

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Narratives of Persistence: Indigenous Negotiations of Colonialism in Alta and Baja California. By Lee M. Panich.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0ns745bq>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 45(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Taleb, Baligh Ben

Publication Date

2021

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

to assert their claims by discrediting the validity of Indian deeds. For the proponents of land claims based on Crown patents, the time had finally arrived to “dynamite the very foundations of their opponents’ titles” (12). When the Wabanakis subsequently lost French support following the Seven Years’ War, there was little reason (other than moral grounds) to acknowledge Native Americans as landowners, and the stage was set for *Johnson v. McIntosh*.

Properties of Empire not only recounts the arc of the Anglo-Wabanaki relationship, it also invites the reader to reconceptualize the interaction of the two cultures as “a prolonged contest to define the nature of landownership” (3). Title transfers in Anglo-American law are viewed as singular events in which the grantee acquires the ownership rights previously held by the grantor. In contrast, the Wabanakis viewed deeds as bilateral land agreements that set forth intertwined rights and obligations that can be adjusted in light of changing needs and circumstances. As Saxine points out, when Wabanaki diplomats negotiated Dummer’s Treaty, they “tied recognition of the treaty to Massachusetts’s fulfillment of its promises, making the practical validity of certain proprietary titles contingent on the province maintaining friendly diplomatic relations with the Indians” (80). From the Native point of view, the line between deeds and treaties was blurred because both were agreements that embodied reciprocal relationships.

In *Properties of Empire: Indians, Colonists, and Land Speculators on the New England Frontier*, Ian Saxine provides readers with an excellent history of the Indians, colonists, and land speculators on the New England frontier. He also challenges us to look at the land transactions and treaties of this era from the perspective of the Wabanakis. *Properties of Empire* is a valuable resource for persons interested in early New England history and for persons involved in the ongoing movement, both within the United States and internationally, to repudiate the doctrine of discovery based on European power.

Blake A. Watson

University of Dayton School of Law

Narratives of Persistence: Indigenous Negotiations of Colonialism in Alta and Baja California. By Lee M. Panich. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020. 228 pages. \$32.95 paper; \$32.95 e-book; \$100.00 digital.

Native Californians survived several colonial systems over the past two hundred and fifty years. While the (inter)national border line may position these Indigenous groups in distant cusps and marginal relations, emergent ethnographic and archeological datasets suggest linguistic, cultural, and historical connections pervading the existence of the United States and Mexico. Today, there are 109 federally recognized tribes and dozens of unacknowledged nations in Alta (Upper) California. In Baja (Lower) California, eight additional communities live in the Mexican peninsula. Incorporating decolonial methodologies and critical Indigenous studies, scholars have moved beyond

romanticized narratives of decline and elimination to uncover silenced stories of Indigenous “survival,” “endurance,” and “resilience.”

At least two major accounts of Indigenous agency in Californian history are active in the literature recently. Clifford E. Trafzer tells a story of adaptation and resilience of the Chemehuevi peoples facing violent ruptures in their southern California history (*A Chemehuevi Song: The Resilience of a Southern Paiute Tribe*, 2015) and William J. Bower provides a new assessment that insightfully treats California history through Native persistence (*California Through Native Eyes*, 2016). Deploying similar Indigenous-centered approaches, in *Narratives of Persistence: Indigenous Negotiations of Colonialism in Alta and Baja California* Lee M. Panich offers a refreshing study of two Native Californian groups who had largely endured colonial ruptures and presently occupy political and economic spectrums at opposite ends.

These groups are the Ohlone of the central and southern portions of the San Francisco Bay Area and the Paipai of Santa Catarina in Baja California (known as the Jaspupaiaum, “those who have not bathed” or “those who rejected baptism”). Taking a wide-lens perspective, Panich assembles a comprehensive array of threads that shaped the history of the Ohlone and the Paipai-speaking peoples to explain how they followed an uneven pattern of persistence. With tidal rhythms, he argues, the two nations sat straight as they shouldered and survived varying degrees of colonial tensions. Left neither totally without agency nor completely unfettered, they drew on existing cultural knowledge and practical choices to resist, accommodate, and evade various forces of erasure. Panich marshals a wealth of archival sources—from archaeological, ethnographic and historical data to interactions with Native communities—to unravel a fraught history that tangled up these two tribal communities within a long trajectory of historical endurance.

In six compelling chapters and a conclusion, *Narratives of Persistence* is arranged chronologically and thematically. Each chapter provides detailed examination of five areas that defined the two nations’ historical trajectories: political organization, subsistence economies, technology, ceremonial life, and conflict. Each case study exposes Native visibility and agency from precolonial time through the Spanish mission systems onto the more intricate forms of United States and Mexican settler colonialisms. For instance, in the Jesuit, Franciscan, and Dominican mission systems operating under Spanish (and later Mexican) colonial rule, the Ohlone and Paipai peoples endured forced relocation, exploitative labor, and assimilation programs aimed at obliterating their cultural identities. But with varying degrees of success, they redefined—and often reworked—the mission systems by means of traditional knowledge to stymie colonial expectations. As the missions closed down in the 1830s and 1840s, colonial violence spiraled into genocidal acts under the hands of American settlers and organized insurgency of vigilante groups.

Panich’s understanding of colonial violence shifts away from the teleology of terminal narratives that capture bits and pieces of these two stories to emphasize how these groups were able to find a place within and against the colonial systems. Along the way, he discusses how the Ohlone and the Paipai groups were able to carve out cultural and territorial enclaves, maintain their kinship, and hold seasonal celebrations

that enforced their environmental connections, social organization, and a sense of community. Today, however, with the formation of more rigid settler polities in the twentieth century, Native persistence is practiced differently. The Muwekma Ohlone tribe, despite genealogical and ethnohistorical evidence, still lacks federal recognition and faces constant challenges to celebrate their Indigenous heritage. South of the border, the Paipai occupy approximately 7,000 acres of their ancestral land in the Sierra Juárez and maintain close family ties and kinship practices that trace back to precolonial times. With a slightly different valence, both groups nonetheless evade official categories and localized understandings of indigeneity. Instead, they choose to tell the tale of continuity and change around programs of language revival, promotion of Indigenous cuisine, hand-modeled pottery, ritual events, and walks to ancestral sites.

Altogether, Panich's use of an interdisciplinary comparative approach hints at the prevalence of both creative measures and inherent methodological challenges. The creative edge demonstrates the viability of organizing complex historical trajectories beyond narratives of colonial inevitability and erasure. This approach empowers, if not emboldens, Indigenous history and peoples, and also encourages scholars to explore Indigenous-centered narratives outside the boundaries of settler-colonial paradigms. Some of the lingering challenges still center on collecting, analyzing, and measuring data of a complex and comparative history. As enunciated in the introduction, Panich is keenly aware of the methodological challenge of staking a comparative voice. But his approach, taken together, offers a tenable and nuanced story that decentralizes colonial narratives. Readers will find *Narratives of Persistence* coherent and brief (despite the sweeping history), with an analytical depth that makes it well pitched for a large readership and specialists in California Indian history, Indigenous studies, archeology, ethnohistory, settler colonialism, transnational history, and Pacific Rim studies.

Baligh Ben Taleb

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Satie on the Seine: Letters to the Heirs of the Fur Trade. By Gerald Vizenor. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2020. 354 pages. \$21.95 paper; \$16.95 electronic.

It is 1932, and Basile and Aloysius Beaulieu (Anishinaabe), Native veterans of the American expeditionary forces during World War I, have rejected new manifestations of neglect and broken promises by the postwar policies of the federal government in Washington. The Beaulieu twins have been to Paris before, and now they return, leaving their family and community on the White Earth reservation of Minnesota to seek the nurture and *liberté* of, in Vizenor's customary parlance, the "natural motion" of creativity engendered by art, music, and literature. This is, after all, a "river story," and the brothers, living in rooms located near the Seine in the art gallery of their friend Nathan Crémieux, listen beside the river as a mysterious young woman in a blue scarf plays Eric Satie's haunting music on a piano set up on a quay.