

Decolonising Water—Decolonising Personhood—Decolonising Knowledge: A Tlingit and Tagish perspective

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Abstract

One meaning of the word Tlingit is “people of the tides”. Immediately this identification with tides introduces a palpable experience of the aquatic as well as a keen sense of place. It is a universal truth that the human animal has co-evolved over millennia with water or the lack of it, developing nuanced, sophisticated and intimate water knowledges. However there is little in the anthropological or geographical record that showcases contemporary Indigenous societies upholding customary laws concerning their relationship with water, and more precisely how this dictates their philosophy of place within postcolonial discourses. It is in the Indigenous record, and in this case the Tlingit and Tagish traditional oral narratives, toponyms (place names), and cultural practices, that principles of an alternative ontological water consciousness can inform and potentially reimagine contemporary international debates concerning water ethics, water law, water governance, and water management. This article is rooted in decolonial theory and practice, and showcases contemporary Tlingit and Tagish Indigenous knowledge production of water knowledge(s) in the Yukon Territory, Canada, to inform and broaden earth jurisprudence conversations.

Key words: Decolonising, Tlingit, Tagish, Water, Personhood, Knowledge production, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, Yukon Territory, Tlingit and Tagish water legislation, Water Ethics, Rights of Nature, Earth Jurisprudence