



Nanola, the Eagle Down

'Namgis Kwakwaka'wakw People - Canada

In the beginning of time, everything was still one, and everything depended on everything else. It was a time of harmony. There was peace everywhere, and everyone knew their place.

High up in the mountains lived the enormous beast of nature Gilalasi, the giant wolf. From this wolf four magical children were born, first two sons, then a daughter, and finally Nanola, the youngest son.

The four children loved to play with the beautiful crystal ball they would pick up from the beaker-cup mountain. The oldest and strongest brother naturally always won. But one day he lost their game to Nanola, his youngest sibling, who outsmarted his big brother. Angered by his defeat he transformed Nanola into eagle down and blew the big cloud of down into the air all around the world. At every spot the eagle down reached the ground, for instance as snow, a new people emerged, with a new language and new traditions. And so came to life the salmon people, the hummingbird people, the eagles, the bears, and all other peoples that now dwell the earth.

This is why all living beings on our planet are related as we all come from the eagle down that one's was Nanola. This is why we are all connected and have responsibility to each other. □

Adapted by Walas (Gerben van Straaten) (2021).

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Comments

The Kwakwaka'wakw People have been repeatedly given the name of Kwakiutl People, when, in fact, the Kwakiutl are a tribe belonging to the Kwakwaka'wakw People. This error comes from the first anthropologists (especially Franz Boas) who studied the Kwakwaka'wakw, because the first of these people they encountered were the Kwakiutl. However, the name Kwakwaka'wakw is more inclusive, since it contains all the tribes that are under the Kwakwaka'wala cultural and linguistic identity.

This adaptation is not made by a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw People, nor is it made by any other member of a fellow culture, which is what we always try to do in The Earth Stories Collection so as not to fall into the error of *cultural appropriation*. Both the adapter of this story, Walas (Gerben van Straate), and Irma Verhoeven, who provided us with this adaptation, are of Dutch origin. However, both were culturally 'adopted' by their respective 'Namgis families, families who have rights to this Kwakwaka'wakw creation myth. It is for this reason that they have the permission of the 'Namgis family to disseminate this ancient story. In any case, we pay our respects and thank the Kwakwaka'wakw People, and in particular the 'Namgis Nation, for the permission granted to share their ancestral story with the rest of humanity.

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On several occasions we have remarked in this Collection that traditional peoples are the greatest guarantee for the preservation of ecosystems around the world (Raygorodetsky, 2018). However, in many cases, their struggles for the conservation of the ecosystems of their territories go unnoticed by the majority of public opinion because they do not receive the necessary media attention. Obviously, most media outlets, usually located in urban environments and controlled by the power structures of the world's dominant ethnicity and culture, are not going to be much interested in ecosystems, let alone in the struggles of traditional peoples. And they have made no exception in the case of the Kwakiutl People.

On 12 September 2007, the Kwakiutl People demonstrated outside the British Columbia Legislature in Canada to protest against the provincial government's secret land deal with the logging corporation

Western Forest Products. The Kwakiutl accused the government of having broken the Douglas Treaty of 1851, signed when Vancouver Island, the ancestral territory of the Kwakiutl, was a British colony under Queen Victoria. This treaty has since protected the collective Aboriginal Title and Rights of the Kwakiutl First Nation (Wonders, 2007).

Once again in the history of the Americas, colonial governments were disregarding treaties that they themselves had signed in order to favour a major company that coveted the territories and resources of first peoples.

During the 1990s, the forests of Kwakiutl territory had been protected by a moratorium imposed by the Kwakiutl First Nation, a moratorium that no corporation dared to violate. But in early 2007, the BC Forest Act was amended to give the forest industry a new and insidious way of gaining control over contested First Nations land.

Under the false guise of consultation and accomodation, Western Forest Products has advanced its own agenda, culminating in the surprise announcement 31 January 2007 regarding 28,283 hectares on northern Vancouver Island – including some 14,000 hectares of Kwakiutl Territory. (ibid.)

It appears that the logging companies in the area bribed some members of the Kwakiutl community by appointing them as ‘co-ordinators’ of their people and designating them as ‘negotiators’ who were collaborating with the logging industry and the provincial government, although these ‘co-ordinators’ had at no time informed the rest of the Kwakiutl community about their ‘negotiations’.

Thanks to this false agreement, the logging industry set to work to raze thousands of hectares of forest, including old-growth forests of incalculable biological value and profound cultural significance to the Kwakiutl people, with red cedars between 700 and 1,000 years old, true Mother Trees (see the research of Dr Suzanne Simard, Professor of Forest Ecology at the University of British Columbia, on this subject).

Unfortunately, the Kwakiutl Nation's protests went unheeded by British Columbia's rulers, even though, as the indigenous people pointed out later in 2014, ‘The Kwakiutl people have never ceded, surrendered, or in any way relinquished aboriginal title and rights to our traditional

territories', title and rights recognised and protected under Section 35 of the the Constitution Act, 1982,

which recognizes our occupation of the territories before the assertion of British sovereignty and affirms our rights to the exclusive use and occupancy of the land and to choose what uses the land can be put to. These Constitutional Rights apply throughout our traditional territories. (Wu, Watts y Carpendale, 2014a)

The logging industry and politicians in British Columbia continued to ignore the Kwakiutl's demands, despite the fact that, by 2021, the Sierra Club of British Columbia estimated that more than 140,000 hectares of old-growth forest were being logged every year in British Columbia, causing irreparable damage to ecosystems.

How to respect the ecological and cultural interests of a minority people in a world dominated by markets, when the timber sector provides more than a quarter of B.C.'s total exports, generating around \$11.9 billion in 2019, creating more than 50,000 jobs? And, to add insult to injury, the Kwakiutl People did not receive a single cent in compensation from this immense fortune (Oudshoorn, 2021).

Statements by Western Forest Products that they had policies in place to minimise the environmental impact of their operations were to no avail, nor was the enactment by the British Columbia government of the Old Growth Strategic Review (OGSR) titled *A New Future for Old Forests*, establishing recommendations for the management of forests and the protection of old-growth forest ecosystems.

In 2022, Kwakiutl Hereditary Chief David Knox, fed up with the neglect his people were being subjected to by the Canadian public administration and the corporate world, said:

They are taking advantage of our community, destroying our last ancient forests, bear dens, culturally modified trees and salmon-bearing watersheds with the help of the British Columbia government. (River Voices, 2022)

And he added, in a letter to the Canadian Ministry of Forests signed by 15 other members of the Kwakiutl Hereditary Chiefs and the Matriarchs:

At the heart of the matter is the simple fact that no consultation or basic information-sharing has ever occurred with our Kwakiutl membership, our Hereditary Chiefs or the Matriarchs of our tribe. This deal was negotiated and concluded in secret without the free, prior and informed consent of the true stewards of our lands and territory. Thus, the laws of British Columbia and the laws of the Kwakiutl Nation have been violated. (Olsen, 2023)

All this while Lemare Group, one of the companies subcontracted to perpetrate this ecological disaster, claims on the front page of its web site that 'Lemare is driven by a commitment to safe, sustainable operations and responsible resource management'. The hypocrisy and total lack of ethics to which we are accustomed by large corporations when they see a juicy business deal. *Business as usual.*

At the time of writing this book (February 2024), logging corporations and the provincial government of British Columbia continue to violate the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) at the expense of the Kwakiutl Nation. In the meantime, deforestation is causing 'landslides, sloughs and tree blowdowns, sending debris into the Cluxewe River, a critical salmon-spawning hábitat', and those in power talk of 'reconciliation' with indigenous peoples, 'meaning reconciliation with those who agree with them' (Olsen, 2023).

Sources

We have not found any version of this creation myth of the Kwakiutl People on the Internet, so there is a good chance that we have here a first adaptation made public for the benefit of all mankind. As for the references in the Comments section,

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Associated text of the Earth Charter

Preamble: Universal Responsibility: Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Preamble: To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny.

Preamble: Universal Responsibility: To realize these aspirations, we must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities.

Principle 1a: Recognize that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.

The Way Forward: It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility.

