

Book Review

Luby, Brittany. 2020. *Dammed: The Politics of Loss and Survival in Anishinaabe Territory*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 256 pages.

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Brittany Luby opens *Dammed* by positioning herself as an Anishinaabe woman and historian within the context of her book. Beginning with an overview of the book, Luby discusses the role of the Winnipeg River as a provider of food and resources, as a site for hydroelectric development, and as a marker of boundary lines. She also discusses the resulting adaptation strategies of Anishinaabe families as the river was altered in the name of economic progress. Describing the cultural and economic background along the river, she introduces some of the problems experienced by local people. Luby highlights the opposing views of water held by the Anishinaabe and the settlers; one group wanted to protect relationships with the environment, and the other wanted to harness the power of water for monetary gain. The importance of fish is emphasized, as guaranteed fishing rights and access to water were fundamental to the creation of Treaty 3 in 1873. The introduction of the Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario (HEPCO) led to a redefinition of water rights, which led to Anishinaabe resistance and rejection of changes to reserve lands.

As hydroelectric development progressed, the shape of the water and its reliability changed. The United States and Canada attempted to manage complaints about changing water levels across their shared border by forming the International Joint Commission, but Anishinaabeg were excluded from discussions. Winter ice road travel became unsafe as the Kenora and Norman dams disrupted flow patterns and weakened ice density. Fluctuating water levels reduced access to food, especially *Manomin*, and increased the need for wage labour. Those seeking full-time or seasonal employment were discriminated against in the town of Kenora, but in 1956, HEPCO needed a large number of

general labourers who could “work for pay on the development of the Whitedog Falls Generating Station” (Luby 2020, 100). By 1958, construction on the project was complete and employment opportunities dwindled.

Since 1879, the Dalles Rapids have been used to dispose of human sewage and industrial pollutants. When HEPCO modified the rapids by blasting in 1950, the river’s flow was still able to remove the waste, but in 1958, the Whitedog Falls Generating Station created a reservoir that prevented the waste from escaping. This impoundment resulted in high levels of organic loading, which led to oxygen depletion and the presence of chemical compounds in the water that are toxic to living things. “Of greatest concern were the wood waste dumped from the wooden waste conduit into the river and wood fibre rubbed off trees during shipment since they triggered mercury methylation and thus compromised Anishinaabe food sources” (Luby 2020:134). Water quality was not protected by environmental law, and as a result, the water quality standards applied to residents of the Dalles 38C Indian Reserve were not the same as those promised to non-Indigenous residents of the land.

Read as a narrative rather than a historical account, this book can be understood by a wide range of people. I believe it will be well received by all who read it, provided they have an interest in non-fiction dealing with current and ongoing issues. Clear language is used, which increases the overall level of understanding. This supports the flow of the story Luby tells and encourages readers to continue their journey from cover to cover without stopping. The book is divided into chapters with subheadings, and the depth of the story is enhanced as each chapter builds on the themes presented in the introductory chapter.

Pictures, charts and maps are occasionally used throughout the book to illustrate the reality of the places and times being discussed. A picture on page 47 shows an active ice road, illustrating one environment that became unsafe. Pictures and charts show the fluctuating water levels and changing rapids that led to the contamination and destruction of food sources. By including these visuals, Luby supports her argument in a way that evokes emotion and further understanding. Connections between images and locations on the maps (pages 26 and 27) show readers specific events and practices, such as drying fish, travelling to berry patches, or disposing of waste.

Luby’s message is clear. We need to learn from the past in order to make informed decisions about our collective future, for the sake of the environment and everyone who lives in it. That is why I recommend this book to everyone.

It offers a perspective on historical and ongoing environmental racism that is important for all ages to understand, especially those who have the opportunity to influence the interests and actions of the next generation. The late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century along the Winnipeg River was a period that will be remembered for economic development, particularly in the post-war period. From another perspective, it will be remembered for the deliberate actions taken to remove the Anishinaabe presence from the land and water. In 1873, they had guaranteed fishing rights and government-recognized control over water resources. These rights were changed when rapids along the Winnipeg River became convenient for HEPCO.

How can formal agreements with Canadian governments be validated in the future if they have been so easily changed in the past? When we consider the lack of inclusive discussions about water management and the pollution from industrial development, it becomes clear that the well-being of Indigenous communities has not been a priority for Canada, settlers, or industrialists. Brittany Luby describes this in a clear and concise manner, keeping the audience in mind as she paints a picture of the Anishinaabe experiences on the Winnipeg River. I recommend *Dammed* in the hope that we will all take the consequences of environmental degradation to heart.