

Tsa'walk and T'aaq-Wiihak Ha'wiih: Surfacing Epistemological and Ontological Presuppositions Embedded in Indigenous Knowledge Systems

In 2009 six *Nuu-chah-nulth* communities won a provincial supreme court case permitting fishing and the sale of fish in their territories. *T'aaq-wiihak*, mandated to implement *Nuu-chah-nulth* fishing rights, uses a management principle “Aquatic resources are managed on an ecosystem basis consistent with the principles of *Hishukish Tsa'walk* (everything is connected, everything is one) and *lisaak* (respect).”

Tsa'walk moves beyond western distinctions between epistemology, ontology and axiology speaking to the practices and techniques of *Nuu-chah-nulth* identity and subject formation.

Tsa'walk insists that everything is connected, the non-physical preceding the physical; this can be understood as a practical ontological claim informing identity and subject formation. It challenges the idea of space as a stage, or place as landscape for events, emphasizing practices that traverse between the physical and non-physical. This brings a new set of complex axiological relations into focus when the noun and verb portion of ‘to fish as formerly’ or to fish for food social and ceremonial purposes, is discussed within the context of consultation and accommodation.

This presentation proposes that few practical improvements in consultation and accommodation can occur if these processes continue to operate without challenging operative western distinctions between epistemology, ontology and axiology and illustrate indigenous alternatives.

(Saul Milne – AFS 2015)