



## SALMON AND ACORNS FEED OUR PEOPLE: COLONIALISM, NATURE, AND SOCIAL ACTION

Kari Marie Norgaard

Rutgers University Press, 2019, 312 pp, \$34.95 | Reviewed by Sara Calvosa Olson

*Salmon and Acorns Feed Our People* is a complex case study of the effects of settler colonialism on environmental justice, gender, politics, and social capital through the lens of a social scientist. When I was asked to review it, I admit I was expecting something a little less academic. Academic tomes can often be a barrier—the language can act as a form of gatekeeping and I honor that not everybody is going to be able to dive into this without feeling like they've jumped into a puddle of half-set cement. At times, the writing can feel like it's only accessible with a PhD. However, the particular points on which Kari Marie Norgaard alights have truly needed to be discussed out loud for a long time. And though she is a non-Native woman, it would appear that she has the full support of my tribe behind her and she has clearly centered Karuk voices in her narrative.

Norgaard, after spending almost two decades working with the Karuk on the Klamath, discusses colonialism's effect on the ecological and social health of our community, even as it relates to gender issues. What does it mean to be a Karuk man if you can't engage in your traditional subsistence work? She posits that colonialism has stolen more than land: there's an emotional, social, and psychological price when Native peoples are disconnected from their environmental management activities.

And while attention has been paid to erasure of Indigenous peoples, there has been less focus on the importance of, reasons for, or consequences of the erasure of Indigenous ecologies" (87–88). Indigenous peoples and cultures are not separate from nature. There is an intimate partnership, and Norgaard uses the Karuk relationship with fire as an example of this familial cohesion with their traditional biomes. In the case of fire medicine, without the cultural use of fire as a way of tending and managing the forested areas surrounding the Klamath river, the landscape has been dramatically altered in health and appearance. The European knee-jerk reaction to fire as something to avoid at all costs has caused not just a physical displacement of people from the land; it has turned the landscape into one that the Karuk don't necessarily even recognize anymore, and the emotional and social repercussions of settler colonialism in that regard need to be studied. If you view yourself as part of a landscape and

through settler-colonial violence that relationship is broken, it devastates the sense of self.

Norgaard goes on to recognize that this separation has far-reaching effects on traditional foodways as well as consequences related to climate change. Burning the upslope for healthy streams and creeks to ensure abundant salmon and eel populations, burning to keep the acorn weevil infestations low—this spiritual connection to the land also becomes a matter of food sovereignty and security. The settler-colonial playbook demands a severing of this link to traditional foods in order to more easily separate the Indigenous person from their cultural identity and to further their assimilation into colonial society. Colonialism via alteration of the land is pathologically formulaic: grab land, remove occupants by whatever means necessary, extract all resources, leave land polluted and toxic, move on. We can see the effects of this formula across Indigenous cultures. Norgaard goes into really specific detail about the consequences of these effects from a sociologist's perspective and though we are familiar with many of the things she's explaining, the sociological perspective fills in an integral missing piece for understanding how to heal our communities.

One of the things that I found most interesting in this book is the addition of observations regarding changing gender practices in the face of environmental decline due to that settler-colonial formula. Norgaard acknowledges that Indigenous gender constructions have "long been more fluid, less binary, and organized around caring and stewardship rather than hierarchy and domination." Women were responsible for certain cultural burning practices, men fishing in inherited sacred spots along the river. Norgaard concludes that, in fact, settler-colonial ecological violence is deeply gendered: when men can't fish in their familial places and women can't burn to ensure the health of the seeds and acorns that feed their families, what becomes of their sense of self when they're separated from these identities? These are all effects of settler colonialism.

Norgaard ties all of these observations and questions to climate change in the end. She notes the difference between non-Native fatalist hand-wringing that ultimately ends up mutating into apathy, and the way the Karuk are essentially

already mid-apocalypse and have been for decades and they're confronting it like a frontline triage team. They're constantly assessing the changes to the landscape, through surveys and diagnostic work, engaging agencies, investing in education for tribal members—they're mobilized and trying to be nimble in a system that is still trying to eliminate them even in the face of an obvious system failure.

Again, academic texts can be difficult to access due to complex vocabulary; we don't all know the language, we aren't all immersed in PhD research, and even though the concept and theory are something we're intimately familiar

with, the language can be challenging to tackle. I struggle with this very much myself and I hope that I have been able to accurately convey the themes of this case study. This would make an excellent book club selection (shout out to Karuk book club every other Monday, all are welcome, find us on Facebook and jump in!). In being able to break it down and have discussions, I have a feeling we could learn a lot about ourselves, where we each fit into a wildly altered landscape, and how we can go forward together as a tribe, practicing *pikyav* as fix-the-world-people.