Power Lines: Hydroelectricity, Québécois Nationalism, and Cree Sovereignty since the 1960s

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Students are often interested in how to find a research topic. It helps to have a lot of background in the subject already, but it also helps to have a personal connection to something important to you, whatever your topic is. In this case, I first got interested in this topic when I joined the faculty at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh in 1999. As an assistant professor, I was impressed by how cheap real estate was. An Air Force base had recently closed there, leading to a depressed housing market. We bought a house and started paying electrical bills. I was astonished at how low these were. Plattsburgh is very cold; it's only a hundred kilometers, less than an hour's drive, from Montréal. In that climate, it's meaningful to have cheap electricity.

A major reason for our cheap electricity, it turned out, was that we were plugged into a power grid that included massive hydroelectric installations sited on lands of Indigenous people in northern Québec. These installations were built and are operated by Hydro-Québec, a state-owned power company that has a near monopoly on power production in the Canadian province. Hydro-Québec also markets its power through a grid that extends into New York State and New England. Our local utility company tapped into this grid.

At the time of our move to Plattsburgh, three hydroelectric facilities on the La Grande River in northern Québec were up and running, and sending electricity to southern Québec, adjoining provinces, and the United States. The La Grande River is one of several major rivers running into James Bay, a southeastern extension of Hudson Bay. Together, these rivers drain 130,000 square miles of mostly forested, thinly inhabited territory. In English we call this region eastern James Bay. Its nearly 18,000 Indigenous Cree inhabitants call it Eeyou Istchee. There are also Inuit people along the bay's northern edges.

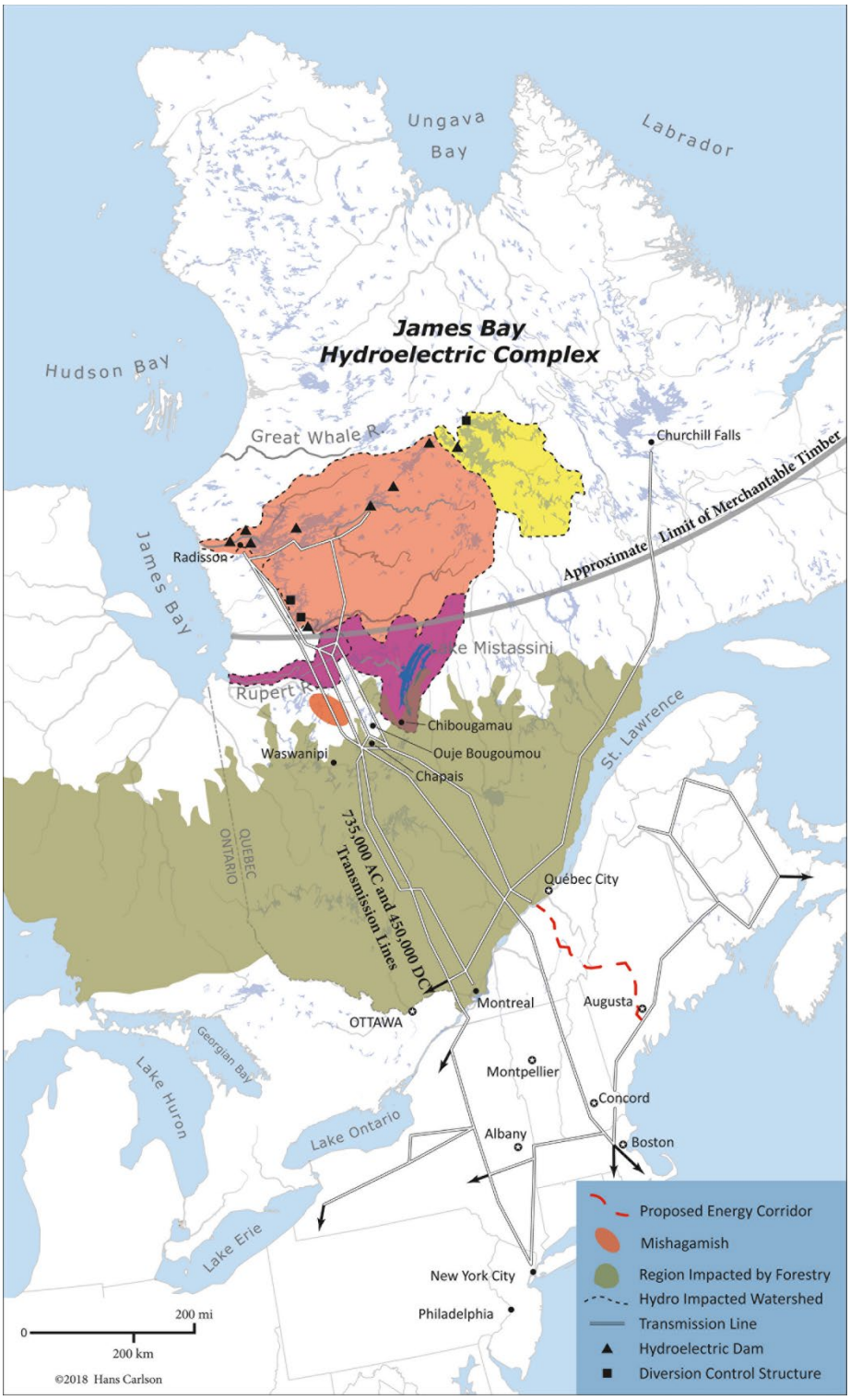

Figure 1: James Bay and Hydro-Québec's Power Grid. Courtesy of Hans M. Carlson. https://www.hansmcarlson.com/james-bay

To give you a sense of the distances involved in transmitting power from James Bay to Hydro-Québec's southern markets, La Grande Two, which is the biggest installation, is about 800 miles

from Montréal. That's about how far it is from Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, to Jacksonville, Florida. Up there, Montréal is referred to as "down south," and rightly so, because Montréal is closer to Washington D.C. than it is to James Bay. To make this profitable at such a distance, the hydroelectric works at James Bay have to be very large and generate a great deal of power. A photograph of a spillway at La Grande Two, called the "Staircase of the Giants," suggests the scale of the project. Each of the spillway's steps is the size of multiple football fields. The dam above it holds back a reservoir that spreads over 1000 square miles. It is but one of several such dams along the La Grande.

Figure 2: The spillway at the Robert-Bourassa hydroelectric complex, in northern Québec [The Staircase of the Giants]. Photo credit: Peter Van den Bossche, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Staircase_of_the_giants-2.jpg

It also turned out that at the time of our move to Plattsburgh, further hydroelectric development at James Bay had been put on pause. This was at least partly because of a well-publicized event in 1990, the "Voyage of the Odeyak." (Odeyak is a mashup of the Cree and the Inuit words for "kayak"). The Voyage of the Odeyak was a highly publicized canoe brigade that went from Ottawa, Canada's capital, through a chain of lakes and rivers in Ontario, Québec, and New York State (passing, with considerable fanfare, at Plattsburgh's waterfront on Lake Champlain), all the way to New York City. Conceived and carried out

by Cree and Inuit people, the Voyage of the Odeyak drew attention to their efforts to stop a major expansion of the James Bay Project: the construction of dams and generating stations on the Great Whale River, just to the north of the La Grande River.

Conveniently, the Odeyak arrived in New York City on Earth Day, 1990. As Cree Grand Chief Matthew Mukash recalls the scene, “The Odeyak was put onto a stage at Times Square and it became the centre of attention for the media. And our leadership was given the opportunity to speak before a crowd of about 10,000 people at Times Square.” This brilliant exercise in the politics of shame helped convince New York City to cancel a lucrative contract that it had already signed with Hydro-Québec. A contract that had been in the works for southern New England met a similar fate.

I didn’t do anything with this information right away, except for paying my electric bills without complaint. But around this time, my intellectual community was mostly in Montréal, where I got to know historians and anthropologists who had worked at James Bay. In 2005 I attended a conference on “Positioning Québec in Global Environmental History” at the McCord Museum in Montréal. The session that most impressed me focused on James Bay. From it, I learned some of the details about the Indigenous places that had been flooded by the damming of the La Grande River, and about the importance of hydroelectricity in the politics of Québec.

At the end of one session, a fellow came down to the microphone to ask a question, which was really a speech. He was a representative of Hydro-Québec, which had its headquarters about six blocks away. He explained what a blessing the opening of northern Québec to development had been to Cree people. He spoke of 232 (I think) cable television channels, new roads, and less expensive fruit and vegetables, and finally exclaimed that before this development, “those people didn't even speak French!”

Now, let me point out that Québec is a predominantly Francophone province. It was a French colony from 1608 until it was conquered by the British during the Seven Years War. British, and later anglophone Canadian, rule was oppressive. Only in recent decades has the French-speaking majority gained cultural and political power commensurate with their majority status within the province. So this man’s comment needs to be understood as an expression of Québécois identity. It’s worth noting that the symbol for his employer, Hydro-Québec, features a “Q” with a lightning bolt, thus associating Québec’s identity with hydroelectric power.

Figure 3: Logo of Hydro-Québec. Image credit: Gagnon/Valkus, Inc., Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hydro-Qu%C3%A9bec_logo.svg

Of course, I now had to go to James Bay. Towns there are located at key points along each of the rivers, mostly at their mouths, where the Hudson Bay set up its trading posts. The oldest of these towns were started in 1670. This whole territory was not part of New France or Québec, but part of a jurisdiction known as Rupert's Land, which was administered by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The town I visited in 2008, Waskaganish, at the mouth of the Rupert River, is one of the largest in the region, with a population of around 4,500 people. The Rupert River is a stunningly beautiful, and very large, river.

Figure 4: Waskaganish and the Rupert River from the Air, 2008. Photo credit: James D. Rice.

Not long after my visit, Hydro-Québec announced that they had begun diverting 50% of the Rupert River's flow into the next river north, the Eastmain. The Eastmain River's increased flow, harnessed by new dams and generating stations, would soon begin sending power to markets in the south.

Let's pull back now to look at the big picture, at the intertwined historical narratives of the various people who live within Hydro-Québec's vast power grid.

One of those narratives is about the Indigenous Cree people who make up most of the population in eastern James Bay. The region they inhabit is a transitional boreal forest zone, situated between northern hardwood forests to the south that are robust enough for logging and regeneration, and treeless tundra in the north. There are some stands of large mature trees here, but also a lot of scrubby pines and bogs. It's a harsh environment, by most peoples' standards. In some parts, there are polar bears! The Cree people, however, are used to this: they have been there for roughly 5,000 years, when they moved north in the wake of retreating glaciers.

Cree livelihoods came from hunting waterfowl such goose and ptarmigan, big game such as caribou and bear, various small game, and fish. They trapped beaver and sold the pelts to Hudson's Bay Company [HBC] agents. In the winter, people lived (and some still live) in small, kin-based groups along remote trap lines. In the late spring and early summer, around the summer solstice, people converged on HBC stations such as Waskaganish to bring their furs to the traders and connect with other Cree people; young people found their marriage partners. The arrival of the HBC in the seventeenth century altered, but did not transform, this forest life, which remained the dominant experience for Cree people until recently.

As of 1970, an important turning point in this story, Cree governance was decentralized, kin-based, and centered around the maintenance of trap lines.

This is also a story about Québec. Québec, formerly "New France," became an English colony in 1763, and part of anglophone-dominated Canada after 1867. Well into the twentieth century, the most powerful economic and political social forces were anglophone, English-speaking. The French-speaking population tended to be anti-statist, believing the government could really do nothing for them. Much francophone cultural life centered on the Catholic church, which exercised considerable power. Many, however, found the church's influence to be oppressive, as people who were schoolchildren in the mid-twentieth century will often testify.

This situation continued through the 1950s. The 1960s and 1970s, however, brought what is known as the Quiet Revolution, a francophone decolonization movement that was explicitly statist, modernizing, and secularizing, and it stressed cultural and economic nationalism. The Quiet Revolution was the moment when the preferred term for this group became "Québécois" rather than "French

Canadian." This reflected self-identification as a francophone people in charge of their own destiny, rather than as a sub-category of people within the Canadian nation-state.

Since French speakers made up the great majority of voters, once they became more politically engaged, they could elect whoever they wanted. On the whole, they voted for politicians who promoted economic enterprises to make Québec a more powerful, better, and more thoroughly French place to live.

Not coincidently, the exploitation of the North ramped up in the 1960s and the 1970s. The election of the Liberal Party's leader Jean Lesage as Premier of Québec in 1960 marked the beginning of the Quiet Revolution. Lesage wasn't required to call another election until 1964 or 1965, but he nevertheless decided to call a snap election in 1962 as a referendum on the party's ambitious legislative program. This program included the nationalization of the eleven private power companies operating in Québec, and their consolidation into the publicly owned Hydro-Québec. The idea was that this electricity could power the industry needed to make Québec a more industrialized, economically vibrant, and self-reliant province.

A still-famous poster from the 1962 campaign encapsulated this thinking. Widely distributed and reprinted in numerous local newspapers, the text read:

> MASTERS IN OUR OWN HOME
> The greatest electricity reserve in the world is **here at home** - in Québec.
> It is electricity that illuminates our houses and our farms.
> It is also electricity that is the source of energy of our factories, creators of jobs.
> We must be the complete owners of this energy source to manage it in the best interest of Québec.
> Only the Liberal Party of Québec commits to nationalizing the eleven private electricity companies in the next session, to give us **the key to the kingdom**.
> THE LIBERAL PARTY OF QUÉBEC

The lightening bolt grasped in a powerful hand at the top of the poster, along with the key, composed of another lightening bolt along with the fleur de lis of the Québec flag and an "E" for "Electricité," drove the message home.

Figure 5: Liberal Party Campaign Poster, 1962. Source: *L'Écho de Louiseville*, 25 Octobre 1962.

At the same time that the election campaign of 1962 was unfolding, work was winding up on a hydroelectric project on Indigenous lands—not at James Bay at this early date, but rather on a tributary of the St. Lawrence River in eastern Québec. Popularly known as "La Manic," the aesthetically pleasing dam at the center of the project became a cultural phenomenon. There was an automobile model, for example, and a popular 1966 song by Georges Dor called "La Manic," the lyrics to which were from a (fictional) construction worker on the project to his beloved back home. The song is romantic, even a little racy. Interestingly, it's a song that people still know. In 2016, I played clips from the song for an audience in Québec, and people swayed back and forth while singing along—this, exactly fifty years after "La Manic" was first recorded. The song, like the dam itself, remains a cultural expression of Québécois identity.

Jean Lesage announced that he was stepping down in 1969. Robert Bourassa, also from the Liberal Party, succeeded him in 1970 as premier of Québec. Bourassa, from Montréal, was a lawyer, former professor of public finance, and member of the Québec's Legislative Assembly. He was very much a Québécois nationalist.

I want to pause here and explain that Québécois nationalism has long existed along a spectrum. At one extreme are people who simply wanted an end to oppression, so that one could be free to speak French, be educated and work in French, and so forth. And at the other extreme, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, were revolutionaries who planted bombs in prominent English businessmen's mailboxes. In 1970, one such group kidnapped a British diplomat, who they eventually freed, and a member of Robert Bourassa's cabinet, who they murdered.

For the most part, however, Québécois nationalism has fallen between these extremes. The main dividing line lies between those who sought expanded power and autonomy for Québec while remaining a part of Canada, and those who sought independence—actual succession—from Canada.

Bourassa was a nationalist, but not a separatist. He wanted a powerful Québec. For him, that meant not only promoting French language and culture, but also building a strong national—Québécois—economy. He promoted the cause of several large corporations that became closely associated with Québécois nationalism, such as Bombardier, which makes jet engines and high-speed trains. The most important such corporation was the state-owned Hydro-Québec. In 1971 Bourassa organized a gathering of the Liberal Party leadership in Québec to talk about the achievements of his first year in office, and to discuss what to do going forward. As the climax of this gathering, he announced plans for the James Bay Project, a Can$17.1 billion plan to harness the rivers of northern Québec to produce enough electricity to transform Québec's economy. "The world," he proclaimed, "begins today." Construction on a road to James Bay, necessary to move equipment to begin Phase I (the La Grande River portion of the project), began almost immediately.

Bourassa, a towering figure in modern Québec (and indeed Canadian) history, is best remembered for his economic nationalism, and particularly for the James Bay Project. The La Grande phase was launched under him and completed in various stages through the 1980s. His role in this is commemorated on the La Grande River, where the largest dam and reservoir have been renamed for him. Bourassa is also memorialized in a statue in front of the Assemblée Nationale du Québec in Québec City. Naturally, he is depicted holding an image of the Staircase of the Giants spillway at La Grande 2.

Figure 6: Statue of Robert Bourassa (1933-1996) in front of the National Assembly in Québec City. Photo credit: Claude Bouchecl, Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Assembl%C3%A9e_nationale_-_Statue_Robert_Bourassa2.jpg

The sticking point in all this was that the Bourassa government had never consulted with the Indigenous people who called Eeyou Istchee home.

Billy Diamond and Philip Awashish knew each other from their time together in a Canadian residential school, where they had honed their English and gained knowledge of the non-Native world. Awashish had also attended McGill University in Montréal. Each learned of Bourassa's announcement almost by accident, Awashish because he picked up a day-old newspaper at a coffee shop in a mining town on the southeastern edge of the James Bay region, and Diamond after his wife caught wind of it via short-wave radio while he was out goose hunting. At that point very few other Cree people knew that their homes, fishing, and hunting places were slated to be flooded by the dams planned for the James Bay Project.

Awashish and Diamond gathered together a few other bilingual young men, in what one called "the first meeting we've had in 5,000 years." Then they went to talk to the elders. The young men knew that, as young men who had been away at school, it wasn't their place to act without guidance from their home communities, and particularly from the elders. The results of these consultations should come as no surprise: obviously, Cree people did not want Hydro-Québec to move in. They wanted to keep their trap lines and their fishing places. So, they retained a law firm in Montréal, which mounted a court challenge

in 1973 that so wowed the judge that he put a complete stop, an injunction, to construction at James Bay. The judge was overruled by a higher court a week later, but the testimony given at this hearing, particularly that by Cree women and men from James Bay, was so powerful that Hydro-Québec and the liberal government realized there was a problem, and that they might have to talk to these people.

Over the next two years the Crees, Inuits, Hydro-Québec, and the governments of Québec and Canada negotiated the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA), ratified in 1975. It's impressive that Indigenous people who had not grown up in a litigious society, and were facing such politically powerful opponents, were able to negotiate effectively given that they were in no position to put a complete halt to the James Bay Project. The Agreement divided James Bay into three categories of land. Category One, the smallest, would be completely under Cree or Inuit control and administered by local Cree governments. Fishing and hunting rights on Category Two lands were reserved for Cree and Inuit people, but other forms of development, mining and so forth, could also take place. On Category Three lands, some specific hunting and harvesting rights were reserved for Indigenous people, but all other rights (such as logging and mining) were to be open to development under a joint regulatory scheme. The first phase of the James Bay Project, which included five reservoirs on the La Grande River, multiple generating stations, and 3000 miles of transmission lines, went forward. The Cree and Inuit won direct compensation of Can$225 million (about US$970 million in 2025), paid out over twenty years. The Cree School Board and its Inuit counterpart were created, and these have been pretty successful institutions. Health and human services from southern Québec were extended to the North. Future work on the James Bay Project was to be conducted only after environmental reviews.

Figure 7: Québec Premier Robert Bourassa (left), Grand Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees Billy Diamond (second to left), and Hydro-Québec and Inuit representatives during negotiations over the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement in 1974. Photo credit: The Canadian Press.

The result was a real transformation of Eeyou Istchee. You can imagine the environmental impact. For example, this area, like places that were covered by ice sheets prior to the end of the last ice age, has for thousands of years been gradually rebounding from the weight of the ice. This process is called "isostatic rebound." However, the reservoirs created by the James Bay Project are so big, and the weight of the water is so heavy, that isostatic rebound, which has been ongoing since the end of the last ice age, has been slowed. That says a lot about the magnitude of this transformation of the environment. The more immediate consequences for Indigenous people included the loss of fishing places, trap lines, and homes. Mercury accumulations in the reservoirs made fish taken in the La Grande basin dangerous to human health, and caribou migrations were disrupted.

The James Bay Project has also transformed Indigenous governance. Under the JBNQA, Cree communities organized into local municipal governments, with the Cree Regional Authority (or Grand Council of the Crees) as the overarching body of government. So from 1974 onward, the Cree people have had a political body that is ready and equipped to fight back and negotiate over further incursions onto their lands. Also, in 1982, the Canadian Parliament passed the Constitution Act. Canada doesn't have a single written document for its constitution the way the United States does, but the Constitution Act enumerated various documents that were henceforth to be considered part of the Constitution. These

documents include all treaties and land claim agreements that had been made with First Nations prior to 1982, such as the JBNQA. This proved helpful in subsequent negotiations over resources at James Bay.

Remember the voyage of the Odeyak in 1990? The canoe brigade that traveled from Ottawa to New York City to draw attention to the proposed hydroelectric development of the Great Whale River? That was sparked by Robert Bourassa, who after a nine-year hiatus returned to office as Québec's premier in 1985 (where he remained until 1994). The first thing Bourassa wanted to do was to expand the scope of the James Bay Project. This time, the Grand Council of the Cree was ready. They had good lawyers, they knew how to operate within the provincial and federal political systems, and they were media savvy. That's why they were able to prevent the development of the Great Whale River.

Figure 8: Rally at the conclusion of the Voyage of the Odeyak, Times Square, New York City, 1990. Photo Credit: The Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute.

The Grand Council would likely have opposed the expansion of the James Bay Project to the Great Whale under any circumstances. Their resistance was stiffened, however, because of the environmental, social, and economic problems that the James Bay Project had already caused. As of 1990, moreover, Québec and Hydro-Québec had yet to fulfill their end of promises that had been made in the 1975 James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement.

The failure of the proposed expansion of the James Bay Project into the Great Whale basin forced Hydro-Québec and the provincial government to pay more attention to Indigenous issues at James Bay. So too did the impact of the Great Whale controversy on another question: whether Québec would remain part of Canada. Bourassa retired in 1994, and was succeeded as Premier by Jacques Parizeau, the leader of a separatist party, the Parti Québécois, who promised—and in 1995 delivered—a general referendum

on whether Québec should become an independent nation. Events surrounding James Bay, together with other recent conflicts between the province and Indigenous peoples, convinced some voters that an independent Québec government would not respect minority rights, including those of immigrants and anglophones. After a hotly contested campaign that brought out 93% of the province's eligible voters, the measure failed by a narrow margin, with 49.42% voting to leave Canada. Some analysts argue that the Indigenous vote alone made the difference.

This result put the Cree Nation in a stronger bargaining position. In 2002 they signed another agreement, the Paix des Braves, which opened more of northern Québec to logging and mining, but also treated the Grand Council of the Cree as a partner for the joint management of these resources and for revenue sharing. The Crees' big concession was the diversion of 50% of the Rupert Rivers into the Eastmain River, and the addition of generating stations on the Eastmain (as mentioned earlier). Important for the long term, the Paix des Braves was explicitly presented as a nation-to-nation agreement—a huge change from 1971, when Robert Bourassa had launched the original James Bay project without bothering to notify the Cree.

In 2011, Jean Charest, Premier of Québec since 2003, launched le Plan Nord. This was aimed less at generating new hydroelectric power than at developing additional infrastructure for logging and mining in the North. At the same time, Hydro-Québec was authorized to take new measures to market electricity outside of the province. Under these initiatives, New York City and southern New England would soon be the beneficiaries of direct current power lines running (in the east) down the coast of Maine, and (in the west) through underwater cables laid through Lake Champlain and from thence down the Hudson River Valley to New York City. When those are completed, they will provide 20% of the power for New York City (up from the current 10% or so). When Charest launched le Plan Nord, he sounded much like the late Robert Bourassa, declaring that "Hydro-Québec has remained at once the engine and the mirror of the awakening and rise of francophone Québec."

So far, this is a story about Cree and Inuit people at James Bay, Québec, New York, and the New England states. But I want to turn to the bigger picture now, because similar forces have long been at work throughout the Americas and beyond.

Often when we imagine conquest and colonialism, we think about guns and the military. Of course, direct violence—what can be called "fast violence"—or the threat of such violence is always present in colonialism. Yet much of the work that's done in conquest and colonialization is done using other instruments, through what has been called "slow violence."

Let's start with ideas. For example, think about the nation-state. The strong tendency of a nation-state is to seek a union of peoplehood and polity. This typically includes promoting a common language and establishing sovereignty over the entire space within its borders, including over any Indigenous

nations. Put another way, in a nation-state there is limited conceptual space for the nations within. New or aspiring nation-states that have yet to fully establish this union typically try extra hard to enforce cultural unity and a single sovereignty throughout their territory.

Québec is not alone in having adopted a colonial territorial vision to promote national unity. What is distinctive about Québec is that (1) so far, it has chosen to pursue nationhood while remaining within the framework of the Canadian state; and (2) its moment of decolonization came later than that of other nations in North America. Their common ground, though, is that Canada, the United States, and Québec all deployed a rhetoric of empty land, of a moving "frontier" across a vast, virgin wilderness, where the nation would achieve its destiny. Robert Bourassa, after launching the initiative in James Bay, made this explicit. James Bay, he said, **"**must be conquered, like the Europeans have conquered America, like the Eastern pioneers have conquered the West . . . As for us, our heritage is that of the harsh territories of the North."

Another set of ideas: Leaders of modern nation-states also attempt to unify the nation behind heroic modernist projects, very often by building great dams to harness the nation's power. Dams are real, but they are also an idea, a vision of strength and progress. Looking around the world, in Brazil, in Bangladesh, in Mexico, and in other places, there is to this day an association of dams with men, modernity, and national greatness.

Still another set of ideas that has been instrumental in achieving national unity is the centering of civil equality, civil rights, and equality under the law. All of these are, in general, good things. But on whose terms? What room, what refuge, is there for Indigenous peoples if they are treated exactly the same as everyone else? What is normative?

Take, for example, individual property rights. In the United States, the Dawes Severalty Act of 1887 took tribal lands and broke them into parcels of 160 acres to be owned by a male head of household (even if females were considered "heads of household" in that culture). Tribal lands in excess of what was needed for these individual allotments were sold off by the federal government, mostly to non-Natives. After twenty-five years, an individual Native landowner could sell the property to someone else. Many individual allotments were taken by trickery or by force. By 1934, when this program ended, two-thirds of tribal lands in the United States had been eliminated, having fallen into the hands of non-Native people. Similar things happened in Mexico, where nineteenth-century presidents directed an attack on corporate landownership in general, including large church land holdings as well as Indigenous communities.

In the United States and Canada in the 1950s and 1960s, there were initiatives to eliminate First Nations altogether, under the guise of equal rights for all citizens. It was called "termination" in the United States. In Canada, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's 1969 "White Paper" called for an end to

Indigenous status and the dissolution of their reserves, which he felt would give Native people all the "blessings" of being full members of the community with full legal equality—except again, on non-Indigenous terms.

A second major instrument for conquest and colonization, after ideas, is the transformation of nature. For example, consider California during and after the Gold Rush of 1848. To this day, you can go down the Yuba River and the American River into places where the riverbed and banks have been stripped down to a moonscape of stones. This was caused by hydraulic mining, in which huge, high-pressure hoses washed away hillsides into sluices where gold was captured. The rest of the soil washed away down these rivers, and then into the Sacramento River, where it was deposited as mercury-laced "slicks" (as farmers along the river called it) of silt. This was especially the case in the area just north of Sacramento, which was a vast mosaic of wetlands, teeming with migratory birds, fish, and game, that spread out on both sides of the Sacramento River. This environment supported a dense Indigenous population of some 30,000 Wintun, Nisenan, Koncow, and Maidu people, who tended to build their towns atop natural levees that had been built up from deposits laid down over the course of millions of years of seasonal flooding.

Figure 9: Detail from "The Sacramento Valley from the American River to Butte Creek, Surveyed and Drawn … by Lieut. Derby. September/October 1849." Note the shaded wetlands areas, as well as the fine print: "Tule" (reedy wetlands), "Road round the Tule," "Impassable," and "overflowed in winter."

The silt slicks that were washed down from the gold fields in the foothills damaged this environment. White farmers who came to the Sacramento Valley eventually put a stop to this practice, but those same farmers also took over the levee-top sites of Indigenous towns. The Native people they dislodged were killed, put to work in the fields (often as slaves), or scattered into nearby cities and remote places in the hills. One Sacramento Valley reservation was created in 1854, but its inhabitants proved sitting ducks for squatters or enslavers. It was dissolved in 1866. Eventually, in the early twentieth century, a number of local tribes were given postage stamp reserves of as little as one-third of an acre, far from their riverside homes – which at any rate had by then been transformed through "swamp" drainage and a system of levees that largely prevented the Sacramento River and its tributaries from overflowing during flood events. Their familiar wetland surroundings had disappeared, to be replaced by a desiccated landscape of plowed and irrigated fields.

Figure 10 (left): U.S. Geological Survey party in Tule Swamps. Sacramento Valley, California. Photo credit: USGS Denver Library Photographic Collection). Figure 11 (right): Laying [leveling] tules in preparation for burning. Photo credit: Sacramento Archives & Museum Collection.

Another example is Celilo Falls, which for centuries had been an important salmon fishing place on the Columbia River and the site of annual gatherings of thousands of Native people from all over the Northwest. But the Columbia River today is less a river than is a series of dams and reservoirs, with only short stretches of free-running water. Celilo Falls was drowned in 1957 by rising waters behind a newly constructed dam. Descendants of the people who fished at Celilo Falls remain nearby, but it simply isn't the same.

Figure 12: Dipnet fishing at the Cul-De-Sac of Celilo Falls (Columbia River) around 1957, Oregon, Pacific Northwest, USA. Photo credit: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, accessed at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Corps-engineers-archives_celilo_falls_color.jpg#file

There is one additional larger force, another set of extra-provincial transnational patterns, to be discussed. Remember Québec's Quiet Revolution? That statist, modernizing decolonization movement of the 1960s and 1970s that stressed cultural and economic nationalism? Well, Indigenous nations all over Canada and the United States have been having their own quiet revolutions, deploying law, litigation, and political action to insist on the enforcement of treaty terms and exercise sovereignty within their communities. Tribal governments, now largely organized along lines that allow them to exercise political power within the framework of local, provincial/state, and federal governments, give Indigenous nations tools for survival that were not previously available to them.

Tribal governments today work to restore language, culture, and environments, often paid for by initiatives rooted in economic nationalism, such as tourism, logging, or casinos. Survivors of the California genocide, for example, have used profits from their casinos to purchase tens of thousands of acres of land in the Sacramento Valley and nearby foothills. They make money by farming it, but use different practices than most non-Native growers—for example, by planting drought-resistant olive trees rather than thirsty almond orchards. Similarly, there are tribes in the Pacific Northwest that rely on timber

for income, but use logging practices that are more sustainable than those of non-Native corporations harvesting timber in the same region.

Which brings me back to Eeyou Istchee. The Cree Nation, too, engages in economic nationalism. To take but one example its airline, Air Creebec, serves the region's towns on a schedule that considers the needs of community members. Air Creebec also brings in tourists, fishers, and hunters, who visit on Cree terms. Visitors must hire a Cree guide when on Category One land, and are restricted from visiting some places. Revenue from tourism and other sources, moreover, goes to supporting traditional Cree ways, particularly around forest life. The income is being used, among other things, to support Cree trappers and to get youth into the woods.

Let me conclude simply by saying that the story of James Bay in recent decades is both a big story and a very local story. It is a Cree story; it is a Québec story; it is a Canadian story. It is an American story, and an international one. It is a very modern story of the nexus of hydroelectricity, Indigenous histories, and a prime example of the often-invisible networks in which we are all enmeshed.

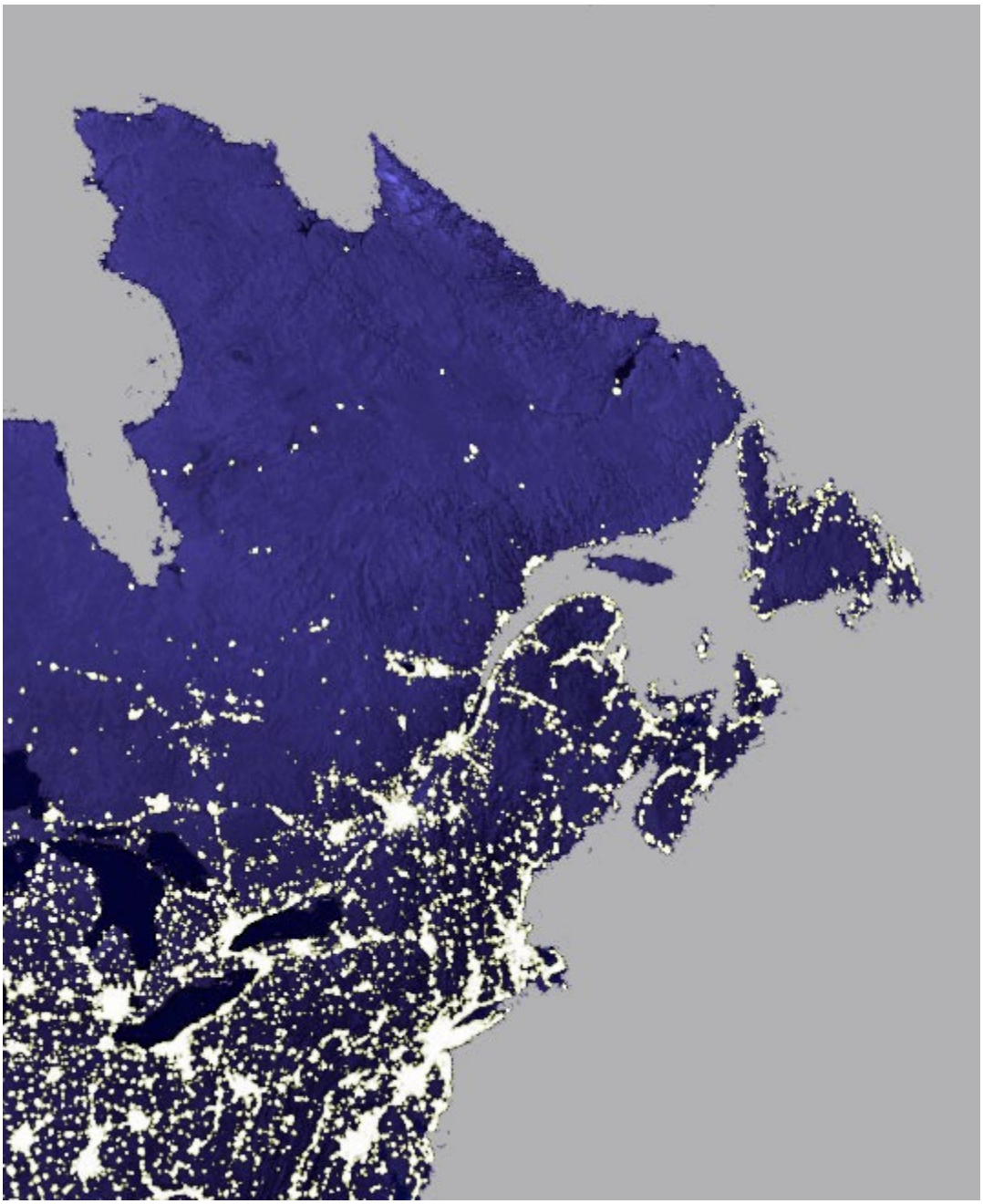

Figure 13: Dark woods and brightly lit cities in northeastern North America. James Bay is near the left margin, midway down; the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River run diagonally from lower left to the center of the image. The bright spots to the east of James Bay are primarily at hydroelectric dams, generating stations, and supporting facilities (see Figure 1). Source: Adapted by Hans Carlson from NASA's Earth at Night collection, and used by his permission.