Alberta’s Tar Sands and the Aboriginal Communities, a mediated production


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[["White Man’s Burden"
by Rudyard Kipling (1899 )

Take up the White Man's burden--
In patience to abide,
To veil the threat of terror
And check the show of pride;
By open speech and simple,
An hundred times made plain
To seek another's profit,
And work another's gain/b]

Can a poem be a bridge between centuries? If so, can it indicate an historical process and expose a critical disposition? The quote from Kipling's "The White Man's Burden" introduces us to a series of problematics that this presentation will address: for example, how is information transmitted and received over a century after Kipling's?

In terms of our media environment, communications based on the image seem to sustain the belief that if an image speaks a thousand words, then a dynamic image must surely be a declaration of truth. In contrast, the stanza proposes an ambiguity that could be resolved in terms of the struggle of the colonized or, in favour of the colonizer. What does it mean, to "Take up the White Man's Burden": a call to arms, a brotherhood through the protestant work ethic, a celebration of Homo Faber? Is it an ironic reading of white supremacist colonizing process? One that ascribes to the white man the arching text of knowledge, work, civilization, culture, religion and ethics – all categories that pertain to the discourse that speaks for imperialism and colonization? In Kipling's case, India is the background, and the non-white man, the brown man, the dark man, those off-white colour categories that naturalize submission is the backdrop. Further to this, whose pride are we talking about? "To veil the threat of terror / And check the show of pride."

Is it the pride of becoming white and therefore of the process of self-erasure/self-actualization (become white/ becoming "real")? What of "to seek another's profit, / And work another's gain"? Is it a Marxian 'workers of the world unite'? Or, simply, a statement about a collectivity that transcends nationalities? Finally, is it the factual reality of exploitation and therefore an invitation to resistance or a normative rhetoric to abide by the superiority of the White Man?

The poem offers an irresolvable ambiguity out of context, yet this ambiguity reverberates if read through the developments of the colonization of particular countries – ie. Canada – and, the developing context that the colonizing project has sustained and is still capable of sustaining. In terms of its history, Canada has emancipated itself from the colonial project, yet it still cannot be fully claimed that Canada is an independent, fully sovereign nation.

There is still a symbolic dependence – when the newly arrived immigrant flips a coin, he/she still has to choose between the Queen's head and tails, and tails is not Louis the XVI or de Gaulle. In the contemporary world of immaterial work, as the new Canadian flips or surfs through channels, symbolic relevance acquires a heavy currency.

This preamble contextualizes then the construction of social structures and representations that partake of Canada as an independent nation. Numerous points of entry into biculturalism and multiculturalism can be brought to play upon this stage and yet for the sake of time they can be reduced to the essence of what they represent. Multiculturalism and biculturalism are social, political and economic apparatuses, which
shape Canadian culture by investing in identity formation paradigms. Historically, English and French constituencies are not branded as ethnics or ethnicities, but rather as the dominant discourse. To further nuance the complexity of this point, those who call themselves Canadian, with no hyphenated prefix or adjectival description, illustrate by omission the unresolved tensions within the construction of non-negotiable Canadian identity. If we include the Other into this equation, then the impasse becomes blatant, in terms of the histories of colonization.

The Other is anyone so designated by the dominant power structures but in this particular case, we take the example of Aboriginal Other, a phantasmagorical Other, invisibility being a function of both physical presence and location: sometimes living on a reserve or in a remote town away from high urban density, sometimes a product of media communications that render silent/mute the Aboriginal subject.

The Aboriginal Other, as well as the media representations of a limited number of potential Aboriginal identities perpetuated by the media circuit – contributes to the construction of an impermeable Canadian identity, and through which the Bicultural/Multicultural project is sustained.

The industrial revolution was not simply a revolution that transformed the modes of production and increased the wealth of the bourgeoisie to others’ detriment. Through technological developments, actually reconfigured social relations of everyday life and our relationship with nature, an iconic image of industrialization was embedded in the idea of modernity: progress, development, and amelioration of everyone’s life. This utopic dispositif, borrowing from Foucault’s terminology, is what sustains the capitalist project through which, it is extractable from Kipling’s poem. Yet, the other side, the byproduct of this utopic disposition is a renewable resource, the Homo Sacer.

Embedded in the discourse of sovereignty, as definable through Giorgio Agamben’s analysis of the state of emergency by which sovereignty defines itself as power, the Homo Sacer is the designation of the disposerte Other. Read through this process the subjugation of Aboriginal peoples is ongoing: first through practices of colonization, second through land rights that reconstruct the public imaginary in favour of revisiting national history, and third through the consistent erosion of Aboriginal life. An ongoing process through the practice of dispossessing, rights by trespassing and using Aboriginal territories to extract and transport oil, overriding Aboriginal authority and autonomy, building Aboriginal ways of life, and simultaneously making individual Aboriginals complicit by having them participate in oil extraction.

Media, and the Aboriginal – the struggle goes pop, representation and mediation

When Marshall McLuhan in The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962), strategically places the human species within media environments, by invoking ‘the global village’, he questioning the economic drive behind communicative technologies, the development of a new type of belonging and brotherhood, or is he extating the erasure of boundaries that, in the Sixties, still pertain quite concretely to the notion of the nation-state? Irving, metaphorically, a world made to man’s measure – the village, an idyllic, nostalgic, discourse – while achieving spiritual transcendence through the notion of a global economy of communication, McLuhan seems to celebrate in a de-politicized form, a process that experimentally in this late 2010 everyone brings to bear in the everyday life, from the farmer to the prostitute to the savvy urbanite.

What must be reiterated is the naturalization process of these communicative environments, from cell phones to i-pads to Facebook, the whole phantasmagorical media circuit that is intervening directly in the process of individuation and in the construction of identity paradigms. So that the marginalization of the Other is not simply a byproduct of representational apparatus is most often the subtext of how we refer to Others within our hierarchical structures. It has been argued that (Kosta Goulamios and Anselmi) that the Canadian composite of biculturalism and multiculturalism does produce a hierarchical structure that leaves the dominant discourses to form identity – cultural and others – and outsources to ethno-cultural groups the management of disciplined exoticism in terms of cultural heritage displayed through the forms of folk dancing and spicy cuisine.

Obviously, within this categorical construct, Canadian society as a whole is able to maintain a democratic appreciation of ‘the different’ (Derrida) as it is cohesively managed within paradigms of Canadian multicultural identity. With this as a background, as we move from media towards the ecological systems that we inhabit, the passage is one of the degrees of consumption that happens in our engagement with natural environments, and how, for example, to site chaos theory, it is not a butterflies wings flapping in Australia that causes a hurricane in the US but the destruction of the Amazon Forest that has immediate repercussions on the way that we breathe and keep forest that has immediate repercussions on the way that we breathe and keep…

in traditional ways of life. However, this complexity is miraculously reduced to the consumption of a space by an external agency/company that erases the various levels present in the problematic and actually destroys ways of life.

This is all done in the name of national and provincial development and the wealth of its citizens, so that citizenship is reduced to individual profit. The irony is that this oil development project of catastrophic proportions is presented as an epic process. Linguistic recuperations, semantic shifts, oxymoronic sublimations, have altered the descriptors of reality: overburden (meaning boreal forest and wetlands), reclamation (free-planting but not replacement of the wetlands that took millennia to develop), business without borders, or, at a national level, Conservative Prime Minister Harper’s July 14th 2006 speech, where the term “epic” deflagrates literary tropes and history, framing a narrative of rightful dominion over nature.

Re-envisioning the Alberta Tar Sands as epical—where apart from the direct, economic beneficiaries no one will have direct contact with the Tar Sands other than through visual mediations—invites for the Canadian imaginary the triumph of the will over its habitat: a trope of Canadian literature taken well beyond its initial survivalist mode.

A cultural discourse, that has been diffused by a number of recent documentary films on the Tar Sands in the last few years, is that of the Native populations of Alberta in most cases (Saskatchewan in one), resisting the White Man’s technologies – progress in the form of oil extraction – in order to sustain a traditional way of life that will ensure survival.

For example, the hybrid title in the documentary film H2Oil plays with the chemical element of H2O + a source of energy which has a multivalent sign – Oil – that ranges from the economic to the political. The title is already an indication of on one side a complexity of the process at work and a reduction of the process that has occurred, in a way that has naturalized it into our social structure. To quote the film itself, “2.5 barrels of fresh water are used to produce one barrel of oil. Tar sands operations are draining the Peace-Athabasca Delta, which is the collector of more than 1/6 of Canada’s fresh watersheds.”

Downstream, this time an American documentary also indicates the issue of water as a consumed resource, concerned with where it is flowing and who it will impact. Our Land, My People, the Amnesty film, instead concentrates the discourse on land, not water – although that subject is reiterated throughout the film as the means in many cases by which the environmental toxicity travels and seeps into the various ecosystems – yet accentuating there is a Canada, Our Land, and there is also a history of division and segregation, My People (which admittedly can be read two ways) that reimagines the unspoken colonial discours-still partaking of how sovereignty can disengage or remove a group and designate it as Homo Sacer.

And while all of the films ultimately are discussing the pitfalls of the Tar Sands, they do so by reflecting on the Native populations – namely Fort Chipewyan and Lubicon Cree, but other communities are mentioned as well – but to some degree all of these films fail to clearly draw the link between the Native populations and the general Alberta and Canadian populations who are necessarily impacted by the environmental pollutants downstream.

Somehow, the films fail to fully articulate that everyone – urban dwellers included – are part of a larger eco-system are both impacted and part of the problem, since citizenship is as a practice reduced to an environment of wealth where it is flowing and who it will impact. Our Land, My People, the Amnesty film, instead concentrates the discourse on land, not water – although that subject is reiterated throughout the film as the means in many cases by which the environmental toxicity travels and seeps into the various ecosystems – yet accentuating there is a Canada, Our Land, and there is also a history of division and segregation, My People (which admittedly can be read two ways) that reimagines the unspoken colonial discourse still partaking of how sovereignty can disengage or remove a group and designate it as Homo Sacer.

Each of the three films mentioned incorporates the narrative of a Native community in Alberta suffering the impact of environmental devastation as an outcome of industrial development also known as the Tar Sands in multiple ways. H2Oil permits them - Fort Chipewyan to space the claim genocide, both literal in relation to the health impacts suffered by the community and figuratively through the destruction of the wildlife that has ramifications on the community’s hunting practices and diet.

Downstream focusing on the same community creates two parallel narratives of victimization: 1st the narrative of abundance of cancers some extremely rare in the community, and 2nd the foregrounding of the persecution of the white doctor who exposes these health concerns and is targeted by various governmental institutions. The third film, Our Land, My People, focuses on an even more remote community – the Lubicon Cree – who had at the time of the film’s release almost no public voice given their logistical marginalization that highlights a discursive alienation whereby poor education, alcoholism, social stresses, unemployment, all act to confirm poor sound ecological perceptions.
Laura Boldrini, ha nuovamente declinato il suo ruolo, con riguardo alla richiesta di fiducia avanzata dal Governo Renzi su alcuni articoli del progetto di legge elettorale, in maniera impronta. Già in occasione della conversione in legge del Decreto IMU-Bankitalia avevamo notato che la sua... **Continua a leggere** →

- "Lui è lui, voi nun sete un cazzo!" - di Tonino D'Orazio
- "Stesso voto di fiducia in un anno, ma la saga non è finita. Ormai la cosa dissideta sinistra del PD, una specie di osso morto incomprensibile, continua a collassare a cazzuolo su cazzuolo. Tra il no, no, no e voto si, si, per ‘salvare l’Italia’, o la farsa, la farisa è completa. Ma... **Continua a leggere** →

- **CELL: il richiamo della foresta, fuori tempo massimo.**
- "Di Tonino D’Orazio Succede in Cgil. All’iniziativa di Sammini, la Camusso stringe le fila dei dissidenti con un aperto generale di alcune categorie della confederazione per il blocco alla “deriva”. Appello la Conferenza di Organizzazione. Direi inutile, ma sembra Di Vittorio: "Il nostro obiettivo principale è cambiare le politiche economiche e sociali del governo, che... **Continua a leggere** →

- **Casa accade in Ucraina: l’esperienza di Franco Fracassi arrestato e espulso (VIDEO) da Pandora.tv.Archiviato in America, Confessioni Audit Eterodossie Satire, CRISIS, Diritti sociali diritti umani, Europa, Geopolitica Conflitti Pace, Italia Tagged: conflitti guerre pace, crisi globale, Diritti globali, Ucraina**

- **Osservazioni sulla (in)costituzionalità del c.d. Italcom - di G.Z. Karl**
- Considerazioni preliminari – Le censure di costituzionalità mosse dalla Corte Costituzionale al Porcellum – L’impianto dell’Italcim – Alcuni rilievi di costituzionalità (Problemi nell’attribuzione del premio di maggioranza - L’incostituzionalità del premio di maggioranza - L’incostituzionalità del voto di balottaggio – Il nodo delle preferenze e del capilista bloccato) – Osservazioni conclusive Considerazioni preliminari. E ora in... **Continua a leggere** →

- **La geo-strategia USA, secondo George Friedman: un documento inquietante e chiarificatore - “GI USA hanno un interesse fondamentale: ora controllano tutti gli oceani del mondo. Nessuna potenza si è mai nemmeno avvicinata a farlo”**. Secondo Friedman, ISIS non sembra una preoccupazione per gli USA. Anzi, pare rispondere pienamente alle logiche del divide et impera che hanno contraddistinto l’azione nord americana nel medio oriente e in altri scenari da... **Continua a leggere** →

- **TTIP e TPP: chi raccoglierà l’ira popolare? - Thomas Fazi intervista Walden Bello**
- Parlamentari all’accordo commerciale attualmente in discussione con l’Unione Europea (Il TTIP), gli USA stanno negoziando un accordo analogo con 11 paesi dell’Asia e del Pacifico: l’accordo Trans-Pacific (Trans-Pacific Partnership, TPP), Walden Bello, uno dei critici più importanti della globalizzazione neobrista delle multinazionali, identifica quel che è strategia globale che sostiene... **Continua a leggere** →

- **Emergenza umanitaria: la...**
"naturali conseguenze" di Giorgio Napolitano - Il Presidente emerito Giorgio Napolitano, le cui espressioni di parte e unilaterali a cui abbiamo assistito nel suo novennato e la cui purissima assenza di autoritica verificabile anche in questi giorni lo denomina come esempio paradigmatico da evitare (per gli attuali e per i posteri), interrogato, nel 2011, sulla legittimità costituzionale dei bombardamenti in Libia, ebbe ad affermare che …

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- Eco come la NATO uccide gli africani nel Club Med - di Pepe Escobar L'imperialismo umanitario applicato a ciò che il Pentagono ama definire MENA (Middle East-North Africa) ha portato, secondo Amnesty International, "al più grande disastro di profughi dopo la seconda guerra mondiale." Voi tutti ricordate la coalizione dei volenterosi NATO/AFRICOM, "guidata" da Re Sarko I, l'allora Presidente della Francia, mentre il presidente americano Barack …

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- Fiorella Mannoia: "Non credo a nulla di quello che dicono" - di Fiorella Mannoia Dovrebbero rispondere gli Stati dove risiedono le multinazionali che lucrano su qui paesi, dovrebbero rispondere tutti gli Stati che hanno bombardato stati sovrani, uccidendo migliaia di civili e portando caos in ogni posto dove sono andati (Libia compresa). Chiediamo giustamente all'Europa di prendersi le sue responsabilità, allora chiediamo anche agli Stati Uniti ...

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- 25 Aprile 2015 - di Alfiero Grandi Il 25 aprile è una data fondamentale per l'Italia. La Liberazione dal fascismo e dall'occupazione nazista ne motivano l'importanza, ma c'è anche qualcosa che arriva ad oggi. E' dalla spinta di libertà e di rinnovamento della Liberazione che è iniziata una fase storica che è chiamata da molti 2° risorgimento. Il parallelismo ...

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- Guerra e pace - di Andrea Ermano (Zurigo) "E molto incoraggiante l'apertura mostrata dalla Commissione europea alla richiesta italiana di modificare la taglia minima nella pesca delle vongole", ci scrive la senatrice Bertuzzi, capogruppo Pd in Commissione Agricoltura a Palazzo Madama, assicurandoci che "il sottosegretario Castiglione continuerà il suo impegno in Europa" e che "la variazione della taglia minima delle …

Continua a leggere →

- La strage continua dei neo-nazisti del XXI secolo - di Salvatore Palidda L'annegamento di 700 forse 900 migranti il 17 aprile 2015 è l'ennesima conseguenza diretta di due fatti principali: la riproduzione delle guerre e il proibizionismo delle migrazioni. La maggioranza dei media continua a vomitare lacrime da coccodrillo, vili ipocrisie, falsità e addirittura il compiacimento da parte degli sciacalli; ancora una
- **Distrazione di... Continua a leggere** -
- Riforme costituzionali e legge elettorale: il dibattito in corso - Proponiamo alcuni interventi da diversi organi di stampa italiani su riforme costituzionali e legge elettorale: un confronto sempre più aperto connotato dalla necessità di governance (autoritaria) della crisi e conseguente semplificazione della rappresentanza e della dinamica parlamentare. (a cura di M. Zanetta) Editoriale de Il Manifesto

- **Immigrazione: il dibattito in corso** - Proponiamo alcuni interventi da diversi organi di stampa italiani sulla questione Immigrazione, in un momento in cui ci si appresta a scelte ancora una volta dettate dall'emergenza (un'emergenza che dura da anni e che continua a non affrontare i nodi strutturali del rapporto nord-sud) e quindi a rischio di effetti negativi e ulteriormente problematici. (a cura di... Continua a leggere)

- **IMMIGRAZIONE: CHIUDERE CON L'EMERGENZA E AVVIARE UNA SERIA POLITICA D'IMMIGRAZIONE** - CHIUDERE CON L'EMERGENZA E AVVIARE UNA SERIA POLITICA D'IMMIGRAZIONE: CHIUDERE CON L'EMERGENZA DEL SOCCORSO IN MARE E AVVIARE UNA SERIA POLITICA D'IMMIGRAZIONE. Ma quanti ne dovranno morire per cambiare politica?; Chiudere il capitolo del soccorso in mare e aprire quello dell'immigrazione regolare; Non serve recriminare, ma proporre giuste soluzioni; Accordi bilaterali e multilaterali d'immigrazione; L'atto di... Continua a leggere —

- **Dalla Libia all’Ucraina passando per la Grecia** - di Roberto Musacchio Il braccio di ferro durissimo tra l’attuale governance europea e la nuova Grecia di Alexis Tsipras ha già avuto il merito di scoperchiare tutta l’inadeguatezza, o peggio la sciagurataggine, delle leadership del vecchio continente. Solo pensare di poter arrivare ad uno splash down con la Grecia, ad una separazione con un Paese... Continua a leggere —

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