Products of human cultivation or "mysterious agencies"?: The hunter-gatherer myth and perceptions of Northwestern Coastal Indigenous clam gardens

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Acknowledgement

Before I begin, I wish to acknowledge that I am writing this thesis as a settler of mixed European descent. I live and study on the unceded territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt nations, and the WSÁNEĆ peoples. These peoples have resided on and have had ongoing, complex relationships with the land on which I write since time immemorial, and will continue to for generations to come. In researching and writing this thesis I have had the invaluable opportunity to explore the history of this land and its dynamics with the people who lived here long before mine ever did. My hope with this paper is to help shine light onto the stories of these people and other Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples who have historically been ignored and misrepresented in Western scholarship.

At a place called Eelung, on Orcas Island, there is a clam bed cultivated by its owners. They took the largest rocks that were in the clam bed and moved them out to extreme low water marks, setting them in rows like a fence along the edge of the water. This made clam digging very easy compared to what it had previously been because there are only small pebbles and sand to dig in. It is exceptional to cultivate clam beds in this manner and while other clam beds are used by everyone in the tribe, here only the owners who cultivated the bed gathered.[1]

In 1934, Bernhard Stern wrote this passage in his ethnography on the Lummi people, a Coast Salish First Nation located in Washington. Here he describes what we now call clam gardens, an intricate land management system practiced by Indigenous peoples along the Northwest Coast of North America. Up until Stern's 1934 account, no descriptions of Northwestern Indigenous cultures and clam harvesting mentioned this intentional cultivation. Even more interestingly, descriptions from Western scholars written after 1934 failed to acknowledge the existence of clam gardens until the mid-1990s, when clam gardens were formally "discovered". Why was the intricate and deliberate cultivation of clams so widely ignored for much of the last two centuries? Why did Stern's description of clam gardens not change Western understandings of clam cultivation?

Since time immemorial, clams have been an important resource for Indigenous peoples along the Northwestern coast of North America, including the Tlingit, Haida, Nisga'a, Ts'msyen, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth, Ditidaht, Makah, Quileute, Nuxalk Salish, and many other Coast Salish peoples.[2] Clams are carefully and extensively cultivated by these

[1] Bernhard J. Stern, *The Lummi Indians of Northwest Washington* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1934), 47.
[2] Nancy J Turner, "From 'Taking' to 'Tending': Learning about Indigenous Land and Resource Management on the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America," *ICES Journal of Marine Science* 77, no. 7–8 (September 14, 2020): 2472–82, https://doi.org/10.1093/icesjms/fsaa095.

peoples through the construction of what are known as "clam gardens". Clam gardens are created by the construction of rock walls along the low tide mark of shoreline where clams live. These created gardens are tended to by tilling the sediment and removing predators and large rocks. This practice ultimately expands the area in which clams could grow, increasing the productivity and availability of the food source.[3]

In most scholarship, clam gardens are considered to have been discovered by geologist Dr. John Harper in 1995, when he was working on coastal mapping for the British Columbia Ministry of Sustainable Development. As part of this work, he conducted aerial surveys of the coastline, and noticed human-made structures along the beaches, which we now know to be clam gardens.[4] However, historian Judith Williams explained that she began researching clam gardens in 1993, when she was told about them by Billy Proctor, a fisherman in the Broughton Archipelago who built his own clam garden after being taught by local Indigenous peoples[5]. Regardless, the discovery of clam gardens was made public after Harper's research in 1995, and soon after other scholars began to contribute to the research on the topic. This research accelerated in the early 2000s, and by the mid-2010s clam gardens were a popular focus of North American anthropology, archaeology, and ecology.[6] Ecological and archaeological research has since revealed that clam gardens have been created and tended to for at least 11,500 years, and are up to four times as productive than non-managed clam beds.[7]

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[3] Amy S. Groesbeck et al., "Ancient Clam Gardens Increased Shellfish Production: Adaptive Strategies from the Past Can Inform Food Security Today," Plos One 9, no. 3 (March 11, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0091235.; 1. "Intro to CG," Clam Garden Network, accessed February 8, 2024, https://www.clamgarden.com/intro-to-cg.

[4] Rick Hudson, "Ancient Clam Gardens," Pacific Yachting, May 31, 2022, https://www.pacificyachting.com/ancient-clam-gardens/.

[5] Judith Williams, *Clam Gardens: Aboriginal Mariculture on Canada's West Coast* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 2006), 10.

[6] Hudson, "Ancient Clam Gardens,"; Williams, *Clam Gardens: Aboriginal Mariculture*, 15.

[7] Rick Hudson, "Ancient Clam Gardens".; Amy S. Groesbeck et al., "Ancient Clam Gardens Increased Shellfish Production".; 1. Ginevra Toniello et al., "11,500 y of Human–Clam Relationships Provide Long-Term Context for Intertidal Management in the Salish Sea, British Columbia," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 116, no. 44 (October 14, 2019): 22106–14, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1905921116.

This research and accounts from Indigenous peoples of the region prove that clam cultivation has been an important part of life on the Northwest Coast since long before the arrival of Europeans. However, it is seldom mentioned in any non-Indigenous accounts from before John Harper's work. The question arises, then, of why so many Europeans overlooked these practices. Gilbert Malcom Sproat, the Commissioner on the Joint Committee on Indigenous Reserves asserted in 1868 that the colonization of Vancouver Island can be justified "by the fact of all the land lying waste without prospect of improvement", blatantly disregarding any of the land management practices conducted by Coastal Indigenous peoples that we now know to exist.[8]

In this paper, I argue that the limited acknowledgement of Northwestern Indigenous clam cultivation by Western writers before the 1990s and the failure to acknowledge the description of clam cultivation by Stern in 1934 is at least partially the result of what I call the hunter-gatherer myth. The hunter-gatherer myth is the false, yet common, conception by Westerners that the Northwest Coastal Indigenous peoples, as well as many other Indigenous groups, were historically hunter-gatherer societies, meaning that the two methods of sustenance were the catching or collection of food. This implies a lack of cultivation and suggests that humans played a passive role in the production of their food sources.

To argue this, I will examine descriptions of Northwestern Indigenous culture and clam cultivation by Westerners from the mid-nineteenth century until the Western recognition of clam gardens in the late twentieth century. In an effort to avoid a monolithic description of Northwestern Indigenous peoples I will try to specify which Indigenous population is being discussed throughout this paper; however, many early Western accounts did not clarify which

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[8] Gilbert M. Sproat, Chapter II: Rights of Savages to the Soil, *Nootka: Scenes and Studies of the Savage Life* (Victoria: Son Nis Press), 8.

community they were referring to, and so it will not always be possible. In this paper, I organize these European and early American and Canadian accounts of Northwestern Indigenous peoples and their relationships with clams into two main categories. These are exploratory accounts, written during the process of settlement establishment and resource surveying of the area, and anthropological accounts, which are scholarly texts that view Northwestern Indigenous peoples as a subject of study. Through an analysis of these sources and their disciplines, I aim to reveal the stories being told about Northwestern Coastal Indigenous clam cultivation and how they reflect the existence of the hunter-gatherer myth among non-Indigenous people.

I will then compare these accounts to those from Northwestern Coastal Indigenous persons, including recorded oral testimonies and written accounts, revealing the inaccuracies and negligence of the Western sources. These testimonies show that clam cultivation not only supplied food for these societies, but was also an important cultural practice. With this comparison I aim to shine light on the reality of clam cultivation in these communities. I will show that the relationship between people and clams in Northwestern Indigenous societies was much more complex and sophisticated than most Western accounts acknowledged as a result of the hunter-gatherer myth.

Chapter 1: The Hunter-Gatherer Myth

From the time of contact between North American Indigenous peoples and Europeans until well into the twentieth century, Indigenous societies were widely understood in the dominant Euroamerican view to be hunter-gatherer or hunter-gatherer-fisher societies; this misunderstanding can be called the hunter-gatherer myth.[9] It has been argued by a number of

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[9] Douglas Deur and Nancy Turner, "Introduction: Reconstructing Indigenous Resource Management, Reconstructing the History of an Idea." in *Keeping it Living: Traditions of Plant Use and Cultivation on the Northwest Coast of North America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 3-34.

scholars that this assumption contributed to the widespread unawareness of Northwestern Coastal Indigenous cultivation practices.

The scholarship on the hunter-gatherer myth is part of the broader subject of decolonial and post-colonial studies in history and other related disciplines. This field of thought emerged in the mid-twentieth century and continues to develop today. One important practice in post-colonial theory and literature is a re-examination of narratives about colonized peoples, including Indigenous societies. Susan A. Miller, an American Indigenous historian of the Seminole nation, wrote that "the prevailing narrative of American history…recounts the claiming of a vast wilderness by a brave people who bring enlightenment and civilization to a benighted continent".[10] This dominant narrative sees Indigenous peoples as uncivilized, only being saved by colonialism, and has led to the erasure of Indigenous peoples and misconstrued depictions of them in historical narratives. A primary part of post-colonial historical literature has been the amplification of Indigenous voices and knowledge to deconstruct this narrative and redefine the ways that they are perceived in Western society.

There is existing research on the ways that colonial narratives of Indigenous peoples are being retold. One clear example is Deirdre Slattery's chapter in the book *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*. Slattery describes the ways that scholars have been revising the story of Australian colonization to reveal the dynamics and events left out of colonial accounts. Slattery explains that important Indigenous guides have been left out of most accounts of the story, with Indigenous Australians being portrayed "only as attendant admirers of the dying heroes", despite their important role in navigation and survival of some of the crew.[11]

[10] Susan A. Miller, "Native Historians Write Back: The Indigenous Paradigm in American Indian Historiography," *Wicazo Sa Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 25–45, https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.0.0018, 25.
[11] Deirdre Slattery, "Telling and Retelling National Narratives," in *The Aboriginal Story of Burke and Wills: Forgotten Narratives*, ed. Ian Clark and Fred Cahir (Collingwood, Victoria: CSIRO Publishing, 2013), 179–90, 181.

Slattery credits these inaccurate accounts to the dominant perspective that sees the journey as "part of a story of conquest and control", as well as common beliefs about a racial hierarchy and the superiority of Western civilisation.[12]

Similar research has focused on the changing Western perspectives of the relationship between North American Indigenous peoples and their environment. In his paper "Beyond "The Ecological Indian"and"Virgin Soil Epidemics": New Perspectives on Native Americans and the Environment", James D. Rice discusses how Western scholars have historically viewed the relationship between Indigenous peoples and nature, and how this view has changed over time. He explains that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the relationship between Indigenous societies and nature was used by Westerners to distinguish Indigenous peoples from Europeans, as they "[regarded] native Americans as lower…on an evolutionary scale, closer to their non-human ancestors".[13]

These dominant narratives are now being questioned. Slattery discusses the ways that the Burke and Wills expedition is being rewritten and retold in literature and museums. Similarly, the notion of the primitive relationship between Indigenous peoples and their environment changed over the twentieth century, and in the 1960s and 1970s this relationship came to be viewed as more positive. The colonial narratives of Indigenous peoples being helpless and less than has started to be challenged, and Western scholarship has begun to recognize the complexity of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their natural environment; it is in this area of research that the question of the hunter-gatherer myth applies.

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[12] Ibid., 182-183.

[13] James D. Rice, "Beyond 'the Ecological Indian' and 'Virgin Soil Epidemics': New Perspectives on Native Americans and the Environment," *History Compass* 12, no. 9 (September 2014): 745–57, https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12184, 746.

The hunter-gatherer myth is a concept that can be used to help explain misunderstandings about Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples, allowing for a revision of the way that these peoples and their relationship to non-human life are understood. It provides a background for re-defining the ways that Northwestern Coastal Indigenous societies are viewed. The concept has been explored in the research of a variety of scholars including Nancy J. Turner and Douglas Deur. Their book *Keeping It Living: Traditions of Plant Use and Cultivation on the Northwest Coast of North America* is one of the first pieces of literature to discuss the hunter-gatherer myth and Northwestern Coastal Indigenous cultivation. The book contains case studies by several authors identifying different types of traditional plant management and credits the longtime unawareness of these practices to the assumption that Northwestern Coastal peoples were primarily hunter-gatherers.[14]

The case studies in this book include the management and harvesting of root plants by Coast Salish peoples, the management of Wapato by the Chinook, prescribed burning in the Fraser Valley by Northwestern Coastal peoples, plant management practiced by the Tsimshian and Tlingit, and the tending of Estuarine root gardens by the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw. These studies show a variety of the different resource management practices of Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples, most of which were previously ignored by Western writers.

The idea of the hunter-gatherer myth has been explored in relation to Indigenous groups elsewhere as well. For example, M. Kat Anderson explores cultivation practices of Indigenous peoples in California in her book *Tending the Wild: Native American knowledge and the management of California's natural resources.* She explains the issue with the label "hunter-gatherer", arguing that the term connotes "a hand-to-mouth existence" and implies "that California Indians dug tubers, plucked berries,and foraged for greens in a random fashion, never

[14] Deur and Turner, *Keeping it Living*.

staying in any one place long enough to leave lasting human imprints".[15] This description shows the implications of the term hunter-gatherer and the assumptions it led Western scholars and observers to make about Indigenous peoples. Anderson's book examines how these ideas are false, and describes the complex cultivation practices of Indigenous peoples in California in opposition to this hunter-gatherer assumption.

There are a few hypotheses as to why the assumption that North American Indigenous peoples were strictly hunter-gatherers came to be. First, there is an argument that because the dominant Western view saw Indigenous peoples as primitive and unsophisticated, they did not believe that these societies were capable of agriculture. This is the primary assumption explored in *Keeping It Living.* In the introduction, Deur and Turner accredit the ignorance of Indigenous agriculture in the case of James Cook to a view of Indigenous populations being "incapable of the most basic civilized pursuits (including agriculture)"at the time of his arrival.[16] Deur and Turner explain how many Indigenous societies were introduced to and quickly took to growing new plants when the Europeans arrived, with the potato being one example. However, for a long time it was widely believed that Northwestern Indigenous societies were only introduced to the idea of cultivation with the arrival of Europeans, as it is a practice too sophisticated for these "primitive" societies to have developed on their own.[17]

A second theory is that European explorers did not recognize Indigenous cultivation practices like clam gardening as agricultural practices because they were so unfamiliar. The definition of agriculture is subject to disagreement. In their paper "Were the Ancient Coast Salish Farmers? A Story of Origins" Natasha Lyons et. al. define farming and agriculture as

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[15] Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 2.
[16] Deur and Turner, *Keeping it Living*, 4.
[17] Ibid., 14.

interchangeable terms that mean "the cultivation, production, and (at least) behavioral domestication of plant and animal foods".[18] Alternatively, in their paper "Agriculture: Definition and Overview", David R. Harris and Dorian Q Fuller define agriculture as "the science and art of cultivating the soil, including the allied pursuits of gathering in the crops and rearing livestock; tillage, husbandry, farming (in the widest sense)"[19]. Clam gardens, being cultivated and produced by people, fit the latter definition. However, as clams are not domesticated in this practice, clam gardens would not fit the definition proposed by Lyons et. al. In light of conflicting understandings of agriculture and cultivation, it is uncertain whether Europeans would understand clam gardening as a form of farming or agriculture. Nancy Turner and Douglas Deur argue that "many [cultivation practices] are quite different from those characteristics of European agriculture", and it is therefore possible that hunter-gatherer myth resulted from differing cultural understandings of what constitutes agriculture. [20]

Additionally, European land cultivation is based on ideas of property and ownership. Lyons et. al. argue that "differences between English commonlaw and Indigenous land practices" may play a role in the ignorance of Indigenous cultivation.[21] Though specifics of land ownership differed across nations, many Indigenous communities had community-owned land or rejected the idea of land-ownership altogether. For this reason, Europeans may not have identified the management or cultivation of communal land as agricultural practices.

A third reason identified by scholars for the existence of the hunter-gatherer myth is the presence of a gender divide, both in the division of labour of Northwestern Indigenous cultivation practices and in the research on them within Indigenous groups. In her paper "From

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[18] Natasha Lyons et al., "Were the Ancient Coast Salish Farmers? A Story of Origins," *American Antiquity* 86, no. 3 (March 17, 2021): 504–25, https://doi.org/10.1017/aaq.2020.115, 505.
[19] David R. Harris and Dorian Q. Fuller, "Agriculture: Definition and Overview," *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology*, 2014, 104–13, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-0465-2_64, 104.
[20] Deur and Turner, *Keeping it Living*, 5.
[21] Lyons et al., "Were the Ancient Coast Salish Farmers?," 514.

"taking" to "tending": learning about Indigenous land and resource management on the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America", Turner suggests that Indigenous cultivation practices on the Northwest Coast may have in part been ignored because tending to plants was primarily women's work, and historically most anthropological researchers have been men, who only interacted with the men in the Indigenous communities they studied. She argues that this could lead to the false understanding that hunting, as typically men's work, was the primary method of sustenance.[22]

Scholars agree that a combination of factors likely contributed to the existence of the hunter-gatherer myth, with the three primary factors being the belief that Indigenous people were too primitive to develop cultivation practices, a different understanding of what constitutes agriculture by Europeans, and a gender divide in historical indigenous communities paired with a gender imbalance in Western research.[23] The following sections will examine how the hunter-gatherer myth and the theories behind it can explain the centuries-long widespread unawareness of clam gardens.

Chapter 2: Western Perceptions

In this chapter I will analyze Western Primary sources on Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples to investigate how traditional clam harvesting and relationships with the natural environment were understood. These dates of these sources range from 1792 until 1965, and fit into two main categories: exploratory accounts and anthropological accounts. Exploratory accounts were written by early explorers and settlers of the Northwest Coast. Their primary interest was to find resource and settlement opportunities, a goal that is reflected in their content.

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[22] Turner, "From 'Taking' to 'Tending', 2474.
[23] Turner, "From 'Taking' to 'Tending'; Deur and Turner, *Keeping it Living*.

Anthropological accounts view Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast as subjects, describing their ways of life from the perspective of the Western observer.

i. Exploratory Accounts

Early explorers of the Northwest Coast arrived with the intentions of resource and settlement identification and establishment. These people often wrote journals or letters documenting their experiences, and these are what I am considering exploratory accounts in this research. There are limited accounts of this type that discuss clams specifically in any detail, as the primary scope of these documents is the opportunities for Westerners in the Northwest Coast, and clams were not seen as a desirable resource compared to other marine life such as salmon or herring. However, even the texts with no mention of clams are important in this examination, as they illustrate how Europeans perceived the Coastal Indigenous peoples and their relationship to the environment more broadly, offering an understanding of the hunter-gatherer myth and the way that it impacted the perceptions of clam cultivation.

The earliest source included in this research is written by Captain George Vancouver, in 1792, reporting on his voyage of the Northern Pacific. Vancouver describes the natural environment of Vancouver Island with a tone of awe, using vivid descriptions of the "beautiful scenery" of the landscape that "exhibited every thing that bounteous nature could be expected to draw into one point of view".[24] About this beautiful land he states that as he "had no reason to imagine that this country had ever been indebted for any of its decorations at the hand of man, I could not possibly believe that any uncultivated country had ever been discovered exhibiting

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[24] George Vancouver, *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean, and Round the World: In Which the Coast of North-West America Has Been Carefully Examined and Accurately Surveyed: Undertaken by His Majesty's Command, Principally with a View to Ascertain the Existence of Any Navigable Communication between the North Pacific and North Atlantic Oceans ; and Performed in the Years 1790, 1791, 1792, 1793, 1794 and 1795, in the Discovery Sloop of War, and Armed Tender Chatham, under the Command of Captain George Vancouver* (London: Printed for John Stockdale, 1801), 227.

such a picture".[25] Vancouver was impressed by the nature of the island, but assumed that this was in no way the result of human cultivation.

A similar perspective is expressed in a letter written by James Douglas to his friend Esquire James Hargrave in 1843, in which he discusses clams specifically. James Douglas is an important figure to examine as he was a Hudson's Bay Company representative and the future governor of Fort Victoria. His letter can thus be understood as an insight into the ideas of a prominent colonial figure on the Northwest Coast as well as one of the first texts discussing clams in the region during the colonial period.

Like Vancouver's account, the letter discusses in detail the natural environment of Fort Victoria. Douglas comments on the incredible beauty of the place, describing it as "a perfect 'Eden', in the midst of the dreary wilderness of the North west coast".[26] In his infatuation with the natural environment, Douglas discusses the "horizontal beds of shells, found above high water mark", crediting this directly to the "mysterious agencies" at work in creating this beautiful wilderness.[27] He does not acknowledge that the beautiful landscape around him might have been cultivated by the people of the area.

Douglas continues on to describe the Coast Salish peoples of the area, likely what are now known as the Esquimalt and Songhees nations. In contrast to his sublime descriptions of the environment, Douglas continues on to describe the local Indigenous populations as "desperate savages" who have "yet lost no trait of their natural barbarity".[28] By separating the people and the environment both in location within the text and in connotation of the adjectives used,

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[25] Ibid..
[26] James Douglas, "James Douglas to James Hargrave" in *The Hargrave Correspondence, 1821-1843* (Champlain Society, 2013), 420–22, 420.
[27] Ibid..
[28] Douglas, "James Douglas to James Hargrave," 421.

Douglas shows that he sees the natural environment, including shellfish, as natural and entirely separate from the people of Vancouver Island.

While the assumption that these peoples were hunter-gatherers is not explicitly written in the letter as it was in Vancouver's, Douglas seemingly expresses the same view as Vancouver, failing to acknowledge that the beautiful landscape around him could have been cultivated by the people of the area. Vancouver and Douglas's views of the separation of Northwest Coastal Indigenous peoples and their environment and Douglas's perspective of Coastal Indigenous peoples as lesser than their European counterparts are evident and connect these sources to the ideas behind the hunter-gatherer myth.

ii. Anthropological Accounts

The second common type of source from this period is anthropological accounts. Most Euroamerican descriptions of the Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples from the mid-nineteenth century into the late twentieth century can fit into this category. Before examining these descriptions, it is important to first understand the significance and development of anthropology in this colonial period.

In his 1904 paper "The History of Anthropology" Franz Boas, one of the founders of the modern anthropological discipline, explains how the development of anthropology is directly tied to European expansion and exploration. He describes the study of race as a primary focus of anthropology since the eighteenth century. He explains that during the nineteenth century, "the leading discussion related to the discovery of mental differences between zoological varieties or races and men" and that "the relationships between man and nature were of prime importance".[29]

[29] Franz Boas, "The History of Anthropology," *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 20, no. 512 (1904): 513–24, 515.

These classifications, based on early ideas of evolution, are clearly depicted in figure 1.[30] The Indian race is placed fifth from the bottom in this image. Not only were North American Indigenous peoples considered significantly less advanced than Americo-Europeans, but they were also thought of as one generalized race, with all North American Indigenous groups being relatively the same.

Figure 1. Catologue page from the 1904 St. Louis World Fair ranking races on an evolutionary scale.

[30] Louise Krasniewicz, "All the World in One Place," *Expedition Magazine* 57, no. 1 (April 2015), https://www.penn.museum/sites/expedition/all-the-world-in-one-place/.

During the early twentieth century, however, the idea of humans developing on an evolutionary scale from savage to civilized began to be rejected by anthropologists, as cultural anthropology shifted from an evolutionary view of society and culture to a historical one.[31] Anthropologist Ward H. Goodenough explains that this newer historical framework “sought to tell the story of cultural progress in the course of human history through tracing how new human developments spread from centers of innovation to outlying areas”.[32] Most anthropological accounts on Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples were created during this period, and can thus be understood as fitting into this historical cultural framework. It is important to note though, that the abandonment of the idea of evolutionary superiority does not mean an absence of racism and colonial ideals in these later anthropological accounts. Many of these texts reflect racist ideas of Euroamerican cultural superiority, these views are just no longer connected to ideas of evolutionary advancement.

The nineteenth-century anthropological belief in the evolutionary inferiority of North American Indigenous peoples can be found in accounts of Northwestern Coastal peoples specifically. One example is anthropologist Gilbert Malcom Sproat’s 1867 ethnography titled “The West Coast Indians in Vancouver Island". This paper is anthropological, but is also very colonial in nature, as Sproat’s time with Indigenous communities as an Indian Reserve Commissioner was a part of the colonial project and was done with the intent of helping the European settlement and dominance of North America.

In this text, Sproat discusses his experiences with a group of Indigenous societies who he refers to as the Aht tribes, which likely includes the Ditidaht, Nuu-chah-nulth, and Tla-o-qui-aht peoples, but may include others as well. Sproat describes these people as “a degraded and

[31] Ward H. Goodenough, “Anthropology in the 20th Century and Beyond,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 2 (June 2002): 423–40, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.2.423, 431.
[32] Ibid.

wretched portion of the human race", a similar sentiment to that figure 1.[33] Of their relationship with their environment, Sproat writes that they have "no knowledge of agriculture; a condition…similar to the earliest and rudest state of mankind that can be conceived."[34] This indicates a connection between the view of Indigenous peoples as an inferior, primitive race and the belief that they had no cultivation practices. Though food is briefly discussed in Sproat's account, with him writing that the primary food source of the Aht tribes is fish, including "whale, halibut, herring, salmon, anchovy, and shell-fish of various kinds", the topic is not examined in much detail.[35]

In many of the twentieth-century accounts of Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples' food is a main point of interest. In their paper "The Anthropology of Food and Eating", Sidney W Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois explain how food has been a major tool in cultural anthropological studies throughout the twentieth century, as food systems are directly tied to social, political, and economic structures.[36]

One twentieth century ethnography of the Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples that discusses food systems is Stern's curious account of clam gardens from 1934. As previously mentioned, in 1934 anthropologist Bernhard J. Stern released an ethnography titled *The Lummi Indians of Northwest Washington,* in which he describes Coast Salish clam gardening quite accurately. Stern expressed a good understanding of clam gardens, using the term cultivation several times, and was not afraid to describe this practice as "exceptional".[37] Stern's amazement with the practice suggests that it was unfamiliar to Western scholars. Strangely, despite this

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[33] Gilbert Malcom Sproat, *The West Coast Indians in Vancouver Island* (1867), 245.
[34] Ibid., 244.
[35] Ibid., 249.
[36] Sidney W Mintz and Christine M Du Bois , "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 99–119.
[37] Stern, *The Lummi Indians of Northwest Washington,* 47.

research being published in 1934, the ignorance of intentional cultivation of clam gardens continued in other anthropological accounts throughout the twentieth century.

Some scholars touched on ways that the clam beds were cared for, but none fully acknowledge the cultivation of the beds in the way that Stern did. In anthropologist and linguist Wayne Suttles' 1951 paper titled "The early diffusion of the potato among the Coast Salish", he explores how and whether potato cultivation by Coast Salish peoples in the post-colonial period is connected to pre-colonial land-use practices. The discussion of clams in this text reflects a greater knowledge of the involvement of Coast Salish people in clam production than earlier accounts, as Suttles states that they "took some care of their property" and that "in clam beds they sometimes took out the bigger rocks".[38] The use of the word "care" to describe the engagement with clam beds, rather than something related to cultivation or agriculture shows that the full extent of involvement with clam beds was not understood.

One theme that emerges in later anthropological accounts is the categorization of clams as a gathered food source**.** In his 1955 ethnography of the Katzie people, Suttles divides his chapter on sustenance into the three categories of fishing, hunting, and gathering.[39] This categorization implies that these are the only three ways in which these people sustained themselves, leaving no room for cultivation practices such as the creation and tending of clam gardens. Morton J. Sloane categorizes clams in a similar way in his 1956 dissertation"The Interrelationship of Economics, Class and Leadership on the Northwest Coast". The text includes Sloane's ethnographical accounts on a variety of Northwestern Indigenous communities, and he mentions clams in the section on sustenance for the Quinault peoples, an Indigenous group

[38]Wayne Suttles, "The Early Diffusion of the Potato among the Coast Salish," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 3 (October 1951): 272–88, https://doi.org/10.1086/soutjanth.7.3.3628605, 281.
[39] Wayne P. Suttles, Wilson Duff, and Diamond Jenness, *Katzie Ethnographic Notes* (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1955), 21-27.

located on the Washington Coast. Sloane explains that marine wildlife is the primary source of food for the Quinault peoples, but that land animals and birds are also important. He writes that edible staple plants were rare in the area, but that some such as camas and berries were eaten regularly. In the section on edible plants, he also mentions that "among shellfish, razor clams were an important source of food".[40] The text goes into incredible detail on the ways in which animals were caught and hunted, explaining who did the work and what tools were used. On shellfish, though, all he writes is that "any Quinault had the right to…dig for clams where he pleased".[41]

Sloane's connection between edible plants and shellfish such as clam is elaborated on by Suttles in "The early diffusion of the potato among the Coast Salish". He describes clam harvesting as being connected to a Coast Salish "root-gathering tradition" in the sense that many root plants were harvested in the same way.[42] The association of clams and plants as similarly gathered food sources is mentioned again by Suttles in "Post-Contact Culture Change Among the Lummi Indians", released in 1954. In this paper he writes that even after European settlement in the late nineteenth century, "the gathering of food persisted, especially clam-digging and berry picking".[43]

In some ways, Sloane and Suttles were correct in associating clams with plants such as berries and root plants, as they were tended to in similar ways. In his chapter "Cultivating the Northwest: Early Accounts of Tsimshian Horticulture", James McDonald discusses the ways that the Tsimshian people cultivated plants including berries, root crops, fruit trees, bark and tree roots, and seaweed. He explains that the plants' environments were modified, similarly to how

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[40] Morton J Sloane, *The Interrelationship of Economics, Class and Leadership on the Northwest Coast*, 1956, 8.
[41] Ibid., 11.
[42] Suttles, "The Early Diffusion of the Potato", 281.
[43] Wayne Suttles, "Post-Contact Culture Change Among the Lummi Indians," *British Columbia Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 and 2 (1954): 29–99, 5.

clam gardens are managed. Additionally, wild plans such as berries were brought into garden environments within communities.[44] Madonna L. Moss also documents similar practices used to cultivate tobacco among the Tlingit people in the chapter "Tlingit Horticulture: An Indigenous or Introduced Development?".[45] By categorizing plants and clams as a "gathered" food source, though, Sloane and Suttles fail to acknowledge the human involvement in the production of plants and clams, reflecting the hunter-gatherer narrative.

The human-role in plant cultivation is acknowledged in more recent sources, such as *Our Native Peoples: Coast Salish*. This book is a part of the British Columbia Heritage Series, and is a collection of texts about the Indigenous peoples in different regions of British Columbia designed to be taught in school classrooms. The book was released in 1965 and describes many parts of Coast Salish life, including food. In the introduction to the food section, some level of cultivation is acknowledged by the writers, as they claim that "a near approach to agriculture is found in the activities of the women, who, in gathering roots and berries, exercised a rough weed-control over their plots".[46] This shows that by this point, it was becoming known by Western academics that the Coast Salish peoples cultivated their land.

Yet, contemporary accounts do not acknowledge cultivation in clam harvesting. In the food section, there is an entire subsection on clams, as the authors state that "from ancient times clams have been an important food to the natives of the North-west Coast of America".[47] It describes how village sites were strategically set up near clam beds, and the ways in which clams were prepared. There is however no mention of the beds being cultivated or tended to in any

[44] James McDonald, "Cultivating in the Northwest: Early Accounts of Tsimshian Horticulture." In *Keeping It Living: Traditions of Plant Use and Cultivation on the Northwest Coast of North America*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 240-273.
[45] Madonna L. Moss, "Tlingit Horticulture: An Indigenous or Introduced Development?" In *Keeping It Living: Traditions of Plant Use and Cultivation on the Northwest Coast of North America*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016), 274-295.
[46] *Our Native Peoples: Coast Salish*. (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1965), 18.
[47] Ibid., 21.

way. Because there was increasing knowledge of Coast Salish cultivation practices at this time, and Stern had identified the existence of clam gardens, it is interesting that the cultivation of clam gardens was still not considered in this text.

Another theme addressed in many of the anthropological texts that discuss Northwestern Indigenous clam harvesting is gender dynamics in labour systems. For example, Suttles describes a gender divide in Coast Salish clam harvesting. He writes that potatoes were harvested using "the traditional digging-stick that women used for roots and clams".[48] This characterizes clam-digging as an activity accomplished by Indigenous women. American anthropologist Philip Drucker describes clam harvesting similarly in his 1963 book *Indians of the Northwest Coast.* In this text, Drucker describes the ways of life of different Indigenous societies along the Northwest coast. The only discussion of the harvesting of clams in the book is about how "gathering shellfish was generally regarded as a woman's task, although men occasionally aided their wives".[49] Like Suttles, Drucker describes clam harvesting as primarily women's work, adding that men were sometimes involved. In *Our Native Peoples*, the aforementioned quote explains that the identified cultivation of plants was women's work, as is mentioned in the existent literature on the hunter-gatherer myth. It is clearly stated that these activities were solely performed by women, as men had "neither time nor actual necessity for tilling the land".[50] However, gender is not directly discussed in the book's section on clams.

To summarize, the existence of clam gardens was not widely understood by Western explorers or scholars until the late twentieth century. It is clear that most of these writers viewed clams as a food source that was gathered, within the common framework of a hunter-gatherer divide. There is evidence in the earlier accounts by Douglas, Vancouver and Sproat, which were

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[48] Suttles, "The Early Diffusion of the Potato", 278.
[49] Philip Drucker, *Indians of the Northwest Coast* (Garden City, NY: Natural History Press, 1963), 32.
[50] *Our Native Peoples*, 18.

created as part of a broader colonial project, that these writers viewed the Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast as primitive and unsophisticated. This reflects the first of the proposed reasons behind the existence of the hunter-gatherer myth, that Indigenous peoples were viewed as too unsophisticated for cultivation practices to be considered, and may be a reason that the relationship between Indigenous peoples and clam production was not addressed.

The anthropological texts examined are created with the intent of understanding Coastal Indigenous peoples for academia, rather than for use in colonization and settlement. Food is a primary focus in these texts, and is typically categorized into those hunted, fished, and gathered. The creation of these categories reflects an assumption that these are the only ways in which Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast obtained food. Though Suttles does acknowledge that Coast Salish peoples cared for clam beds, he does not give them credit in the creation of these beds. Stern's amazement at the practice of clam gardening suggests an unfamiliarity with the practice for Europeans, which could be one reason that it was seldom acknowledged as cultivation. These anthropological texts also comment on the gender divide in clam harvesting. Both Suttles and Drucker attributed clam harvesting to women specifically, connecting clam gardens to the theory that the hunter-gatherer myth and gender are related.

While Stern acknowledges the existence of clam gardens in 1934, the idea did not have an impact on the wider academic community until they were re-discovered in the 1990s. I argue that the reason Stern's account had such little impact is the pervasiveness of the hunter-gatherer myth throughout Western thought. It was not until other examples of North American Indigenous cultivation practices, such as the management of roots and berries, were beginning to be acknowledged by Western scholars and the hunter-gatherer myth was starting to be questioned that clam gardens were formally acknowledged by the Western academic community.

Chapter 3: Indigenous Perspectives

In the previous section I examined Western accounts of the relationship between Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Coast and clams, concluding that the general unawareness of clam gardens by Western thinkers and the inability of Stern's acknowledgement of clam gardens to generate more interest is reflective of the dominant hunter-gatherer myth. In this chapter, I will examine and analyze accounts from Northwestern Coastal Indigenous people, comparing them with the Western sources. In my comparison of the Western texts and the Indigenous sources, I aim to allow the words and stories of Indigenous community members to correct the errors in these Western accounts and provide a complete picture of clam cultivation on the Northwest Coast.

For many Indigenous societies globally, including those along the Northwest Coast, history is primarily an oral tradition. During the colonization of North America and the simultaneous efforts to destroy Indigenous cultures, much of this oral tradition was lost. Māori historian Nepia Mahuika writes that in the "colonization of Indigenous knowledge, the native oral past was stripped of history and repositioned as the unreliable ramblings of superstitious savages".[51] Indigenous methods of historiography across the globe were devalued, as the Western tradition came to view them as unreliable superstitions.

Further, the oral historical tradition relies on language for its transfer and its continuation. The suppression of Indigenous languages by colonizers in Canada led to significant language loss, and with it a loss of history. However, despite colonial efforts to eradicate the culture and histories of these peoples, many oral histories have been passed on successfully and have been recorded both in writing and in video. While there are no written documents created by

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[51] Nēpia Mahuika, *Rethinking Oral History and Tradition: An Indigenous Perspective* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 17.

Indigenous people before recent years that discuss clam cultivation or harvesting, there are many equally valuable recorded oral histories that discuss clam gardens and traditions.

Like in the anthropological accounts previously examined, many Indigenous histories discuss clams as a food source. One person who has contributed to much of the recent scholarship on clam gardens is *Kwaxsistalla*, or Adam Dick. *Kwaxsistalla* is a Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw Clan Chief who is a vital figure in the research on clam gardens, as he is one of the few individuals alive who was trained during the twentieth century by family members who still actively used and tended to clam gardens. The 2013 paper "Back to the Clam Gardens" and the 2015 paper "Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw "Clam Gardens": Motive and Agency in Traditional Northwest Coast Mariculture" by Nancy Turner, Douglas Deur, *Kwaxsistalla* and Kim Recalma-Clutesi are the written publications of information about clam gardens conveyed to Turner and Deur by *Kwaxsistalla* and his partner Recalma-Clutesi.

According to *Kwaxsistalla,* clam gardens are known as *loxiwey* in Kwak'wala, the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw language. *Kwaxsistalla* claims that *loxiwey* have been an integral part of Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw culture for "maybe 2,000 years".[52] *Kwaxsistalla* discusses the difference between *loxiwey* and *ixstawis*, natural clam beds. He explains how *ixstawis* were used more infrequently, with *loxiwey* being the preferred places to dig for clams. As such, village sites were often established near clam gardens, with *Kwaxsistalla* stating that "when you see clam shells up and down the coast, that's where people lived".[53] He explains that a defining aspect of *loxiwey* is their inter-generational management. This familial component of cultivating clam gardens is echoed by a Hul'q'umi'num-speaking Coast Salish Elder who stated that "our grandmother

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[52] Douglas Deur et al., "Kwakwaka'wakw 'Clam Gardens': Motive and Agency in Traditional Northwest Coast Mariculture," *Human Ecology* 43, no. 2 (April 2015): 201–12, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-015-9743-3, 206.
[53] Douglas Deur, Kim Recalma-Clutesi and Nancy J Turner, "Back to the Clam Gardens," *Ecotrust Magazine*, (2013), 5.

teaching us all this, showing us, telling us where you go and how you do it, it made us all a strong family" and that "once you're old enough then you get to go on your own but then you never forget that you're part of a family".[54] The assumption that Northwestern peoples were strictly hunter-gatherer societies prevented most Western observers and writers from understanding the dynamics described by *Kwaxsistalla* and the Coast Salish Elder. An acknowledgement of clam gardens is not only important in understanding Indigenous food systems on the Northwest Coast, but also social and economic organization.

Tsartlip elder Dave Elliott Senior also discusses aspects of clam cultivation for sustenance in the book *Saltwater People*, created for the Saanich Native Studies Program in 1983. The book includes over twenty hours of recorded oral testimony by Tsartlip elder Dave Elliott Senior. Elliot Sr. was born in 1910 and was raised by Coast Salish elders during much of the colonization of his people. In this book, Elliot Sr. tells the stories of his Ancestors and the W̱SÁNEĆ history and ways of life. Elliot Sr. explains that clams were an important part of a "great food supply that was put here by the Creator, the Great Spirit".[55] Clams were a gift, not just a resource.

In his explanation of the W̱SÁNEĆ seasonal cycle, he describes how come April, "daylight tides have arrived" and "instead of having to go dig clams in the night, now you can dig in the daytime".[56] Because of the tidal cycles, clam cultivation times change with the seasons. The seasonality of clam cultivation for the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples is different than the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw, who "traditionally gathered clams only in the winter months", according to *Kwaxsistalla.*[57] This indicates that while clams are a staple food for most Northwestern Coastal

[54] "Stewardship," Clam Garden Network, accessed April 2, 2024, https://www.clamgarden.com/stewardship.
[55] Dave Elliot Sr., *Saltwater People as Told by Dave Elliot Sr.*, ed. Janet Poth (Saanich, BC: School District 63 (Saanich), 1990), 77.
[56] Ibid., 45.
[57] Douglas Deur et al., "Kwakwaka'wakw 'Clam Gardens'", 205.

Indigenous peoples, and a variety of different peoples created and managed clam gardens, the relationships with clams were not monolithic across societies.

One important aspect of clam gardens touched on in many of Indigenous accounts but left out of the Western sources was the spiritual significance of clams and clam gardens. For the Haida peoples, the clam plays a major part in their origin story, the Raven and the First Men. This story tells of the Raven alone on a beach on Haida Gwaii, when he found an impressive clamshell at his feet with several small creatures coming out of it. The Raven convinced these creatures to venture out of the shell and join the Raven, and these creatures became the first Haida. The Haida were thus birthed from clams, making clams a very important and respected being. The significance of this story is reflected in Haida art, with Bill Reid's sculpture *The Raven and the First Men,* created between 1973 and 1980, being one well-known example. The cedar carving, currently located in the Museum of Anthropology at UBC, Vancouver, depicts the raven sitting atop a clam shell, with small Haida people emerging from it.[58]

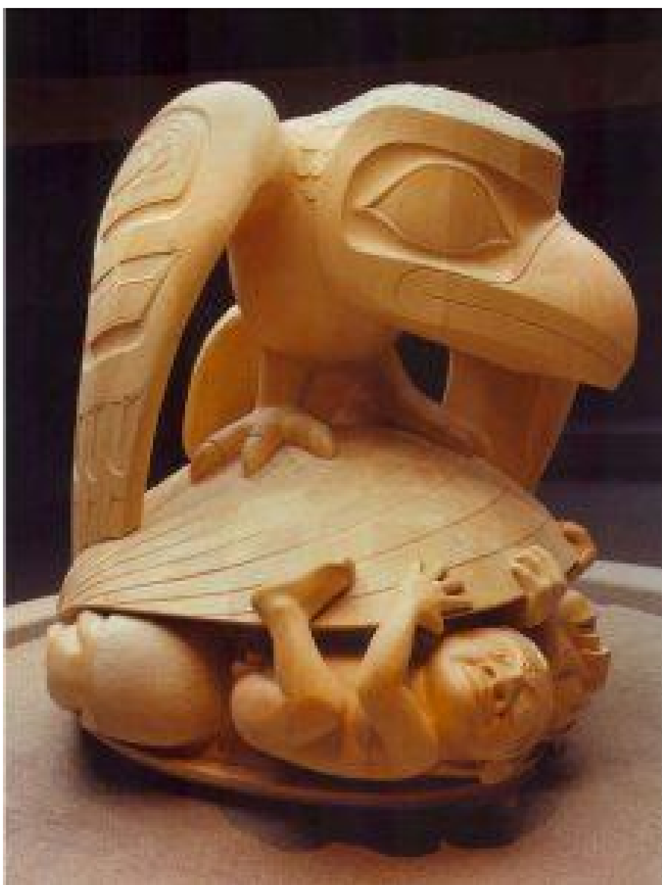

Figure 2. "The Raven and the First Men" by Bill Reid.

[58] Anne Cross, "The Raven and the First Men: From Conception to Completion," UBC Museum of Anthropology Pacific Northwest sourcebook series, 2011, https://moa.ubc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Sourcebooks-Raven_and_the_First_Men.pdf.

Clams are featured prominently in stories from other Indigenous peoples along the Northwest Coast as well, such as the W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations. The "W̱SÁNEĆ Clam Garden Restoration Project Final Report" includes a story written out by W̱SÁNEĆ Elder J'SINTEN. The story begins with the creator, XÁLS, turning people into other beings or places. Some of the people ran away and hid, not wanting to be changed. When XÁLS found them, they told him that they did not wish to be changed. He then told them that if he changed them, it was for the good of all. Following this, he changed them into clams. In reflecting upon this story, Elliot writes that clams are a reminder to trust the choices of the creator, and that "XÁLS and the ways of the sea told us how to live with others, eat well and prosper through sharing and trade".[59]

These stories reflect the significance of clams. The fact that clams were included in these stories dating back long before colonization is reflective of how important clams were to these societies. The W̱SÁNEĆ and Haida stories also indicate the additional cultural value of clams: for these peoples, clams are not just something to eat, but a lesson and a history. This suggests a more complex relationship between people and clams than was captured in any of the Western accounts, even Stern's. J'SINTEN explains this relationship well in the opening quote of Hakai magazine's video *A Wall Worth Building: Making Clam Habitat Great Again*, where he states that:

> A clam garden is a place that's been prepared to create the best growing opportunity for clams so you can cultivate them, just like you would a normal garden. They are a part of our belief system and they're a part of our food system. And so we're to look after it that way, maintain it like a relative.[60]

Here J'SINTEN communicates that clam cultivation was not just a means of sustenance, but a part of a broader belief system. This indicates a cultural significance of clams not mentioned in

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[59] Joni Olsen, "2014-2020 W̱SÁNEĆ Clam Garden Restoration Project Final Report" (2019), 4.
[60] Hakai Magazine, "A Wall Worth Building: Making Clam Habitat Great Again," YouTube, January 26, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22Nytmxw2Z8.

the Western accounts. Clams are not just a food source, but also a relative, explaining why they are so carefully managed.

The idea that clam gardens were a way to care for a relative is discussed by *Kwaxsistalla*. He explains that, like the W̱SÁNEĆ and Haida, the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw saw clams as relatives. He states that because of this, "Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw harvesters were motivated to ensure that clams were able to thrive and have their needs met" and that if this was done, clams would continue to support the people.[61] Clams were cared for not just as resources, but as family. Further, *Kwaxsistalla* explains how the Kwakwa̱ka̱'wakw saw their relationship with clams as going two ways, the clams caring for them as they care for the clams, which was not mentioned by earlier Western writers.

One of the main themes observed in the Western descriptions of Indigenous clam cultivation on the Northwest Coast was a gender divide. Gender is similarly mentioned in several Indigenous testimonies. In the "W̱SÁNEĆ Clam Garden Restoration Project Final Report", informed by eleven elders and knowledge keepers, they write that through the winter, "clams were gathered by the women when their families were traveling less", and that come spring "women gathered clams and made blankets".[62] *Kwaxsistalla* recounts traditional songs about *loxiwey* in which women were specifically mentioned, which the authors argue suggests "the traditionally important role of women in the shellfish harvest".[63] This portrays clam cultivation as a women's activity, such was suggested by several of previously examined non-Indigenous accounts. However, *Kwaxsistalla* does not describe clam harvesting as always being a gendered activity, as he describes being taught to create and manage clam gardens and cook the clams by

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[61] Douglas Deur et al., "Kwakwaka'wakw 'Clam Gardens'",206.
[62] Olsen, "2014-2020 W̱SÁNEĆ Clam Garden Restoration Project, 10.
[63] Douglas Deur et al., "Kwakwaka'wakw 'Clam Gardens'",206.

his grandfather.[64] Likewise, In *Saltwater People*, Elliot Sr. does not describe a gender divide in the harvesting of clams, stating that in the summer months, while the W̱SÁNEĆ people were digging and preparing clams, "the women and children were there and the men too".[65]

It is unclear from the sources available exactly whether the gender divide existed in clam cultivation as people like Sproat and Suttles argued. Through the Indigenous testimonies it is evident that men participated in clam harvesting in the twentieth century, but it may have been different in precolonial times. It is also possible that it differed seasonally or across different Northwestern Coastal societies. Nevertheless, it is evident that many Westerners believed that clam harvesting was a gendered activity, and as such it is reasonable to conclude that this perceived gender divide, whether true or not, might play a role in the unawareness of clam cultivation throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

From these accounts, it is clear that clam gardening was a significantly more complex system than the Western accounts described. Even Stern's account, which differed from the other sources in its recognition of clam cultivation, did not acknowledge the cultural components. Clams were featured in traditional stories, and thus serve as a reminder of traditional lessons for the people who harvest them. Clams were, and still are, considered a relative for many coastal Indigenous peoples, giving them a duty to care for them the way clams care for the people. As such, clam gardens not only provide sustenance, but also a connection between coastal Indigenous peoples and their environment. The assumption that clams were simply harvested as they naturally grew, a result of the dominant hunter-gatherer myth, meant that until recent decades the complexity of the relationship between Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples and clams was not recognized in the Western world.

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[64] Deur, Recalma-Clutesi and Turner, "Back to the Clam Gardens".
[65] Elliot Sr., *Saltwater People*, 47.

Conclusion

This analysis has shown that despite the existence and management of clam gardens long before and throughout the colonial period, clam cultivation was until recently widely ignored by Western observers and academics. An examination of both exploratory accounts from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and anthropological accounts from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century shows a common assumption that the Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples were strictly a hunter-gatherer society. The exception to this is Bernard Stern's 1934 ethnography of the Lummi people, which describes clam gardens in significant detail. However, despite Stern's observations, clam gardens remained widely unknown until the end of the twentieth century.

The exploration of the hunter-gatherer myth provides reasons for the absence of clam cultivation in the examined texts. The accounts from non-Indigenous peoples show a belief in the inferiority and primitiveness of the Indigenous peoples inhabiting the Northwest Coast. This view has been shown to generate the belief that Indigenous societies were not capable of establishing cultivation practices, and has been used to explain the unawareness of other cultivation practices in the region. Stern's account also reflects a fascination with the practice of clam gardening, suggesting that they were unfamiliar to Euroamerican observers, another possible explanation for their absence in the non-Indigenous historical record. Finally, several Western accounts of Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples describe clam harvesting as a gendered activity. Research has shown that most plant gathering and cultivation practices were done by women, and as men made up the majority of researchers, these were often ignored. While it is unclear whether clam cultivation was truly a gendered activity for all communities, Western anthropologists clearly believed that clam gathering was women's work, and could also

in part therefore explain the unawareness of clam gardens. I argue that the continued unawareness of clam gardens even after Stern's work is reflective of the dominance of this hunter-gatherer myth.

The accounts from Northwestern Coastal Indigenous peoples serve to illustrate the truth about the history of clam gardens and clam cultivation and management on the West Coast of North America. These testimonies show the complex management system of clams, as well as the importance of clams in the spiritual and social aspects of the cultures. The centuries-long failure to acknowledge clam cultivation resulting from the hunter-gatherer myth meant that these aspects of Northwestern Indigenous cultures and ways of life have been neglected from most non-Indigenous accounts prior to Judith Williams' and John Harper's work in the 1990s.

This paper is inspired by and adds to the existing body of decolonial and post-colonial historical research. It reveals the ways in which false colonial narratives have led to misunderstandings and erasure of Indigenous histories. For much of the last few centuries, most histories of Northwestern Indigenous peoples created by non-Indigenous scholars have upheld colonial beliefs. A re-examination of these colonial perspectives is thus necessary not only in the practice of decolonization but also for a better understanding of the history of the Northwest Coast.

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