Communities are constituted partly through narratives about their origins. This is especially and most obviously true of national communities which assemble stories about their origins as means of consolidating a vision or ‘imagined community.’ These narratives position people in relation to each other, communities, and the state through discourses about citizenship, dominion, security, and belonging. The overarching objective of this workshop is to examine the relation between two foundational sets of narratives that have shaped and continue to shape settler societies (narratives of ‘contact’ and narratives of ‘arrival’) and, through that relationship, to consider more deeply the role of narrative in defining and shaping community.

Narratives of contact and arrival interact both to complement and to challenge a third powerful story about settler societies. This third narrative treats such a society as simply the product of its people today and in the very recent past. Citizens are conceived as individuals marked more by what they decide to do now than by the circumstances of their society’s founding or by the arrival of their ancestors. This story tends to push aside questions of contact and arrival – perhaps even to deny the relevance of narrative altogether. Our workshop will serve to critically illuminate this increasingly dominant story by noting its interaction with stories about contact and arrival.

In short, this workshop is committed to exploring the following questions:

- To what extent are communities defined by accounts that take a narrative form (and why)?

* We would like to thank our University of Victoria colleagues who provided feedback on earlier drafts, in particular Professors maneesh Deckha and Hamar Foster. We would also like to thank Ben Berger, Dawnis Kennedy, Colin MacLeod and Jim Tully, who gave invaluable assistance in the initial formulation of the workshop’s focus.

• How do those stories interact, empower, exclude – and how in particular does this occur with respect to narratives of contact and narratives of arrival?
• What possibilities exist within the narrative form for reconstructing communities in a more adequate fashion, for creating a sense of community that can accommodate a diversity of origins and interpretations, and for developing processes that more adequately address issues posed by immigration and aboriginal/non-aboriginal relations?

Contact Narratives:

In settler societies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the idea of historical contact between Aboriginal peoples and settlers is part of a powerful narrative about the origins of the state that serves to underpin the conception of Crown sovereignty. Foundational contact narratives in law such as the doctrine of discovery erase the territorial and political sovereignty of indigenous nations by constructing entire continents as vacant (or at least unorganized and undeveloped) and awaiting discovery by Europeans. The doctrine of discovery and other fictions are testament to the need to clothe power with legitimacy through narratives of origins that offer a closed logic and a starting place of purity in the form of a vast and empty wilderness.

Building upon a previous conference held at the University of Victoria in February 2002, our first objective in this workshop is to foreground the way in which narratives of contact and early interaction position the arrival of Europeans in settler societies and, in turn, how that positioning continues to shape and order bodies, borders, land and membership. Some of the themes we wish to explore relate directly to the contact trope, for example, the way in which it reorders time, marking the distinction between history and pre-history and, in the process, normalizing colonization, neutralizing genocide, and erasing racism. Can this chronological scheme be disrupted by the reclaiming of history by indigenous scholars and communities? How does storytelling provide the epistemological foundations for a politics of resistance? For example, Kim Anderson has explored the ways in which indigenous women’s resistance to racist and imperial narratives of the ‘squaw’ and ‘princess’ constitute resistance to colonization and how the counter narratives of sacred bodies, places and responsibilities constitute community and nation.

The re-ordering of bodies within the contact narrative - constructing some as settled, agricultural, and civilized and others as unsettled, disorganized, and savage - reverberates throughout the layers of practices, relationships, and self and community constructions.

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that texture our public and private worlds. Legal narratives have quickly absorbed the simple binaries underpinning the contact framework, lending them its institutional and normative heft as well as providing the gloss of detached, judicious reasonableness. Constitutional jurisprudence, for example, continues to demand a reconciliation of any indigenous claims with Crown political and territorial sovereignty in determining the content of entrenched aboriginal rights. Criminal law interventions rendered deviant and dangerous the potlatch, sundance, and other practices of community formation. Conversely, silences within the criminal law ensured that the seizure, confiscation, and collecting of goods (including human skeletal remains) would not be characterized as ‘theft’ perpetrated by colonizers against indigenous peoples. Are these narrative inversions symptomatic of the illogic of imperialism? What sorts of narrative spaces are opened up by their illumination? What sorts of political possibilities are trapped or foreclosed by their constant reiteration? Does their simple reversal participate in a similar over-simplification and erasure of memory and possibility?

Some related themes we may explore are how settlers’ self constructions as ‘emigrants’ obscured their arrival in indigenous territories as immigrants; and how the elaborate indigenous proprietary legal systems that governed the fisheries, the gathering spots and the succession of property were not simply rhetorically erased by discovery doctrine’s fiction of vacancy and “waste lands” but also functionally invisible to settlers working within assumptions about the appropriate “uses” of property.

Mindful, however, of Julia Cruikshank’s warning that representations of encounters between Indigenous and European peoples “still often float between indigenous oral traditions deemed to be “timeless” or “mythical” and postcolonial metanarratives that homogenize colonizers activities,” we also hope to explore questions about more ambivalent, historically and geographically specific encounters of mutual recognition and creative borrowing between settler and indigenous communities. How should these stories complicate our accounts of community formation and identity and our common sense notions of the limits of politics? Are there ways in which those accounts can be generalized in order to provide a more satisfactory constitutionalism?

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5 The Potlach was outlawed in S.C. 1884, 47 Vict.c. 27, s.3; the sundance in S.C. 1895, 58 & 59 Vict., c. 35, s.6. See Sheehy p. 50 for a summary of how the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en Chiefs explain the centrality of the Potlach.

6 Patrick Dunae, Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981).


Arrival Narratives:

The second objective extends the theme of narrative and the constitution of communities by shifting focus to narratives of arrival. Narratives of arrival also powerfully shape conceptions of political community in settler societies. Many origin stories are stories about arrival in which immigrants attempt to join an already constituted community. These narratives help construct these societies as immigrant societies which draw their economic and cultural strength from communities outside their borders. Like narratives of contact, narratives about arrival also position people and order their relations. Indeed, some recent iterations of narratives of arrival foreground those who are arriving as either supplicants or threats. Thus contact on ‘arrival’ in these immigration and refugee stories reverses the roles and meanings we see ascribed to ‘prior occupants’ and ‘newcomers’ in narratives of contact. In doing so, narratives of arrival sediment an additional set of notions about bodies, borders, land and membership. The narratives immigrants and refugees themselves might give, and the narratives that might be expected of them, coexist, interact and conflict in complex ways. And here, it would seem that again there is not equal power in those narratively structured encounters. Coming as supplicants, certain kinds of stories are expected, and must be told.

Narratives create expectations and, in politics and laws, expectations give rise to different ways of understanding the meaning of legal rules and political principles. In this way, Robert Cover discussed the way in which ‘nomos’ is intimately connected to, indeed constituted by, ‘narrative’. Different stories are told within the same populations about narratives of arrival (and contact). Immigrant communities often have their own (and multiple) narratives of arrival. Often these are not the same stories told about them within mainstream communities. In this way, the stage is set for us to witness the power differences amongst communities. The expectations of immigrant communities, grounded in their narratives of arrival, generate demands from these communities which are not simply rejected by a more powerful state. These demands are not even clearly understood by the mainstream population because their meaning is bound to a narrative unfamiliar to and often ignored by the dominant group in favour of its own narrative for the group. In Canada, a dominant narrative of arrival involves the themes of opportunity, freedom, integration and multiculturalism. Mainstream populations are dumbfounded when the demands of immigrant groups do not fit these themes. The recent controversies over the recognition by public courts of shari’a-based arbitration decisions in Ontario, and the rescue of Lebanese-Canadians living in Lebanon during the recent Israeli-Lebanon offer two clear examples of this. These conflicts suggest not so much a disagreement amongst people about what is good policy, but an incomprehension between the mainstream and immigrants communities about what ‘arrival’ in Canada means and therefore what kinds of demands are appropriate to make on the government. Such disagreements, grounded as

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9 Barsky, Robert F. "Outsider Law in Literature: Construction and Representation in Death and the Maiden" (1998) 84 SubStance 66-89. His study of refugee interviews demonstrated that, during refugee hearings, the kinds of stories the women wanted to tell were in fact ‘untellable’. “the ‘hearing’ could not ‘hear’ what the woman had to say because of systemic prejudices and, moreover, the right questions were not even asked. (p.9 my copy)

they are in different narratives of arrival, reflect the deep sense in which respectful coexistence amongst people is connected to understanding different narratives and their constitutive power. To understand different narratives is not the same as agreeing to the same laws or policies. Rather it is basis upon which peoples come to understand what agreement or disagreement - as opposed to incomprehension - would look like.

The Role and Method of the Narrative Form:

In the course of examining the resonances and contradictions between narratives of contact and arrival, the workshop will pursue its third and most consequential objective: the exploration of the method, texture and reach of narrative in the construction of community.

It has become common to speak of narrative when discussing issues of individual and collective identity. In fact it has become so common that one sometimes wonders whether the particularity of the narrative form is being lost, so that “narrative” serves merely as a synonym for “assertion” or “account”. In this workshop we want to focus on the distinctive characteristics of stories and ask whether those specific characteristics are important to maintaining communities, defining them, specifying the relationship of individuals and groups to them, determining who belongs and who doesn’t, and shaping the manner in which members interact.

This focus on the special characteristics of narrative potentially draws on narrative theories of identity developed within psychology, but also pursued in the philosophical, feminist, and critical race theory literature.11 It connects very closely to indigenous traditions, in which the telling, retelling and receipt of stories provide much of the fabric of community. Indeed, we hope to draw deeply on the insights of indigenous traditions in our reflections at the workshop.12 It reflects the immigrant experience, especially in refugee claims, where one’s entry into a new community is framed in terms of stories. And it also appears to be closely related to the emphasis on a shared history in many theories of nationhood and nationalism.

What are those distinctive features of narrative? We expect the workshop itself to explore these, but here is a tentative list, to get the conversation going:


1. They situate the teller and the community within a **temporal frame**. Stories situate the community in relation to its past. They are, in that sense, traditional, placing the community within the flow of time, in which past events contribute to the nature of the present. They incorporate movement, change and development.

2. They situate the teller and the community within a **geographical frame**. Stories are not abstract. They occur in a place. The geographical boundaries of that place help to define the community: who is a member, who is not. But geography also helps to shape the nature and identity of the community. It situates the community within a distinctive non-human environment. Specific characteristics of that environment may be an integral feature of the community’s identification.

3. Stories are marked by a kind of **narrative coherence**. They select certain features of the community and of its history, and they recount those features in a fashion that makes narrative sense. They involve selectivity, the recognition (creation?) of meaning, and the identification of cause and effect.

4. The telling of a story also features **particular actors, particular agents**. The actions of these agents have particular consequences. There is, then, a theory of agency built into any story. And because stories recount the actions of persons and their effects, the stories may also contain a crucial dimension of normative modeling, of moral exemplification. Moreover, like all aspects of stories, the identification of agents is selective. This may mean that there are differential roles for different agents, some consequential, some marginal.

5. The narrative coherence occurs against the backdrop of a **set of practices and an historical experience** that extend beyond the stories themselves. Indeed, the narratives might be so much of a piece with the experience that they can be said to be embodied. This richer ground allows for the possibility of new interpretations, new stories or applications of stories, the rediscovery of new elements of history or experience out of which identity can be formed – all of these fashioned in relation to the accumulated experience of the tellers and those whom they know.

6. The concrete dimension of stories – their situation in time, in place, with definite agents, and a course of events – also means that they can be, in a sense, **metaphorical**. They speak in concrete terms, but may be taken to carry meanings that are not express, perhaps not even fully expressible. They are open, then, both to a range of interpretations and to a continual extension of interpretation.

7. This in turn means that they can be shaped by the manner in which they are received, by **practices of interpretation**. This can be more or less regulated, more or less subject to a defined ethic. Indeed, the whole context of telling and listening can be regulated by a protocol. Story-telling can be a performance, in which conventions structure both the time and manner of telling and the manner of receiving.
8. Stories can also interact. They can be marked by **intertextuality and dialogue**. Stories can draw upon images, tropes, morals, and events recounted in previous stories. They can be told against each other, so one has narratives and counter-narratives. They can examine a similar set of events for the express purpose of discovering what was not in the original account or in a previous interpretation. They can attempt to incorporate a number of stories within a new meta-story. The narrative structure, in other words, may help us to understand better the dynamics of cross-cultural understanding (and misunderstanding).

Many theorists have drawn on these features. Bhabha reminds us that such stories are both ‘pedagogical’ (teaching us who we are and our place in the order) and ‘performative’ (making and failing to make us parts of that story). In both dimensions, these stories embed obligations both to remember and to forget. Certainly, the placing of contact and arrival narratives side by side makes visible how many things each story seems to require us to forget. Anderson and Bhabha would argue that such ‘forgetting’ is not simply a question of historical memory. It is rather that stories of community help us ‘perform’ acts of forgetting, acts which are reinscribed on a daily basis, and which sometimes place the obligation to forget as part of what it is to remember the nation.

In attending to these stories, we seek not simply to describe the shape of the stories, but also to consider how those stories continue to work in and through us in the present. Here, we hope to take seriously the operation of storytelling, attending to tellers and audience, and of the moments of slippage always present in narrative moments. For a story that must be continually repeated or performed carries with it the constant possibility of slips in the iteration, of performances that don’t return in exactly the same fashion, of the rediscovery of new insights or new possibilities in a story or interplay of stories. What can we learn by attending to the ways in which narrative encounters might function not only to inscribe certain visions of nation, but also to resist them? What possibilities are open in the intervals between repetitions? Or in focusing on the margins of the stories, where categories of exclusion and inclusion break down, where border spaces draw different questions into view? And so we ask about the turn to narrative as a mode of resistance, the interplay of dominant narratives and counter-narratives, and the possibility of reaching toward more inclusive and more acceptable ways of conceiving of our co-habitation. In addition, as an integral part of the workshop, performances of narratives about contact and arrival in story and literature will provide specific instances of these dimensions of narrative as well as punctuate and weave together the broader conversation about foundational narratives in settler societies.

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13 Bhabha, Homi K., ed. *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990) around p. 262?
14 Supra, at 313.
Consequences for Institutions and Processes:

Finally, we ask how we might remould our processes of inter-cultural interaction, or of the regulation of immigration, if we took narrative seriously. Although our primary focus is on the theoretical and broadly social role of narrative, we do want to inquire into how our institutional processes and personal conduct might change, might be rendered more appropriate, more respectful, and more fruitful, if we incorporated an understanding of narrative. We remain actors. How might our actions be reformed? Or does the role of narrative operate at such a level of generality that it does not have material implications for social processes?

Conclusion:

Narratives of contact and narratives of arrival often appear to occupy different worlds in political, philosophical, cultural, and legal discourses. It is the thesis of this workshop that the disconnection between narratives of contact and narratives of arrival is in itself foundational and revealing of the nature of settler political communities. Through the workshop we hope to illuminate how these two narratives co-exist, contradict, complement, intersect, or otherwise relate to each other. They are connected partly through their interaction within the dominant narrative - that is the narrative of established settler societies where all interact, at least ostensibly, as equals. The dominant narrative both relies on the way in which Aboriginal people and immigrants are positioned within the general framework of contact and arrival relative to the dominant majority, and draws into question the relevance of these narratives for the here and now, the moving-forward-together, and the future of the national project. A fourth objective of the workshop is to return to the themes of citizenship, dominion, security, and belonging that seem so firmly fixed within this dominant narrative about settler societies and consider the ways in which they are repositioned within a more complex and contradictory set of tales about communities.