

Tracing the Flow of Treaty Relations in the Salish Sea.

Leah Fulton ^{a,*}, Brian Thom ^b,

^a Department of Geography, University of Victoria, leahfulton@uvic.ca,

^b Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria, bthom@uvic.ca

* Corresponding author

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Abstract: Cartography, as an ever-evolving discipline, necessitates ongoing critical engagement with the question, “Who is the map for?” This inquiry is particularly pertinent in addressing the colonial narratives that have historically shaped mapping practices, especially in ways that relationships between First Nations peoples and the state – such as treaties, reserves/reservations, and land claim areas -- are represented. The Coast Salish Peoples, the original Nations of the Salish Sea, maintain teachings, laws, governance systems, and land tenure practices that predate colonial settlement and continue to thrive today. In some parts of the Salish Sea bioregion (an area similar but not identical to the territories of Coast Salish peoples), historic and modern-day treaties have established foundational relationships between Indigenous communities and the settler states of Canada and the United States. Much of British Columbia, however, remains without treaties, reflecting the Crown's historical failure to establish formal agreements with many Indigenous communities, and the ongoing challenge of reaching modern-day treaty agreements today. In adjacent Washington State, historic treaties and tribal recognition policies have been quite different than in British Columbia, resulting in quite different cartographic picture. The transboundary nature of the Salish Sea further complicates conventional mapping practices, as political, legal, and geophysical boundaries often fail to align with how Indigenous peoples themselves see and practice their territorialities. The interconnected waterbodies of this bioregion provide a helpful focus, metaphor, and framework for better understanding and retracing treaty relationships, Indigenous territories, and ongoing negotiations over title and rights. This perspective is a cartographic challenge and highlights the need for maps that more accurately reflect the complex socio-political and ecological, and historical realities of the region.

This paper picks up on practices of counter-mapping (Peluso, 1995) and decolonial mapping (Lucchesi, 2018) through our experience creating the map “Treaties of the Salish Sea” for installation on a feature wall at the University of Victoria’s McPhearson Library. Through a process of cartographic reclamation, our map is informed by scholars in the field of decolonial cartography (Lucchesi, 2020; Tucker & Rose-Redwood, 2015), and puts dialogue into practice to emphasize interconnectedness, and point out challenges of dominant power structures. Our work to represent treaty relationships raised many issues of historical, legal, political, and cultural context which needed to be drawn out in order to foster a deeper understanding of the bioregion. This work opens critical dialogue about the limitations of conventional spatial delineations and compels cartographers to rethink approaches to the layers of reclamation, transboundary relationships, and the representation of interconnected socio-ecological relationships. Through this work, we retrace the historical and ongoing colonial disruptions that have shaped the region, building off existing literature (ie; Thom, 2009) that highlights how cartographic practices must attend to local understandings of land tenure, sovereignty, and dynamic, emergent relations with the state contribute to the reclamation of land and relationships within the Salish Sea.

As non-Indigenous scholars who are committed to the goals outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (including Call to Action 62), we aim to take on work to educate the public on treaties. We have noticed that the spatial dimensions of treaty relations, in their historical and contemporary trans-border complexity, are poorly understood in the region. Our own scholarly careers have been centred in and around Coast Salish territories and have been informed by long-engagements with knowledge-holders from these communities. Invited by Associate University Librarian, Reconciliation Ry Morran (also the founding director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation) to contribute to a large, highly visible public installation, we were challenged to go beyond land acknowledgements; to evoke the geography of treaty relations of the *ləkʷəŋən* peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands in broader context of the varied treaty relations of the larger region the university operates in. Our aim, as settler scholars and allies in this conversation, is to ignite dialogue and better understanding of these issues, and attune people to the particularity’s geographies, jurisdictions, sovereignties, and histories at play in Indigenous-settler land relations in the Salish Sea. We endeavour to leverage our privilege in academia to acknowledge these failures and strive for more respectful treaty partnerships, across present and future.

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