

*Response to Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy's
Review of 'Keeping the Lakes' Way'*

BC Studies, no. 128, (Winter 2000/01): 102-5

PAULA PRYCE

THANK YOU for reviewing *'Keeping the Lakes' Way: Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People* (Winter 2000/2001). Peer review, as all of us know, is invaluable to the scholarly process. We also know, however, that the review process itself occasionally needs its own critical assessment when reviewers fall short of the high standards expected of them: hence my response to Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy, who not only misrepresent the theme and content of *'Keeping the Lakes' Way'*, but also appear to have misused their important role as critics to promote their own interests as researchers with the Sinixt Interior Salish.

Bouchard and Kennedy have difficulty communicating the thesis of *'Keeping the Lakes' Way'*. This book is about how an historically displaced people – an “invisible” people – currently envision themselves in relation to their past; it is about the power of cultural perceptions of time and place.

I grew up in the West Kootenays of British Columbia, a region whose residents have no living memory and little historical consciousness of a First Nations presence there. When in 1989 a group of First Nations people turned up to protest a road being built through an ancient grave and village site, the residents of the area were baffled. Who were they? Where did

they come from and why were they here? I set out to solve this puzzle, a puzzle for which Randy Bouchard and Dorothy Kennedy's unpublished research helped to provide a number of pieces. Those protesters, I soon discovered, were members of the Lakes Band, or Sinixt Interior Salish. Due to a difficult contact history, this people had been dispersed some generations ago from their historical homeland, now called the West Kootenays. They currently live in diaspora in neighbouring territories in British Columbia and Washington State. Despite their official “extinct” status and immigration disputes with the Canadian government, the Sinixt have for over a decade been attempting to re-establish their connection to this homeland, largely through the reburial of ancestral remains at the ancient village site at Vallican in the Slocan Valley.

'Keeping the Lakes' Way' does address some questions of ethnography and history, particularly the history of the Sinixt's diaspora. But this book is much more about the present than it is about the past. The ethnohistory provides a backdrop to the greater questions of the book: What does an historical homeland mean to people who live in diaspora? Why do they feel so strongly about a place they had not previously seen? And why are they so concerned about reburying ancestral remains there? Their passion begs a

thousand more questions: How do people think of history and their place in it? Do social memory and local cultural concepts influence people through time, even after diaspora, social distress, and rapid culture change? How do actual historical ideas and historical consciousness combine to form cultural sense of place and identity?

I explore these questions with Sinixt people in their pilgrimage to the archaeological site at Vallican. Vallican has become a kind of amulet of identity for Sinixt people, a chronotope where space merges with intricate layers of time. People feel a powerful complexity of history there, a connectedness to forebears over generations; their feelings about these ancestors and their stories shape how they understand themselves as Sinixt today, despite their invisibility to other peoples around them.

Bouchard and Kennedy brush over this core of ideas in their review of *Keeping the Lakes' Way*. Instead, they focus on minor facts of kinship and land use and occupancy, their interpretations of which are largely wrong. I can easily answer their criticisms point for point. For example, the reviewers claim that a source I cite makes "no reference at all to the Lakes being a matrilineal society," yet it clearly does: "Descent was recognized through the female line" (Mohs 1982a: 67 [summarizing Elmendorf 1935-6]; see Pryce 1999: 26). Further, they criticize me for my comment, "polygyny was relatively common," which they felt was not reflective of my source quote, "polygyny was not uncommon" (Pryce 1999: 26; Mohs 1982a: 67). I confess that I cannot see a significant difference between these two statements and wonder why the reviewers would remark upon them. They also

expend considerable energy pointing out that the word *Chattb-noo-nick* is not a linguistic rendering of Sinixt. Fair enough, but I myself state that my postulation is plausible but questionable (Pryce 1999: 17, 149). Why would they write a column and a half on an inconsequential detail about which I myself have reservations? Their review is filled with these strangely myopic comments. I can only conclude that Bouchard and Kennedy did not find much of substance to criticize.

While I cannot here respond to their every remark, I must address in some detail one particular error your reviewers make. Contrary to Bouchard and Kennedy's claim, I do indeed have evidence for the idea that the Slocan Valley was a significant place of occupation for Sinixt Interior Salish people. The reader should note that I never attempt to show hard and fast "fact" for the idea that the Slocan was a place of refuge during a troubled contact period, as the reviewers suggest. Rather, it is a possibility based on certain evidence. Bouchard and Kennedy ignore this evidence, including some based on their own writings.

Citing Bouchard and Kennedy's research, I describe a sizeable village which existed at the south end of Slocan Lake until about 1896 (Pryce 1999: 43, 111; cf. Bouchard and Kennedy 1985: 99). I also make note of six Sinixt villages in the Slocan Valley which were independently documented by anthropologists James Teit (1930: 209-11) and Verne Ray (1936: 124-8; Pryce 1999: 154-5). In addition, there is an abundance of archaeological evidence which, while it cannot establish ethnicity definitively, does show that the valley had some of the densest occupation in the region. This archaeological record includes Vallican

village, the site to which living Sinixt now make pilgrimages. This village may have been occupied as late as 1840 (Pryce 1999: 99; cf. Mohs 1982b: 6, 44; Eldridge 1984: 39, 47). A few years later than this, nineteenth century Jesuit missionaries based near HBC Fort Colville remarked that First Nations peoples, including the Sinixt, had been withdrawing into the isolated mountain regions north of the border for refuge from the violence that accompanied the advancement of settlers (Burns 1966: 277, 359; Pryce 1999: 51-52).

More importantly, I use the evidence of oral tradition to show a connection of Sinixt people to the West Kootenays. These people tell narratives of land forms there. I include one such narrative of the Slocan in particular, but at the Sinixt's request, I do not detail it because of its sacred nature. Further, I discuss a Sinixt elder, Eva Orr's memories of "going home" to the Slocan as a child on horseback, as well as other elders' oral traditions of family history in the valley, including accounts of conflict with miners during the late nineteenth-century Silver Rush (Pryce 1999: 6, 58, 110-14). Sinixt people have a social memory of the Slocan Valley which they relay through oral tradition.

Oral tradition is legitimate evidence of First Nations occupation, according to the Supreme Court of Canada's *Delgamuukw* decision (1997). Indeed, an entire edition of *BC Studies*, 'Anthropology and History in the Courts,' was devoted to the need for us to take seriously First Nations oral tradition (Miller 1992; cf. Culhane 1998). Most anthropologists do not need court documents to acknowledge the value of oral tradition. Apparently, Bouchard and Kennedy do not understand its worth despite them.

Bouchard and Kennedy's inaccuracies, as well as their focus on astonishingly minor details, seriously misrepresent the actual thesis of '*Keeping the Lakes' Way*'. This book does not revolve around territory or borders, despite the critics' insistence. In fact, I briefly and reluctantly touch on these problematic issues only because little has been published elsewhere. Their review is entirely off point.

Rather, '*Keeping the Lakes' Way*' is about how a people's ideas of the past motivate them in the present; it is about concepts of time and space, diaspora and pilgrimage, love of land and the people who went before – not territoriality.

When more than a quarter of the review goes to describing their own work and protecting themselves from my only criticism of them – that they should have published – it is clear whose territory Bouchard and Kennedy are concerned for: their own.

Academic territorialism like that which seems to motivate Bouchard and Kennedy has no place in an academic review. A review should grasp a book's greater themes and debate its ideas, as well as challenge the author's abilities not only as a scholastic technician, but also as a writer and a thinker. I would have welcomed a strong, thoughtful critique which dealt with the substance of ideas and scholarship in '*Keeping the Lakes' Way*'. There is much that could have been discussed.

REFERENCES CITED:

- Bouchard, Randy, and Dorothy Kennedy. 1985. 'Lakes Indian Ethnography and History.' Unpublished manuscript prepared for the BC Heritage Conservation Branch, Victoria.

- Burns, Robert Ignatius. 1966. *The Jesuits and the Indian Wars of the Northwest*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Culhane, Dara. 1998. *The Pleasure of the Crown: Anthropology, Law and First Nations*. Burnaby: Talonbooks.
- Eldridge, Morley. 1984. 'Vallican Archaeological Site (DjQj 1): A Synthesis and Management Report.' Unpublished non-permit report prepared for the BC Heritage Conservation Branch, Victoria.
- Elmendorf, William. 1935-6. 'Lakes Ethnographic Fieldnotes.' Unpublished manuscript.
- Miller, Bruce G., ed. 1992. 'Anthropology and History in the Courts.' Special Issue of *BC Studies*. 95.
- Mohs, Gordon. 1982a. 'Archaeological Investigations at the Vallican Site (DjQj 1), Slocan Valley, Southeastern British Columbia.' Unpublished manuscript.
- . 1982b. 'Prehistoric Settlement Patterns in the Columbia/Lakes Region of Southeastern British Columbia and Northeastern Washington.' Unpublished manuscript.
- Pryce, Paula. 1999. *'Keeping the Lakes' Way: Reburial and the Re-creation of a Moral World among an Invisible People*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ray, Verne F. 1936. 'Native Villages and Groupings of the Columbia Basin.' *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*. 27(2): 99-152.
- Supreme Court of Canada. 1997. *Judgment and Reasons for Judgment in Delgamuukw v. R.* File no. 23799. Ottawa.
- Teit, James. 1930. 'The Salishan Tribes of the Western Plateaus.' Franz Boas, ed. *Forty-Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 25-396.