

America. It has become especially open and public since the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.<sup>5</sup> Earlier opposition to Indigenous religious practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had come from the civilizing policy of government agents and from the evangelizing efforts of Christian missionaries. Even though government policies preventing the practice of their traditions have changed, some Salish peoples have internalized skeptical attitudes toward the Winter Dance and criticize such Salish practices as outmoded.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the efforts at revival of the Winter Dance reveal the endurance of traditional lifeways. Preserving such cultural and religious practices of indigenous peoples worldwide is the driving force behind the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (see appendix C).

### Lifeway

*Lifeway* is a term that helps us understand how the Winter Dance is a religious ecology demonstrating the process of nurturing the people and the land. *Lifeway* refers to a traditional integrated style of life found among many Indigenous peoples that distinguishes them from modern secular societies that tend to make distinctions between economics and ecology, politics and society, science and religion. Among small-scale societies there is a seamlessness between political, economic, religious, and cultural realms in which shared language, kinship names, governance systems, reverence for homeland, and collective narratives of identity bind the people together. Cultural forces coalesce, thus forming a collective symbolic consciousness that transmits values over generations. In this sense, the symbolic values that nurture life are threaded through their worldviews. Thus, a traditional people's worldview—or way of understanding reality—flows from their life in a bioregion where rivers, mountains, animals, and particular sites sacred to the people are profoundly intertwined with their identity and their ways of nurturance.<sup>7</sup> This has resulted in cultural coherence for many Indigenous nations even in the face of the fragmenting forces of colonialism.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold images this concept, which he calls lifeworld, as dwelling in a sphere with a strong sense of the relationships between places and life forms. He contrasts this with dominating or moving over a globe as though lands and species exist to serve humans.<sup>8</sup> These intertwined lifeway connections are practiced in ritual and remembered in stories about the community of living presences in the landscape. Lifeway flows from and renews a people's religious cosmology through mythic stories. Such stories are considered to be vital and alive, so that their

## 8

# Indigenous Traditions and the Nurturing Powers of Nature

### Connecting Food and Ritual

Religious ceremonies often bring participants into the immediacy of vital embodiment, that is, the capacity to feel sacred power in one's body. Indigenous peoples recognize this sacred power residing in the surrounding world of plants and animals that nurture humans. In this sense, embodied beings in the world are food to one another. That which nourishes and that which receives the nurturing stand in intimate relationship and thus shape one another.

In these ways, nurturing, as a process of religious ecology, brings us into consideration of food. Food in its many aspects has been marked by religious reflection and ritual action.<sup>1</sup> As a seminal pathway for transferring sacred power, food comes to be gathered, prepared, and presented at celebrations and in thanksgiving. Here one ritual of Salish/Okanagan peoples, the Winter Dance,<sup>2</sup> is highlighted for connections between the sources of food, the life of the people, and the implications of food in the larger flow of the natural world.<sup>3</sup> A term in the Salish language for this sacred flow is *sumix*, and this powerful concept is at the heart of the Winter Dance, a yearly ritual for the Salish peoples.<sup>4</sup> Reception of this sacred power is understood by Salish elders as coming from guardian spirits, or spirit beings, in the natural world.

This major ceremonial is still practiced among Salish peoples of the Interior Columbia River Plateau region in the Northwest of North

narration during ritual constitutes one expression of their living cosmology that carries them throughout their life. These narratives place the speaker and audience in the larger community of life.<sup>9</sup> Salish interactions with the natural world manifest a religious ecology. That is, their lifeway does not separate out religion and the spiritual life as an autonomous, individualistic, or separate component of community life.

In presenting this particular example of an Indigenous religious ecology, we are not implying that this represents other First Nations or Native Peoples. Striking differences mark the lifeways and ceremonies of the many Indigenous peoples around the planet. Nor are we suggesting that a return to Indigenous lifeways is the answer to contemporary environmental challenges. Instead, we are highlighting this ceremonial as an example of the resilience of Indigenous cultures as sustained by their religious ecologies. This resilience is evident in the ways traditional thought has been brought to bear in sovereignty struggles that First Nations peoples in Canada are waging against tar sands pipelines (see appendix D).

### Attending the Winter Dance

John attended Winter Dances from 1985 to 1997 and again in 2000. The dances were sponsored by the Louie family in Inchelium, Washington on the Colville Reservation. The small village of Inchelium is best reached by the ferry that crosses Franklin Delano Roosevelt Lake. The Columbia River forms the lake behind the Grand Coulee Dam. This dam was finished in 1941 and has significantly eroded the lifeways of Salish villages along the river's shores because no fish ladders were included for salmon to return to their spawning grounds.<sup>10</sup>

Salmon are at the center of the Salish peoples' traditional symbolic and subsistence activities. Religious and economic life revolves around salmon. The loss of this keystone food and religious symbol has had a cascading effect that devastated the Salish lifeway and subverted their rituals.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, years earlier elder Martin Louie (also known as *Snpakchin*, or "First Light at Morning"; figure 8.1) left his home in Inchelium. Seeking religious freedom, he brought his family to the Canadian side of the border. Having grown old, he came home to Inchelium after the 1978 American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed. He returned to end his years in familiar sacred places in the mountains along the Columbia River so that he could continue Salish traditional ways. After his return, he and his sons were instrumental in reviving ceremonial life, especially the Winter Dance.



Figure 8.1 Martin Louie (*Snpakchin*, or "First Light at Morning," Okanagan/Salish); Photo credit: John Grim

At the first Winter Dance John attended, Martin Louie's son, Tom, brought him over to the site. The dance was to begin before sunset, but there was a problem. The "old man," Martin Louie, was not back from his healing travels to northern reservations that no longer had traditional healers. His two sons, Pierre and Tom, knew the ritual procedures, but they had not led a Winter Dance ceremony on their own before.

The anxiety precipitated by the absent ritual leader was relieved by crackling humor as Pierre observed, "I'll bet the old man is parked right on top of the mountain behind us waiting for us to set up the centering tree and begin the dance." So we laughed until he and Tom finally brought in the lodgepole pine for the centering pole and began the dance before sunset. In the end, Pierre was exactly right, and their father arrived soon after the centering tree was set in place.

Over the years as John returned for Winter Dances he became familiar with external signs that the dance was in preparation. On those later ferry crossings he would invariably spot the welcoming smoke from the dance house stovepipe. On the opening day there are usually several cars parked nearby. By the third day of the dance, the surrounding area would be crowded with cars, with nearly a hundred people gathered. They were

waiting for sunset to go into the dance house. During these years, Pierre arranged for a one-room schoolhouse to be transported to the Louie place as the dance house. This spacious setting for the Winter Dance has a marvelous oak floor that seems to lift the dancers as they circle around the singer at the centering tree.

The dance occurs over four nights into the early morning, during which the windows of the hall are covered with different-colored cloths, some of which are also draped over the antlers of the deer heads on the inner walls. Dimmed kerosene lanterns sitting on small shelves cast a comfortable glow over participants seated in chairs around the room. In the far corner the barrel stove glows with the fire within, while its light plays on the stacks of firewood and throws shadows across the dance floor. In the corner of the room opposite the stove, the door for entry is also covered with a long cloth. A doorman stands nearby to welcome participants and to close the door when a singer stands up, begins to sing, and goes to the pole.

The format and structure of the Winter Dance have changed since the nineteenth century, when dances were held in a large rectangular ritual area formed by tule-reed tipis sewn together. Although archaeological records indicate that Salish peoples may have lived in this region for more than 10,000 years, the evolving form of this ancient Winter Dance ceremony is not known. The ethnology gathered from native peoples in the region during the nineteenth century shows differences between Interior Plateau native peoples, such as the Yakima, Okanagan, Flathead, and Coeur d'Alene. Yet a shared consistency endures among these tribes in the ways they practice the Winter Dance.<sup>12</sup> Earlier ethnographic accounts present the ceremony as John experienced it. For example, a Winter Dance from 1954 is described as follows:

The dance is held in the largest room, usually the living room of a male or female shaman's house. In the centre of the room is a bare pole affixed to the ceiling and floor. This pole acts as the centre point for all activity during the dance. Only a shaman [or singer] may touch the pole.

Before performing, a shaman [or singer] will begin humming a song softly while he [or she] sits or stands in some part of the room. As he sings louder he approaches the pole. He may walk around the pole singing to it or hold out his arms to the pole as he sings. When he grasps the pole in both hands he has become one with his guardian spirit. As long as he is holding the pole his words are not his own but those of his guardian spirit. Guardian spirits speak unintelligibly and in a low voice, and therefore,

another person must transmit the guardian spirit's words to the audience. For this purpose an interpreter [or announcer] stands by the shaman [or singer] and repeats the guardian spirit's speech in a loud voice. . . . This pipeline from the guardian spirit via the shaman [or singer] and the interpreter continues for as long as the guardian spirit has something to say to the audience. As a rule the guardian spirit makes prognostications of the future, gives free advice, and makes comments on present events.<sup>13</sup>

A Winter Dance may also include other ritual activities such as the symbolic cleaning of the room where the ritual is held in preparation for the arrival of guardian spirits, or spirit beings (*sumix*). Other forms of ritualization include participants singing vision songs and dancing as animals on the move around a center pole. There are also giveaways by the singers and host families, distribution of sacred foods, feasting, sweat lodges, stick-game gambling, and storytelling. Each Winter Dance is somewhat different and comes about through a spirit call to the shaman-sponsor rather than a human-determined calendar or clock time.

### Nurturing and Giving

Nurturing is a central moral impulse threaded throughout the Salish worldview. This giving forms a core cultural value within the religious ecology of the Winter Dance. Thus, songs are sung at the Winter Dance to honor the giving of the plants and animals as food for humans. Traditional Salish peoples recognize that most animals, including humans, eat root crops. This is particularly the case for the large mammals such as deer, elk, and bear that hunters bring to the community as food. So songs are primarily about changing the weather to give moisture for the growth of root crops. In the Salish lifeway this is a reverential remembering of what the plants in particular have given to nurture life.

In addition to their songs, individual singers may also give away material goods during the ceremony. After singing and speaking slowly at the pole, they may drape over their backs multiple shawls and cloths. They hold in their hands beaded strings, woven belts, bandanas, and other gifts. Singing softly, they move around the circle of seated participants and wait for each person to take an object. These gifts are given to assist the singer in lifting the burdens of life from his or her shoulders. The giveaways amplify the giving of the Earth especially evident in Salish religious cosmologies. Narratives describe how the spirit beings gave of their bodies to nourish humans. The gifts of food from these plants, animals, minerals, and land are symbolically reenacted in the giving of material goods by the singers.

Individuals sing their special song; given to them by a guardian spirit in the local landscape. By singing they give back what was given to them for the benefit of the whole community of life. Their song reverberates on many levels. For example, the songs are believed to affect the weather so that moisture will reach the root crops. One way for that to happen is for a heavy wet snow to fall during the Winter Dance, followed by increasingly cold weather. This creates ice that seals moisture into the ground for the root crops such as camas bulbs and bitterroot. In the religious ecology of the Winter Dance, gift giving reflects the many levels of reciprocity in life from root crops to animals to humans to spirit beings.

Elders often speak of the significance of these gifts (*en-we-num*) while at the center pole. They chide anyone who attends the dance merely for the opportunity to receive a gift. Such thinking is labeled the "outsider behavior" of acquisitive dominant society and is criticized as damaging to the singers, the community, and the moral order in the world. A gift is a nurturing act that imparts reciprocity between the person who gives and those receiving. Receipt of a gift implies an obligation to help the giver who has undertaken the difficult burden of giving. Thus, giving is a central value symbolizing the reciprocal needs across the community of life most evident in the exchange of food.

At midnight the family members go out of the dance hall to get water and prepare the four sacred foods: bitterroot, camas bulbs, salmon, and deer meat. Water is carried in first and placed before the centering tree. There, the head sponsor approaches the pole, singing softly and speaking of the gift of water to sustain life. Taking a water dipper, he or she pours water on the tree first and then takes a drink. The participants line up and come to the pole, offering a silent or spoken word, a small act of appreciation for water, before taking a drink. After this, the four foods are brought out and distributed with a short comment about their gift to the people. This central ritual moment occurs at midnight, when the guardian spirits are said to draw closest to the dance hall. The sharing of food commemorates the religious cosmology describing the *sumix* beings who both give songs and give of themselves as food. Along with sharing food, ritual singing at the Winter Dance manifests this deep relational exchange at the center of the religious ecology of the Interior Columbia River Salish peoples.

### *Sumix* and Spirit Songs

At the heart of the Winter Dance is the individual guardian spirit relationship made manifest in visionary songs sung at the centering tree, a

lodgepole pine. It is believed that these numinous spirit persons in the landscape give songs as a gift of *sumix* power to humans. *Sumix* is a Salish word that has no direct equivalent in English. Thus, it is challenging to interpret *sumix* into a non-Indigenous worldview, especially one with a monotheistic understanding of the divine. Rather than a single defined equivalency in English, *sumix* can be understood as referring simultaneously to the spirit-persons in the landscape, the power that they can transfer to humans, and the manifestation of that power.<sup>14</sup> Such manifestations can be in natural occurrences, such as an earthquake, or in a human demonstrating skills and capacities such as healing, hunting, fishing, or plant gathering.

*Sumix* is considered present in the powers of growth and nurturance in the natural world.<sup>15</sup> It may also describe a person who has the capacity for generating life, for creativity, and for transforming the ordinary. This capacity can be given to an individual in an exceptional way, such as in a vision song, but even that individual learns about *sumix* in the context of his or her community and culture. *Sumix*, then, is manifestation of spiritual power and may be expressed in a song, a sound, and even in a baby's cry. During a Winter Dance, Martin Louie gently said to those assembled:

When I was a youngster at Barnaby Creek other villages from Mission Flat, Hall Creek, Roger's Bar, Keller, Nespelem, and Omak, they all gathered for the Winter Dances. . . . I think what we gained in one word was *confidence*. We made a circle and we went around the world [the centering tree] and prayed that we'd be in the circle this time next year . . . and it's not only the Indians that sing the song at the Winter Dance. It's all over the world. All nations, they all have a song. That's what my people say. When you're a baby the first thing you do is to learn to hum, to make a little noise. That's what they call a song. Each nation in their own language in their own way has a song. Clear 'round the world [the centering tree] in all the four directions . . . don't matter what nation it is. The world has a song. The rivers, the creeks, the winds, the trees, everything has a whispering sound.<sup>16</sup>

By naming the villages, this elder draws together local sites into a larger circle of place-based confidence around the collective symbolism of the nurturing tree. The local bioregion in the Salish lifeway is filled with songs that flow from the elements and animals. The sonic quality of a song brings the participants into resonance with the living world that feeds them. For example, in the Winter Dance humans dancing around

the centering tree both mimic and make present the animals on the move in that season.

Singing songs and spirit talking take place at this lodgepole pine. As a sacred center with clear cosmological and sacred symbolism, this tree is often called "old man" out of respect. It is symbolically understood as "the world that all of us go around." The singers are the only ones to touch this centering pole. After slowly singing their song and moving gradually to the center of the room, they take hold of the pole and speak to those assembled. Often they tell the story of how they acquired their song. They also sing of the skills they have developed for hunting, fishing, or plant gathering. Singers may also comment on community events and give their reflections.

These are *sumix* skills manifested by the numinous powers who bestow songs and who give of themselves. That is, the hunting and trapping of animals, the catching of fish, and the gathering of plants are all gifts from the *sumix* world that nurtures the human. The singer brings forward this traditional knowledge and accompanying skills in appropriate ways at the Winter Dance by singing the songs, undergoing spirit sickness, speaking to those assembled in spirit voice, and bringing instructions from the spirit beings. As an announcer steps forward to project the words of the singer, he or she is believed to be speaking in a spirit-filled way that mediates sustenance to the community. The announcer gives support, staying with a person through all the stages of singing, dancing, and speaking. Thus, singers bring their personal spirit helpers (guardian spirits) in the communal setting of the Winter Dance, and announcers help mediate those gifts. Both activities reaffirm values in the old stories, the Salish religious cosmologies. In these stories all the mythic spirit beings—Bear, Coyote, Bitterroot, and all the spiritual persons in the landscape—prepare for the arrival of humans who were created after all other creatures. These stories relate the willing sacrifice of these spirit beings who give of their bodies as food to sustain humans. The encounter of humans with the songs of these spirit beings occurs in a special way.

### Cosmological Songs: Remembered and Forgotten

In the traditional Salish lifeway, young boys and girls are sent out to fast in specific locations to acquire a song from a guardian spirit. Acquisition of a song not only announces a special relationship between that individual and an animal, plant, or place but also initiates the work of knowing and acquiring skills about the environment. This work of engaging in traditional environmental knowledge is coordinated with religious ecology

but not in a straightforward manner. That is, Salish individuals who receive a song are culturally disposed to forget, or set aside, their vision songs until they mature, at 25 to 30 years of age, and begin to attend and sing at Winter Dances. Salish author Mourning Dove described this unusual cultural practice:

When a man or woman had previously experienced the finding of a supernatural power to guide them, it usually left them alone in childhood. It came back when they were adults, appearing as a dream or vision to remind them of the contact saying, "Sing my song and the world will shine for you."<sup>17</sup>

In the Salish lifeway a vision song imparted at youth is "forgotten." Later that song returns and becomes embodied knowledge that causes the world to "shine." At the Winter Dance, it is sung openly to the people. Yet the youth who receives a song enters into a prolonged search to understand the life purpose imparted in a visionary song even before singing it openly at a dance. A male or female singer-in-formation becomes intent on learning the healing, hunting, fishing, or gathering skills associated with the animal, fish, plant, or place-based spirit that sang to them. This learning forms the basis for his or her entry into traditional environmental knowledge acquired by individuals, ritually shared with the community, and implemented in multivillage activities. Novice singers gradually become proficient in this knowledge as they mature and begin to sing their song. At the Winter Dance they bring to completion one stage of learning.

Singing one's spirit song transmits significant information about beings in the environment that the singer is coming to know intimately, such as salmon, bitterroot, camas, or deer. This religious ecology was crucial for the shared tasks undertaken by the independently Salish villages in the precontact days when foods were communally gathered. For example, singers with deer or salmon songs would lead those respective hunting and fishing activities. Even today knowledge of particular animals and plants announced by a singer at the Winter Dance is important for family and community subsistence activities.

### Spirit Sickness

Complementing the gradual learning of traditional environmental knowledge is the spirit sickness. This sickness connects a singer to an empathic experience of sacrifice, namely, the giving of the spirit beings

in song and in food. The sickness results in disorientation and prepares participants for the giving of themselves. This disorientation is ritualized in the days before the Winter Dance and harks back to a person's transitional stage of forgetting and remembering whereby a singer recovers his or her song and vision power.

With the acquisition of a song, a mature singer takes on the burden of a spirit sickness that returns with each Winter Dance season. The Winter Dance season runs roughly from late December to March, and spirit sickness may come just as this season begins. Spirit sickness can be described as physical, psychic, or both, and it becomes manifest in a variety of ways. That is, a person may feel physically ill, mentally burdened, or some combination of both. Singing at the Winter Dance relieves this spirit sickness. Moreover, the spirit sickness is understood in the context of the stories of creation, or religious cosmologies, so that the physical and psychic debilitation has a larger meaning than simply individual malaise.<sup>18</sup> It is at this point that the conjunction of religious cosmology and religious ecology becomes clear. That is, the guardian spirits who pervade all reality are integral to the Salish lifeway that affirms the nurturing of humans by spirit beings. Through this spirit sickness, individual singers bring to the Winter Dance a living reflection on health and food, subsistence and nurturance.

The spirit guardians are described in the mythic narratives as giving themselves as food and as a healing force in songs. Spirit sickness places singers in a bodily experience that directly relates them to the original and ongoing gifts of the animal-plant-mineral spirit beings. The underlying tension of the spirit sickness also relates to widespread ideas among Indigenous peoples of the need for a "second gift" by humans to the more-than-human world.<sup>19</sup> The complexity of the gift of food, in this interpretation, requires the additional or second gift of suffering by the singers. Enduring the spirit sickness and celebrating its release by singing at the center tree are modes of acknowledging the maturing interchange of humans with the community of life in the Winter Dance.<sup>20</sup> This is a way for humans to acknowledge and nurture the spirit world. This empathy is at the heart of traditional Salish ethics narrated in the cosmological stories.

### Coyote Stories and an Ethics of Empathy Regarding Food

In traditional Salish cosmological stories it is Coyote, the mythic trickster, who raises the question, "How will the human survive?" The first of the guardian spirits to respond is bitterroot, the most handsome of the root

crops, who gives his body as food for the human. As the other spirit beings step forward, giving of their bodies, Coyote realizes that more than physical food is needed to sustain humans, the latecomers to creation. "How shall they thrive?" Coyote asks. At that point, the *sumix* beings decide to give songs to humans to orient and nurture them. Coyote, the trickster, thus reveals his sincere concern for humans. Coyote is himself the master of transformation and troublemaking. He is the shape shifter extraordinaire, and alternately buffoon and culture hero. One relevant story connects him to the Winter Dance:

Coyote and Porcupine were partners. Porcupine told Coyote that the latter's son, Muskrat would lead a dance that night. Coyote replied, "Well, we'll go." When they approached the dance house, Porcupine warned Coyote, "You'd better behave yourself, because your boy is pretty powerful. He's liable to kill us." Coyote answered, "No. My boy's not ahead of me." When they came to the house, Porcupine said to Coyote, "Don't enter first; let me." But Coyote said, "No. My power's better than yours. Let me go ahead." So when they entered, Coyote went first. Muskrat had a lot of little maggots dancing for him. When Coyote saw his son dancing and heard him singing, he himself started to do likewise and told the maggots to come to him. Coyote told the maggots to feed on him, and they all rushed upon him and ate him. Before he had danced once around, the maggots had eaten him all up. His partner Porcupine was behind him, but as soon as the maggots got on Porcupine he shook himself and they dropped off. Porcupine danced 'til he got to Coyote, and looked at him. He was nothing but a skeleton lying there dead. Porcupine took him by the wrist and told him to get up. Coyote yawned and made believe he had been asleep, saying, "I went this far and lay down and went to sleep." And Porcupine replied, "I guess you were asleep alright!"<sup>21</sup>

The *sumix* or power of Coyote's son, Muskrat, causes Coyote to die when he claims to have abilities that he does not actually have. Coyote oversteps his limits by claiming to be first and by arrogantly calling the maggots onto himself to feed. Coyote does not show mature judgment or experience of either the proper respect for another's power or the correct ethical understanding of food, eating, and nurturance. Yet in the myth Coyote comes to the dance and undergoes a death experience that marks all singers who endure the spirit sickness and are liberated by the power of their song.

This story describes the Winter Dance among the spirit animals

during the mythic time of beginnings in which the patterns for all of life were established. In the story several Salish ethical teachings are flagrantly violated by Coyote. Among them are recognizing personal limitations regarding *sumix*, awareness of the sacrifice of food, and reciprocal giving. The story presents an inflated individual whose self-importance is clear to the audience as a denial of proper respect for power and a singular lack of awareness of personal limitations. The story also intimates Salish cultural reflections on the numinous aspects of nurturing. The maggot power of Muskrat eats to the bone when limits are surpassed and arrogance leads a person.

The singers' experience of spirit sickness at the arrival of Winter Dance season can be seen as the moral reversal of Coyote's arrogance. In the loneliness and discomfort that comes over a singer before the Winter Dances, there is a personal and psychological connection to ecological knowledge regarding limits. The seasonal features of this recurring sickness during the ritual year are intricately tied to the Salish lifeway that connects the sacred, food, and personal growth together. Spirit sickness gives force to the teaching that all members of the community are, in time, food to one another.

## Conclusion

This brief overview of the Winter Dance ceremonial gives some idea of the ways in which Salish peoples have ritually integrated the nurturing power of spirit beings in the acquisition of songs along with hunting, gathering, and fishing skills. Human reciprocity is ritualized in giving back to the world by singing, by spirit sickness, and by giveaways. Being mindful of the natural environment in the Winter Dance ceremonial constitutes a religious ecology that fosters personal maturation, stronger community relations, appropriate subsistence activities, and renewing ties with spirit beings. According to the Salish, the *sumix* beings have a central role in nurturing humans and teaching them limits and gifts of life. For the Columbia River Salish peoples, the Winter Dance is a religious ecology that facilitates traditional environmental knowledge of land, species, and food that nurtures the village community.

In many ceremonials Indigenous peoples present remarkably stable patterns of human-Earth interdependence that have been sustained over generations in one location. So also some Indigenous peoples migrate with the seasons, and other native peoples transmit stories of their movements over time from distant settings to the places they now inhabit. What is striking is the manner in which Indigenous peoples are committed to

establishing sacred relations with landscape and local biodiversity. They have made significant efforts to maintain their religious ecologies despite historical challenges of conquest, disease, and colonization. These pressures continue into the contemporary period with sovereignty disputes, invasive extractive industries, resource depletion, and cultural subversion. That many Indigenous peoples have endured is a testament to their religious ecologies that survived the arrivals of peoples with other songs and dreams.