

# Rethinking co-operatives: Japanese-Canadian fishing co-operatives

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**Abstract** Drawing on a case study of Japanese Canadian (JC) fishing co-operatives on Canada's West Coast at the beginning of the twentieth century, this article explores the politics of knowledge production in Canadian co-operative historiography and discourse. There is an absence of JC and other minority ethnic groups' co-operative experiences in the Canadian co-operative literature that has resulted in a narrow Eurocentric, masculinist and colonizing understanding of co-operatives. The article argues a need for critically reconceptualizing Canadian cooperative history and offers implications for reconceptualizing co-operative theory and practice.

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## Introduction

Conventional histories of Canada's co-operatives, outside of Quebec, usually attribute the origins of the Canadian co-operative movement to nineteenth century English settlers who brought co-operative practices learned from English weavers known as the Rochdale pioneers, to establish a network of co-operatives across Canada (MacPherson, 1979, 2007a, b, 2009; Fairburn, 1994, 2004). The little known history of highly successful Japanese Canadian (JC) fishing co-operatives operating on Canada's West Coast from the turn of the nineteenth century (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009) challenges this story. By bringing into focus anti-Asian racism, economic and social exclusion, resistance and survival within a historical context of white nation formation, our analysis demonstrates the need for multi-dimensional conceptualizations of

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Canadian co-operative origins and formation. This article contributes to the growing critical literature concerning western narratives of co-operatives and co-operation as an idealized national trajectory towards becoming liberal, democratic, economically successful and modern.

We question dominant historical accounts of Canadian co-operative movements in relation to ethnic minority co-operative experiences for several reasons. Most early examples of co-operation in Canada that did not fit the dominant account were dismissed and ignored (e.g. Finnish cooperatives, [Wilson, 2005](#)).<sup>1</sup> Conventional discourses about Canadian co-operatives mainly reflected the experiences of dominant groups ([Attwood and Bavisar, 1993](#)). This privileging of dominant group co-operative experiences has resulted in an impoverished understanding of ethnic minority co-operatives and of co-operative development more generally. Consequently, with few exceptions ([Attwood and Bavisar, 1993](#); [Birchall, 2002](#); [Bernard and Spielman, 2009](#)), we know little about why and how some groups and sectors in society fail to participate and benefit from co-operative enterprises, especially when they share the same social contexts and/or compete for the same resource. Our argument centres on the need to reconceptualize the study of co-operatives by incorporating more critical and complex explanatory frameworks that focus on power and social relations.

Our analytical framework draws on Foucault's (1980, 1982) analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge and on feminist, transnational, anti-racist and decolonizing theorists who have extended Foucault's methodology and conceptual insights ([Mohanty, 2003](#)). According to these approaches, interlocking structures of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nation and citizenship among other structures of power mediate knowledge claims. Knowledge claims are not abstract, objective and universal truths as often asserted, but socially constructed, contested through with unequal relations of power ([Hall, 1986](#); [Omi and Winant, 1994](#); [Said, 1994](#); [Narayan, 1997](#); [Mohanty, 2003](#)).

We suggest that knowledge produced about formal and informal co-operatives in the West is situated within values, beliefs and assumptions inherent to Western liberal modernity and colonialism. Western knowledge production practices valorize the West via colonizing discursive practice ([Said, 1994](#)). Said suggests that the West produced/produces knowledge about the Orient as an imagined geography upon which knowledge was

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1 The disagreements between the British Canadian Co-operative Society (led by Protestant British immigrants, and rooted in the Rochdale traditions) and the Antigonish Movement-inspired by Roman Catholic led local co-ops in Atlantic Canada have been well documented (e.g. [Bouchard, 2009](#); see also [Quiring, 2004](#); [Wilson, 2005](#); [Findlay, 2014](#); [Ketilson, 2014](#)). We wish to acknowledge the helpful comments by an anonymous reviewer in identifying these examples.

built from travellers' tales, military reports and archival records as a reflection of its self-reserving all that is progressive, beautiful and good for its own glorification (Said, 1994). In other words, what we know as truth about the Other is based on selective perceptions and unconscious desire, representations that are also sexualized and racialized (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997).

In the field of co-operative studies, colonialism as a hierarchical and othering system of values and beliefs about the colonizing European masters' relationships to their colonies mediates knowledge about what co-operatives are and how they operate (Develtere, 1994). This knowledge reflects the desires and self-representations of the imperial centre – England and the British Empire – in the case of white settler colonies like Canada (Wanyama, Develtere, and Pollet, 2009). Conventional discourses about Canadian co-operatives share many similarities to Orientalist discourses derived from colonizer/colonizing relations.

By no means exhaustive, our analyses uncovers biases, gaps and erasures in conventional Canadian historiography. We join voices with other Canadian co-operative researchers who also affirm the need for more critical approaches in Canadian co-operative studies by integrating intersectional analysis of race, class, gender, citizenship, colonialism and nation formation (Wuttunee and Weir, 2004; Findlay, 2006; Fairburn and Russell, 2014).

### Rupturing western origin stories

Our approach entailed reviewing what are generally accepted as important and relevant Canadian texts on co-operative history and juxtaposing them against JC historians' accounts of JC fishing co-operatives. We examined the writings of Ian MacPherson (1979, 2007a, b, 2009), a highly regarded scholar of Canadian co-operatives, and Hill (1967) as representatives of their field. Their historical writings are taken as exemplars of conventional co-operative histories. Given space limitations, we can offer only a few excerpts from their work.

MacPherson (1979, 2007a, b) saw the roots of the Canadian co-operative movement as firmly and unequivocally located in the British Rochdale tradition. His accounts of early co-operatives in English (speaking) Canada leave out any mention of JC or other minority ethnic group involvement. His book, *A Century of Co-Operation*, published by the Canadian Co-operative Association and considered an official history, describes the backgrounds of the men who were present in the founding of the Co-operative Union of Canada, the first national co-operative organization. He writes,

He (Keen) called the meeting to create a national union like the one that the British co-operative movement had established in 1869. Over the intervening three decades that union had become that movement's "parliament" and for a few, "the parliament of the working man," the mother church of the great co-operative social religion. (P.7)

A few paragraphs on, he reiterates,

Like many other emerging national co-operative organizations and movements a century ago, the CUC was profoundly influenced in its early days by the British movement. That movement had grown with remarkable speed after its permanent establishment in the 1840's with the development of consumer co-ops based on the practices of the Rochdale Pioneers . . . George Keen was particularly committed to the ideas and approach of the British movement. (P.8)

In case there were any doubts about the significance of British influences on Canada's co-operative movement, he repeats,

The British approach greatly influenced the preliminary vision of the CUC and largely informed what it tried to do in its earliest years and its commitment to co-operative philosophy. (pp. 14–15)

Because MacPherson assumed – and did not question – that members shared a common identity and purpose, there is little room to consider other models and influences that might have contributed to building a Canadian national movement. As British influences were considered definitive and determining and by conflating Britishness with Canadianness, other ethnic groups' participation in the development of a diverse (non-Anglo) 'Canadian' movement were hidden and excluded.

One of the only and most widely recognized histories of BC fishing co-operatives, *Tides of Change: A Story of Fishermen's Co-operatives in British Columbia*, written by Hill (1967) replicates a narrow ethnocentric perspective. Hill designates 'ethnic' co-operatives, such as those organized by Native and JC fishers, as not quite co-operatives, or 'crypto-co-operatives' (Hill, 1967, p. 217), because they lacked 'open' membership. Yet, the exclusion of non-whites by white-dominated fishing co-operatives and associations is taken as normal. Hill not only fails to recognize the closed, exclusionary membership of white-dominated co-operatives, he also fails to note that JC fishers decided to form their own fishing co-operatives because they were refused membership in the 'white' fishing co-operatives. Hill implies that because JC fishing co-operatives did not have all of the characteristics of a Rochdale co-operative, they were deficient or not fully formed, thus revealing his narrow Eurocentrism. He opines that over time, these fishing co-operatives might evolve into 'real' modern co-operatives from their traditional, non-formal and pre-modern form.

## JC fishing co-operatives

### *The problem with a single story*

Against these Eurocentric accounts, JC historians offer a different account of the history of JC fishing co-operatives on the West Coast. Our purpose is not to provide detailed, primary evidence as this task has been superbly undertaken by [Fukawa and Fukawa \(2009\)](#) on whose work we draw.<sup>2</sup> Our purpose in introducing this history is first, to illustrate limitations, biases and assumptions in conventional histories of Canadian co-operative development; second, to correct errors and misinterpretations in the conventional literature and third, to demonstrate how more critical intersectional feminist approaches can contribute to a fuller understanding of co-operative formation, structures and practices.

Minority groups, such as JC, are generally not seen as constitutive agents in the genealogy of co-operatives. Beyond general descriptive observations and claims about co-operatives' contributions to alleviating social and economic needs ([Emmanuel, 2007](#)), there is a resounding silence concerning excluded and marginalized others' co-operative experiences. If present at all, their experiences are often portrayed as novel exceptions.

In fact, thriving JC fishing co-operatives existed in some form up and down Canada's Pacific coast for more than 40 years, from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1942.<sup>3</sup> In 1942, at the start of the World War II, under the pretense of military necessity and national security, the federal government responded to demands by the provincial government and white supremacist groups to relocate and intern about 22,000 JC living within 100 miles of the Pacific coast. Under the War Measures Act, boats, supplies, homes and other property were confiscated and sold.<sup>4</sup> After the end of the World War II, JC retreated into self-enforced silence, healing from trauma, restoring dignity and rebuilding their communities ([Sunahara, 1981](#); [Miki and Kobayashi, 1991](#)).

The sudden disappearance of successful Pacific coast fishing co-operatives after 1942 might have been expected to garner considerable attention in the scholarly co-operative literature given the roots of Canadian co-operatives in the agricultural and rural sectors of the economy ([MacPherson, 2009](#)). The muteness is even more perplexing given the tendency by advocates to present co-operatives as a democratic alternative to traditional corporate forms

2 [Fukawa and Fukawa \(2009\)](#) were not writing a history of co-operatives, but a broader history hence they did not reference many documents that would have answered questions of governance, participation and activities.

3 In 1897, The Japanese Fishermen's Association is organized in Steveston, BC, with Tomekichi Homma as President. See <http://jccbulletin-geppo.ca/japanese-canadian-timeline-1833-2008/> for a timeline.

4 [www.japanesecanadianhistory.net/GuideExcerptsForSocialStudiesI.pdf](http://www.japanesecanadianhistory.net/GuideExcerptsForSocialStudiesI.pdf).

of enterprise for community economic development (Normark, 1996; Merrett and Walzer, 2004; MacPherson, 2007a, b; Zamagni and Zamagni, 2010; Zeuli and Radel, 2005).

*JC fishing co-operatives and Canadian historiography: the politics of articulation: colonialism, nationalism and knowledge production*

Peredo, Montgomery and Lee (2011) have argued that it is necessary to examine discursive power linked to colonialism operating in narrative accounts. The assertion that co-operatives first appeared within British and European societies undergoing rapid industrialization, capitalist expansion and social and cultural transformation necessarily links co-operative organizations to a particular historical trajectory of Western modernity: enlightenment, industrialization, secularization, technology, scientism and so on. This lineage has since been adopted as a foundational narrative of the co-operative movement's principles, forms and practices, told for more than a century as a beacon of light for Others', and taught to countless students of co-operatives, reflects the world view and experiences of mainly white, Western men. Although limited and partial, these explanations have become hegemonic and accepted as universal truths and subsequently diffused to the rest of the world. As a result, groups with alternative trajectories to modernity now largely frame their experiences primarily through Western-grounded conceptual lenses. Through this self-replicating cycle, partial knowledge claims from the West continue to marginalize and silence the voices and experiences of non-dominant Others' in the scholarly literature. It seems that co-operatives as enterprise are victims of the same cultural captivity that characterize mainstream enterprise development (Peredo and McLean, 2013). It is urgent to rethink and deconstruct the historiography and narratives of co-operatives to reveal their biases and betrayals.

The scholarly literature tends to view co-operative participants either as neutral subjects without contradiction and complexity or as subjects whose identities can be assumed. Usually, co-operative members are depicted as coherent and stable subjects who occupy a limited number of given social roles, such as worker, producer, consumer or member. Co-operative actors are rarely seen as actively producing and claiming selves in contexts of unequal power relations, as strategically negotiating, defending or claiming subordinated identities and subjectivities, or as holding multiply positioned subjectivities, such as gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality as well as class (Gulati, Issac and Klein, 2002). Because co-operative participants are assumed to share coherent identities, dominant discourses offer limited understandings of minority co-operatives, which may be engaged in struggles over subordinated individual and collective identities. The case of JC fishing co-operatives illustrates these points.

Prior to the implementation of the War Measures Act in 1939, in the context of whites-only nationalism, JC had endured decades of anti-Asian racism from white nationalist groups and the popular media with the tacit approval of provincial and municipal governments and the indifference of the Federal government (Adachi, 1976; Sunahara, 1981; Roy, 1989; Miki and Kobayashi, 1991; Ward, 2002; Price, 2011). Anti-Asian racism was critical to the formation and success of JC fishing co-operatives, in spite of economic and racial exclusion from other occupations. JC fishing co-operatives made important contributions to establishing the Canadian fishing industry. Hill's (1967) portrayal of JC fishing co-operatives as 'crypto-co-operatives' and as a threat to white fishers who perceived the fish and the seas as rightfully theirs deserves to be challenged. Hill (1967) overlooked JC fishing co-operatives' economic success, their resistance to white racism and their contributions to the west-coast fishing industry at the time of nation formation.

Rather than perceiving JC as inherently 'different' and eternally foreign to Canada, it is more useful to understand JC organizations, communities and individual identities as transnational and resilient. JC exercised agency to survive marginalization in Canada. Like other immigrant groups, they drew on preexisting knowledge from home communities and adapted this knowledge to their new homeland. Going beyond mere reversal and/or demand for inclusion in the dominant discourse, we want to move towards rethinking plural narratives of 'difference'.

It is well known that traditional village cooperation was well established throughout rural Japan. Norbeck (1954, p. 100) notes that though communal enterprises had become less important in the post-war years, common residence, common property, tradition and family bonds brought people together for fishing because it required the combined efforts of many individuals. Fishermen, in Japan, had highly developed systems of cooperation that were tightly integrated into traditional village-level cooperation. Fishing practices continued to evolve, and, by the first half of the twentieth century fishermen, who had mostly fished as family units, had begun to extend to larger net groups, with the nets typically being owned by wealthier individuals in the community (Kalland, 1981). These practices were brought to Canada and over time, JC fishers gradually came to adopt the formalized systems of cooperation of their new country, creating new hybrid models.

Hill's (1967) application of Rochdale-derived principles to JC fishing co-operatives worked to obscure their distinctive formation. While JC co-operatives did not have all of the characteristics of Rochdale-style co-ops, such as 'one man, one vote' and a policy of open membership, they were organizations that were collectively owned and managed by the people using their services. An alternative model of democratic participation in decision-making characterized these co-operatives. This was one where

elders were consulted and where participants accorded importance to families' historical patterns of use. JC fishing co-operatives had some of the characteristics of the community organizations in fishing villages in Japan, 'organic' informal organizations that exist for the management of commons.<sup>5</sup> By mid-century, JC fishing co-operatives more closely resembled mainstream Canadian co-operative forms, not only because they were required to by law, but also as a defence against anti-Asian sentiments.

The salience of racial exclusion to ethnic co-operative formation deserves even greater attention since racial exclusion was an important aspect of why JC fishing co-operatives developed. The first JC voluntary organization and the first fishing association were established in British Columbia in 1897, the Fraser River Fisherman's Association, or the *Fureza Gawa Ryoshi Dantai*. Known simply as 'the Dantai' ('group' in Japanese), what prompted its formal incorporation were not its negotiations with the canneries and other fishermen, but the need for medical care (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 74). Many of the Japanese fishermen and their families living on the Fraser were becoming seriously ill due to the pollution of the river water by the canneries. Language differences and racist attitudes made it difficult to receive treatment at the local hospital, which in 1894 led to a Methodist chapel on the Phoenix Cannery site being pressed into service as a hospital. In June 1900, the Dantai completed construction of a new hospital using labour and money donated by Japanese fishermen (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 76). As with most co-operatives, the needs of the community changed over time and with this, the priorities shifted for the Dantai.

Probably because of a rising tide of anti-Asian sentiment against 'Asian' fishers, on June 29th of the same year, the Dantai was re-registered under the Society Act as the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Association of the Fraser River, so as not to draw attention to its members. By this time, combating racial discrimination was a top priority. In this new society, only one of the eighty-five articles of the new association's constitution referred to the hospital. The establishment of the 1900 association was more directly related to racism than its predecessor.

A year earlier, a group of white fishers had resurrected the Fraser River Fishermen's Protective and Benevolent Association with the same goal as a whites-only union formed in 1893: the removal of Japanese fishermen from the Pacific coast. The first article of the Dantai's new constitution

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5 'Informal' co-operative organizations appeared as early as the feudal era in Japan. 'Modern' co-operatives in Japan emerged in the mid-nineteenth and were modelled after Western co-operatives, but they still retained many features of their earlier incarnation as they emerged as indigenous responses to modernizing pressures of industrialization and technological advance (Hoynden, 1958). The practices underlying hybrid co-operative forms that merge traditional and modern, western and non-western are worth further investigation.



outlined the organization's aim 'to ameliorate the long-standing abuse of and to advance the interests of the Japanese who are engaged in the salmon fishery in and around the Fraser River' (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 76).

*The state, co-operatives and the regulation of racial categories: licensing as a means of discrimination: the juridical/political context for co-operative formation*

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the slogan, 'Keep Canada White' was often heard (Roy, 1989; Ward, 2002; Price, 2011). Many laws were passed to prevent non-Whites from competing on equal terms in resource industries. The Canadian federal and provincial governments were clearly involved in shaping citizenship rights and entitlements in the economic interests of British and European groups who were perceived as rightful citizens of Canada (Roy, 1989; Ward, 2002).

Omi and Winant's (1994) theory of racial nation state formation helps to more fully comprehend the context for the emergence, operations and disappearance of JC fishing co-operatives. Whereas conventional approaches to understanding co-operatives and their relationship to the state focuses on government policy as facilitating or hindering co-operative development, Omi and Winant (1994) suggest that it is important to view state policies as constituting a racial regime in a nation. Analyzing state policies as institutionalized and structured racism entails investigating more than legislation governing co-operative activities, or laws that explicitly address co-operatives, or policies that explicitly name racism or human rights violations (Omi and Winant, 1994).

For example, by issuing licenses to canneries, which offered these 'attached' licenses plus boats and gear to fishermen who were required to sell their catch to the cannery, Canadian governments managed the changing social conditions for co-operation among various actors in the fisheries, and indirectly intervened in co-operative practices. Racialized Japanese ethnicity made JC fishers questionable recipients of fishing licenses in the eyes of white fishers and their supporters. The state changed its regulations many times using licenses to restrict JC fishers as white fishers continued to complain. JC fishermen were typically required to pay one-third of their earnings for the rental of the boat and gear, plus a fee for storing their equipment. Since they also bought food and other supplies from the canneries on credit until they were paid for their catch at the end of the season, they often finished the year in debt (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 40). In 1889, Shigeyoshi Hayakawa was the first of ten Japanese to be issued independent licenses that year on the Fraser. By 1901, there were 3858 Japanese holding licenses, 1958 were independent (out of a total of 4722 independent licenses issued) and 1900 were attached to canneries (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 40). When license restrictions did not sufficiently limit Japanese fishers'

competition, the government passed legislation against the use of engines in JC-owned fishing boats in the northern BC fishery (on the Skeena River). JC fishermen organized to fight back against licensing restrictions and regulations that prohibited them alone from using motorboats. A new 'open fishery' policy would be introduced in 1912 that granted independent licenses to white fishermen for the entire coast and denied them to non-white fishermen, JC and Aboriginal alike. The Japanese were offered cannery licenses and their attachment to canneries continued until the 1930s (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, pp. 40–41).

#### *Gender, reproductive labour and fishing co-operatives*

In addition to race and racialization, it is also necessary to examine gender in intersection with race, class and citizenship. However, finding documentary evidence of gender difference is challenging because there is little written documentary evidence of women's involvement. What little we do know comes from letters, photos and oral memory pieced together by social historians. In addition to the general absence of JC fishing co-operatives in the literature, there is resounding silence about JC women's participation in co-operatives (Ayukawa, 2008) – as it is in conventional accounts of early Canadian co-operative histories. However, from the limited information that is available in JC historical accounts, it seems women's work was integral to the co-operative fishing economy. Survival in the context of racial exclusion meant that in addition to caring for children and managing households, women also had to work in the canneries, and it was female labour coupled with the effectiveness and exploitability of male fishers that made JC such an attractive labour force for the canneries.

JC sojourners began to sponsor wives, daughters and mothers because women were excluded from 1907 immigration restrictions by the Canadian and Japanese governments. Through the 'picture bride' system, a primarily bachelor society began to establish families and communities in Canada. But with the almost total exclusion of men from wage employment and the unpredictability of income from cyclical fishing, women became primary providers. Many had to find work almost immediately after disembarking in Canada. They worked as seasonal labourers in canneries and farms, and as domestic workers in white homes. They tended vegetable gardens, processed food, helped to run the 'fishing boss' system (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 22), where JC women provided room and board, took in laundry, and cooked meals for single men who were recruited by their husbands to fish, and processed fish in the cannery. *Issei* (first generation) helped build functioning communities to collectively overcome their hardships. They organized the *fujin-kai* or women's associations to better their and their children's lives. Women played a pivotal role in the operations of the first fishing

co-operatives and took on leadership roles in organizing mutual self-help organizations, negotiating with government officials, writing briefs outlining their case and establishing early membership-based community organizations (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009). Yet, for all their self-reliance and survival savvy, the memoirs of JC women attest that their lives in Canada were often far harsher and more primitive than life in even the poorest Japanese village (Ayukawa, 2008).<sup>6</sup>

A lack of basic health services and educational opportunities for children was the impetus that led to the formation of the first fishing co-operative. Although residing and born in Canada, JC were denied basic rights of citizenship: clean water, free education and adequate health services. Like Nembhard-Gordon's (2014) research into African American co-operative economic activity, the drive to take care of community needs, caring work traditionally undertaken by women, provided the motivation for their co-operative organizations.

*Class, racism and nation formation: white fishers organize to resist the power of the canneries*

Conventionally, injustice in terms of wages, employment conditions and access to resources and markets are deemed motivators for self-help and mutual benefit through the development of co-operative firms. Here again, taking racial exclusion into account reveals a more complicated story of workers' resistance. Prevailing histories of fishing co-operatives widely note that white fishermen of the Fraser suffered at the hands of the canneries (Hill, 1967). In 1893 white fishers created the Fraser River Fishermen's Protective and Benevolent Association (FRFP&BA), which was essentially a labour union. Among the goals of this new association were the exclusion of Chinese from fishing on the Fraser and the removal of Japanese fishermen from the entire coast, suggesting that they saw the Japanese as a particular threat. Despite this racist policy, the Japanese fishermen of the Fraser sought permission to join the FRFP&BA or create an affiliated union. They were turned down by the New Westminster local of the new union (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, pp. 98–99).

The West Coast fishery became divided along racial lines in the period, 1893–1900. Denial of membership in the FRFP&BA set the stage for racialized labour conflicts. In 1897, all fishermen on the Fraser were being pressed by the canneries to accept a lower price for their salmon, and the Japanese under the leadership of Tadaichi Nagao set their demand for 12½ cents per

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<sup>6</sup> Midge Ayukawa (2008) notes how many young Japanese women came to Canada hoping to escape the poverty and restrictive life of rural Japan, only to be thrown into lives much harder than those they had left behind.

piece for a salmon (Marlatt, 1975, p. 9). Individuals were appointed to seek the co-operation of the white and aboriginal fishermen and the meeting concluded that there should be no fishing until the matter had been settled (Marlatt, 1975, p. 9). In the end, the canners agreed to a modest increase and everybody went back to work, after which the white union invited both the Japanese and the aboriginal fishermen to join their union. They declined, with the aboriginal fishermen sticking with their tribal organizations and the Japanese supporting the *Dantai*, which later was to be formally incorporated as the Fraser River Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Association in November of that year (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 99). While it might have been in the interests of the Japanese, white and aboriginal fishermen to work together to counter the power of the canneries, given that the groups were in competition with each other for a limited resource, it is not surprising given their social exclusion that they worked against each other instead of together against the canneries.

In the summer of 1900, a disagreement between the canneries and the fishermen on the price paid for fish led to a big, acrimonious strike with sharp divisions between the Japanese and the white and native fishermen on the Fraser River. The *Dantai* played a key role in negotiating on the behalf of the Japanese, who, being more closely tied to the canneries because they lived in cannery housing and on cannery credit, were suspected of strike breaking. On July 22nd, the *Dantai* were ready to compromise with the canneries at twenty cents a fish, but the white fishermen demonstrated their determination to hold out for twenty-five with a parade of five-hundred fishermen. The Japanese responded the following day with a march of 3000 fishermen (Daily Colonist, 1900, p. 1). The next day the Japanese prepared to return to work and went out on the 24th together with some whites and natives, but under the protection of the Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles at the request of the cannery owners, who feared attacks on the fishermen by whites (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 100).

In the face of such discrimination, JC fishing co-operatives enabled JC fishers to survive and even flourish and to break the hold of the canneries on fishers. These organizations also helped them fight government-initiated discrimination. Prior to World War II, wherever JC fishers operated, fishing co-ops were established to help resist racial discrimination and economic exclusion. Some of the JC organized fishing co-operatives included: the Rivers Inlet Fishermen's Coop, Namu Fishermen's Coop, Knight Inlet Fishermen's Coop and Smith Inlet Fishermen's Coop in the North coast. In the Vancouver Island district, there were the West Coast Trolling Fishermen's Coop, East Coast Trolling Fishermen's Coop, Nanaimo Trolling Fishermen's Coop, Cod Fishermen's Coop and the Shrimp Fishermen's Coop. The names do

not identify them as JC co-operatives because their naming was a strategic act of resistance against white racism.

In addition, regional co-operatives amalgamated to work together to represent their interests. Consolidated co-operatives included the District #1 (the Fraser River) Fishermen's Association, or *Dai-ichi Ku Gyosha Kyokai*, District #2 (Skeena and the North) and District #3 (Vancouver Island). The three districts came together provincially as the *BC-Shu Nikkei Gyosha Renraku Kyogikai*, or the 'Liaison Council'. Its membership included all fishers (salmon, dogfish, cod, herring and halibut) and all gear types (gillnetters, trawlers, trolleys) in the saltwater fisheries of BC. The consolidated associations became spokespersons and negotiators for member associations with cannery owners, and other entities.

All of this came to an abrupt end after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. Within twenty-four hours, on the pretext of national security concerns, all JC fishing boats, some 1137 vessels, began to be confiscated and were later sold off (Fukawa and Fukawa, 2009, p. 119). Important records and documentary evidence of JC fishing co-operatives were destroyed. No matter how well run and how successful they were as producer/consumer co-operatives, and perhaps *because* of how well run they were, four decades of organizing to cope with the discriminatory treatment they received was undone in a single stroke by all levels of government representing a 'white man's province' and a 'white man's country'.

The removal of JC from the coast and their internment undid decades of co-operative organizing. Using national security as the excuse, government and business removed Japanese fishers from the coast.

## **The politics of articulation: colonialism, nationalism and knowledge production**

Although many descriptions of diverse co-operative models and forms can be found in the Canadian co-operative and social economy literature (e.g. MacPherson, 1979; Sacouman and Brym, 1979; MacAulay, 2001; Quiring, 2004; Wilson, 2005; Bouchard, 2009; Quarter, Mook and Armstrong, 2009), these accounts have not meaningfully shifted the dominant Anglo-centric co-operative movement origin story. It is time that alternative co-operative forms such as worker, non-profit, service or multi-stakeholder co-operatives and diverse practices of democratic governance, gender and state relations attain greater analytical significance (see Axworthy, 1988; Theis, 1994).

Discussions at the intersection of co-operative development and First Nations communities have begun to seriously challenge dominant Eurocentric explanations. Findlay (2006, 2014) and Wuttunee and Weir (2004) argue for incorporating Canadian First Nations people's knowledge in the co-op

narrative history by co-creating knowledge. Findlay proposes 'co-operatives and Aboriginal communities can rewrite a shared history of being overlooked or regarded as curiously unmodern ...' (2004, p. 155). Whether this approach is overly idealistic remains to be seen. Ketilson (2014) goes beyond conventional frameworks to analyze First Nations' co-operative experiences in Saskatchewan by recognizing innovative co-operative governance growing out of indigenous culture and practices that challenge some of the basic tenets of co-operative membership and governance. Ketilson (2014) values these adaptations and calls for the possibility and the urgency of reimagining co-operatives and their democratic futures. Christoff (2014) criticizes conventional histories about the success of prairie agrarian co-operatives like the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, because they fail to acknowledge colonization and the original theft and occupation of Indigenous lands. In the rush to embrace decolonizing approaches, it is important to not collapse white and non-white settlers into a single category in opposition to Indigeneity.

## Conclusion

The complexity of minority groups' involvement with co-operative enterprises remains hidden in conventional histories. In the case of JC fishing co-operatives, their social, economic, political and economic exclusion, enforced through laws and the use of state-legitimated force, gave rise to co-operative organizations intended to meet community and individual social, health, education and cultural survival needs in addition to economic ones.

As dominant approaches have privileged Western actors, histories and practices, much remains to be uncovered. Market and class concerns must be considered in relation to race, gender, nationality and citizenship and subject formation as deployed in relations of power. Simultaneously, 'community' has been overvalored as a site of investigation; intersecting individual, state and corporate actors and structures must also be brought into the picture. Finally, co-operatives might be better understood as constantly emergent, adaptive and hybrid forms that respond to relations of power. There is a need to open up co-operative studies to critical, anti-racist, decolonizing, feminist perspectives and methods because they help to uncover the contingency of co-operative enterprises, discourses and practices in relation to wider relations of ruling (see Hempenstall and Rutherford, 1984).

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