McCann, 2017). In other places such as Guatemala, dam opponents have been fatally disappeared (Nixon, 2011: 153-154), and in 2016 Berta Cáceres, winner of the Goldman Environmental Prize was shot and killed in her home only a week after threatening to organize opposition to a major hydroelectric project on indigenous lands in Honduras (Watts, 2016). However, in many places, opposition is muted by the need for wage labour, as Maya indicated at the outset of this essay.

The Muskrat Falls project illustrates that industrialisation cannot be a politically neutral process in which humanity is directed towards ever more progress. Megadams principally benefit powerful political and economic interests (McCully, 2001: 236). In the case of Muskrat Falls, the Innu get a short term cut of the proceeds and some low skilled jobs, but vastly superior benefits accrue to the non-native protagonists who assume management and technical roles and most of the energy. Finally, Innu land rights (what remains of them) and cash compensation are tethered to a hydroelectric project in severe financial peril and predicted to trigger methylmercury poisoning of waters they depend upon. Once it is operating, no further reference to the Innu or their treasured lands and

waters will be necessary. Even if the boondoggle proceeds as planned, Innu replacement is cemented by cultural transformation made imperative by the loss of their lands and waters. In its technological triumphalism and profit making, the megadam replaces indigenous lives and activities and in doing so illustrates how a singular, but extremely precarious, future is justified by the idea of progress.

### **Postscript from the Past**

Over a decade before Muskrat Falls was planned, my friend Louie and I were with his 10-year-old son, little Marcel and his nephew Stanley. We are also taking a trip along the same road I travelled on some 17 years later with the other Marcel and Maya. This was a hunting trip. Little Marcel was excited and said he was glad to be away from Sheshatshiu. We went along the spruce-lined gravel and dirt road. There was no firm plan; we were just looking to see if there were animals about. We travelled West on the road to the Gull island turnoff, drove as far as we could through huge slushy gullies, got out and walked with our guns. There were large chunks of ice in Mishta-shipu, flowing strongly to the east and out into the Atlantic.

Just before the bank, we saw ptarmigan in the woods. His father handed Marcel the .22 rifle, and one bullet. He stood still, fired and got one bird. Louie put another bullet in the .22, and Marcel got his second ptarmigan. We then proceeded along the track, each Innu casually but effectively scouring the ponds for ducks and geese and scanning the woods for porcupines, rabbits and more ptarmigan. "What are we looking for?", I ask Louie. "Anything" he replies. Stanley then shot two ducks on a pond half covered in ice. It was hard to reach them, but he braved the thin ice, carefully testing its thickness with a pole, making his way to the edge and retrieving the ducks. We arrive back at Louie's sister Maggy's camp, just off the road. Everyone is beaming when we bring in the birds.

People have lots to say.

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