

Appraising Cole Harris' *Making Native Space*

Keith Thor Carlson, Sarah Carter, Kate McPherson,
and James Murton, with a response by Cole Harris

The views and appraisals presented in this forum are slightly revised and expanded versions of papers delivered at a panel discussion at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association in Winnipeg, 2004. That session was organized by CHA programme committee co-chairs, Robin Brownlie and Adel Perry. Their aim, as stated in the original invitations, was to encourage an examination of Cole Harris' Sir John A. McDonald Prize-winning book *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (UBC Press, 2002) from a range of perspectives by people with interest in land, colonization, and Aboriginal people. Keith Thor Carlson, Sarah Carter, Kate McPherson, and James Murton are grateful to Drs. Brownlie and Perry for having taken this initiative and hope that the critical analyses presented below lives up to their initial expectations. Cole Harris' gracious response concludes the discussion.

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Keith Thor Carlson, University of Saskatchewan

Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance and Reserves in British Columbia is a remarkable work of scholarship that reflects and reveals Cole Harris' serious and extended ruminations on not only evidence and interpretation, but on narrative, meta-narratives, and theory. Those of us interested in B.C. Aboriginal issues should be grateful that Harris chose this topic at this point in his career. It speaks across disciplinary boundaries and across cultural divides to a wide-ranging and varied audience. It readily builds upon earlier Pacific Coast historical scholarship in a way that is not only constructive, but is earnestly deferential and inclusive, all the while being both original and bold. It reflects, therefore, not just good scholarship, but generous scholarship. It is best conceived, I believe, as a capstone work in a long line of scholarship on what has generally come to be known as the "Indian Land Question," but in filling this role, and in laying to rest a number of intransigent historical debates, it simultaneously becomes a solid foundation upon which a new generation of scholarship, asking different questions about indigenous people and their history, can be built.

Making Native Space tells the story of how Aboriginal people came to be “put in their place” on tiny marginal reserves so that the vast majority of the province’s geography could be opened for development and alienated by Crown and third party interests through a host of different tenures. In doing this, Harris is engaging what is perhaps the most lively and vigorous sub-field in West Coast historiography, and he does this essentially by making geography the focus of his historical analysis.

Making Native Space relates the story of the creation of lines that physically separate Aboriginal people and Aboriginal space from non-Native people and space. It is about boundaries and boundary maintenance. Harris refers to the line separating Indian reserves from the rest of the province as “the primal line” in B.C. And while we might debate the merit of applying the term “primal,” few can doubt that this line represents one of the most divisive social, racial, and political boundaries in Canadian society. As such, *Making Native Space* problematizes what is already a complicated issue—and in so doing makes clear that there are no simple solutions to the vexing issues facing Aboriginals and newcomers on Canada’s Pacific Coast. And yet it is a hopeful analysis that suggests solutions even as it exposes abuses and exploitation.

There are many things about this work for which I am grateful, not the least of which is the broader political and ideological context that Harris creates for his analysis of the development of Pacific Coast Indian policy. I was genuinely surprised to learn, for example, that the mid-nineteenth century British Colonial Office—that nexus of nineteenth-century Imperial administrative authority and bureaucratic complexity—was such a small operation consisting of little more than a few clerks guided by the wide-minded theoretician Herman Merivale. In placing B.C. colonial history within this Imperial context, Harris’ work does more than any other of which I am aware to explain why settlers on the Canadian western frontier had such latitude in shaping and implementing Indian policy.

Additionally, I appreciate the role that Harris has played in outlining the multiplicity of ideologies, philosophies, and vested interests behind the non-Native attitudes toward Aboriginal title in mid-nineteenth century B.C. His discussion of the Catholic Oblate missionaries’ unsuccessful efforts to float an idea of Aboriginal title that was derived from neither Lochean notions of invested labour, nor Hugo Grotius’ writings about the need for enclosures, but rather from Thomas Aquinas’ theology that property rights derived from God, is a powerful reminder that identities, ideas, and alliances are complex and multi-faceted, and that sometimes

those non-Natives who were at the forefront of certain assimilation activities were also at the vanguard of advocating for certain other Native rights in language that was the most meaningful and intelligible to Aboriginal people.

Beyond the Oblates, this point is perhaps nowhere so clearly illustrated as in Harris' extended discussion of Gilbert Malcolm Sproat. Within the pages of *Making Native Space*, Sproat (colonist, entrepreneur, and Indian Reserve Commissioner) is correctly shown to have been a complicated figure who struggled against his settler peer group and community ethos to articulate an idea for an Indian land policy that was fair, predictable, and, most important, empowering to indigenous people, allowing them meaningful participation in its construction, implementation, and operation. Harris shows us how Sproat himself became a casualty of B.C. Indian policy and politics. To bring into focus an even more human face for Sproat, it would have been nice to see a more extensive discussion of some of the contradictions in his character and actions. What are we to make, for example, of the man who was one of the strongest advocates of Aboriginal land rights and the right to Aboriginal self-governance, but who was also prominent in the movement to outlaw the potlatch ceremony and sacred tamanawas dance?

As is illustrated in his discussion of Sproat, Harris is not afraid to emphasize the importance of individuals in history. In this regard, his writing is in part a vindication of the interpretations and approaches of the anthropologist Wilson Duff and historian Robin Fisher.¹ This is not to say that Harris always sees things as Duff and Fisher did, but that like them he recognizes and emphasizes the value of biographical analysis and the potential of individuals to shape historical outcomes. Colonists, in *Making Native Space*, are human, with all that implies.

Along these lines, I appreciate Harris' decision to re-engage the debate over the motivations and intentions and actions of Governor James Douglas as they apply to Indian land policy. His clarification of certain points, and his drawing of attention to Douglas' own words on the matter written ten years into his retirement are important in the contemporary climate of stalled treaty negotiations. In this vein, I wish that Harris had perhaps gone farther and incorporated Aboriginal oral histories about Douglas and certain other colonial figures (many examples of which are captured in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century ethnographies and government transcripts). The transcripts of the *Royal Commission on Indian Affairs in British Columbia for 1913-1915* (which Harris makes

extensive use of in other contexts), in particular, provide numerous accounts of what Aboriginal people living in the early twentieth century understood to have been the intentions of Douglas in the mid-nineteenth. Collectively, these Indigenous sources provide an additional perspective on this important matter that largely corroborates Cole’s conclusions—and so add another dimension to this old chestnut in B.C. history.

This is not to imply that an Aboriginal voice is absent from *Making Native Space*. Indeed, the pages are full of quotes from Indigenous people, most of which are immediate accounts of Aboriginal responses to colonial incursions as recorded by various government agents, or as revealed through Aboriginal petitions and delegations. No single book can do everything, and Harris’ does so many things better than most. He has constructed a compelling account of an important aspect of Native-Newcomer relations, and he has recounted this narrative in a manner and form that I know many Aboriginal people approve of, find relevant, and endorse. Beyond this, its resounding academic endorsement—reflected in awards like the MacDonald Prize—indicate the extent to which scholars have embraced Harris’ analysis and conclusions. What more could a scholar ask?

And yet, of course, there is always more to tell. Harris can take great pride, I think, in knowing that *Making Native Space* raises many new questions—questions that we would not have been able to ask, or at least not asked so clearly, had he not so effectively answered so many others.

I anticipate that people will now start to problematize the idea of Native space as presented in *Making Native Space*, and, indeed, I suspect that this is exactly the sort of thing of which Harris would approve and encourage. The definition of Native space as Indian reserve inevitably privileges a western institution and administration (the Canadian state and the Department of Indian Affairs) and a western cartographic definition of what constitutes space (physical geography). There can be no doubt that the space called Indian reserve and the great beyond known to Aboriginal people as non-reserve land are important demarcated spaces with real and urgent meaning to Aboriginal people. They are not, however, necessarily as clear or entrenched as a reading of *Making Native Space* might lead one to believe.

Aboriginal people continue to relate to, interact with, and assert and exercise title to land outside of their reserves. Even alienated land—as the Gustafsen Lake stand-off has recently shown—sometimes reverts to, and becomes again, Native space. Highways and railroad lines, when

they are blocked by camouflaged “warriors,” fields and forests when occupied by berry-gathering elders, swirling “back-eddies” of torrent water in the Fraser Canyon when Native fishers are catching migrating sockeye salmon—these are all Native spaces, even if they are sometimes or even simultaneously something else.

And, of course, there are metaphysical spaces that lie somewhere beyond the reserve boundary that continue to be valued and cherished as Native space by Native people. The land of the dead, the domain of spirit helpers, the aquatic world of the “water babies,” are beyond the realm where government surveyors can effectively exclude indigenous people. Even the Christian missionaries, who tried to alienate this domain, have largely failed. That more than one lower Fraser River Stó:lō elder, for example, asserts that the ancient Transformer Xa:ls, who “made the world right” through miraculous transformations and journeys to the spirit world, was, in fact, “the little Christ” who came here and did these things after he finished his work in the Middle East, attests to the continuing relevance of indigenous metaphysical space, and suggest, perhaps, that Hawthorne and Cairn’s ideas about “citizen plus” might have a parallel worth exploring in the concept of “Christian Plus.”²²

Stories, of course, can be in and of themselves a kind of Native space. Even land and heavens transformed by skyscrapers and urban sprawl often continue to have an indigenous tenure in the stories of what was there and what happened there before the white man arrived. Sometimes these stories can find resonance in the non-Native world, as when the Coast Salish transformer rock at Xaytem near Mission City was saved from development because of an elder’s story that told of how the giant boulder was once three chiefs, transformed into stone because they failed to share certain types of knowledge with their community. This site is not an Indian reserve, but by being designated a National Historical Site and made into a provincial park it is definitely a Native space, controlled, managed, and used by Aboriginal people to promote understanding of who they are—and how they view their space in B.C.

More readily appreciated “off-reserve” Native space has also been carved out of other forms of non-Native tenure. The system of provincially registered trap lines, the tenuous federal Aboriginal Fishing Strategy agreements, and the non-reserve land included as co-management spheres within the Nisga’a treaty settlement area are only some of the most prominent examples. These expressions, along with ongoing treaty negotiations in other parts of the province and the movement toward the

implementation of various treaty-related Interim Measure Agreements, indicate that *de facto* Native space can sometimes be secured within a *de jure* system of non-recognition. The province does not necessarily have to acknowledge Aboriginal title to recognize Aboriginal title.

If, indeed, post-*Making Native Space* scholarship eventually defines space more problematically, then we might also anticipate future studies that delve deeper into the complexities of Aboriginal identities and actions. If, as Harris has shown, not all colonialists were necessarily bad or exploitative (i.e. Douglas and Sproat), but in fact behaved in complex and sometimes contradictory ways in their relationships with Natives and newcomer alike, then it is to be anticipated that future studies will reveal similarly complicating and sometimes disconcerting patterns and expressions among indigenous historical actors. Some Aboriginal people took advantage of colonial opportunities to advance interests that are not necessarily, in hindsight, in the interest of defending Native rights as defined today. At least some Aboriginal people of the early twentieth century, for instance, were recorded as having attempted to use the provincial land tenure system to secure fee simple title to productive off-reserve fishing sites that were otherwise the hereditary property of competing Native families. At least one hereditary “chief” during the colonial era objected to the idea of a communal Indian reserve and insisted to government surveyors that the land should be registered in his name alone, so that he could determine internal use and tenure. Moreover, like Sproat, some Aboriginal people campaigned vigorously to suppress the potlatch. Their motivations are, as yet, only partially understood. Coastal class/status distinctions, interior residence mobility, and traditional gender/sex relations all offer rich avenues of historical enquiry, all of which have geographic expressions and dimensions that will benefit from Harris’ work.

Perhaps what all these examples point to is the path that Cole Harris has helped blaze toward making an indigenous space for a new historical narrative told more from the Aboriginal perspective where newcomers are fit into an indigenous story, and not the other way around. Certainly his work will serve as a solid foundation upon which such studies could be built.

Notes

¹ Wilson Duff, *The Indian History of British Columbia, Volume 1: The Impact of the White Man* (Victoria, BC: Royal British Columbia Museum, 1969); Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977; second edition 1992).

- ² Harry Hawthorne, Kenneth M. Lysyk, and Alan C. Cairns, eds., *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies*. 2 Vol (Ottawa: Indian Affairs Branch, 1966-67); Alan C. Cairns, *Citizen Plus: Aboriginal People and the Canadian State* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

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A well-worn academic word of wisdom is that you should never take a job in British Columbia because your academic productivity will plummet. The warm climate saps your vitality, and you will likely take up wind surfing or beach volleyball, and forget about writing the books and articles that ought to absorb your attention. But the work of scholars of British Columbia for the last decade or more, especially in the field of Aboriginal or postcolonial history, demonstrates that this wisdom is only perpetrated by those jealous and frozen, and not fortunate enough to live in B.C. Some of Canada's most innovative, energetic scholars are found here, including, but not limited to, Jean Barman, Mary-Ellen Kelm, John Lutz, Dianne Newell, Arthur J. Ray, Elizabeth Vibert, Wendy Wickwire, ex-British Columbian Adele Perry, and, of course, Cole Harris.

Making Native Space is a beautifully written book, a rare achievement in the academic world. As the poet John Newlove has said, when serving on adjudication committees he gave prizes to the poems that he was most jealous of, and I'm jealous of many passages in this book. On almost every page there are enviable ways of putting things. One early example is from the introduction:

Discontinuous as it was, the line separating the Indian reserves from the rest became, in a sense, the primal line on the land of British Columbia, the one that facilitated or constrained all others. This line is, in its way, the province's internal boundary between the desert and the sown, though in this case the extent of the desert (the land largely beyond reach and use) was a vastly one-sided colonial construction (p. xviii).

Or when Cole states succinctly what the book is about: "The point is this: Indian reserves were at the heart of colonialism in British Columbia, and depended on the powers that sustained it. If one seeks to understand

how colonialism functioned in the province, there is no better place to look" (xxv).

Also particularly apt is Coles' description of the "brave and remarkable" Gilbert Sproat, to whom the book is dedicated ("a colonizer who eventually listened"), as "a sort of Don Quixote, tilting at more windmills than any one man can handle." Sproat attempted to continue James Douglas' treaty policy, adding conceptions of self-government and education, and he questioned the use of gunboats and repression, but he was out of tune with the settler mentality of his time, although he remains "a poignant reminder that colonialism speaks with many voices ... and that there were alternatives to the dark path we have taken" (137). I argued in the book *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada* that there were moments on the prairies when it looked like Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people might be able to establish progressive partnerships, to share in the land and resources, but that this hope evaporated by 1900. It was intriguing to me to find a parallel development in British Columbia, exemplified best by Sproat. But here, too, as Cole writes, "Cultural hegemony had triumphed over a tentative, emerging idea of multiple modernities with consequences writ to this day all over the moral landscape of British Columbia" (166).

There is much talk in social science and humanities circles today about the need for interdisciplinary studies, and *Making Native Space* shows that this is already being done with great success. This book serves as a model for interdisciplinarity, as it combines geography, history, anthropology, postcolonial studies, and more. The excellent maps are a striking feature of the book. Cole is not hesitant, unlike many Canadian historians, to see British Columbia's history as imperial history, and devotes an entire chapter to the imperial background, including Australia and New Zealand, the province's two closest colonial antecedents.

The research is thorough, detailed and dense, and as a result there are numerous fresh, even startling insights. For example, I have always thought of Canada's Indian policy as originating in the east and emanating westward, but *Making Native Space* makes me re-think this assumption. Were clauses of the Indian Act influenced by what had been happening in British Columbia? However ineffectual the clause was in practice, the Indian Act provided for a process of reserve land "surrender" or reduction that necessitated band consultation and a vote. Perhaps this was in reaction to the lack of any such process in British Columbia that caused deep dissatisfaction. I also did not know before reading this book about

an 1877 near-uprising in the Okanagan, where, by mid-July of that year, Sproat concluded that “peace hung by a thread.” Did this threat of a military situation in the interior influence the timing and nature of Treaty 7 at Blackfoot Crossing in September of that same year? On the other hand, did events in British Columbia have an influence on the way First Nations of the prairies approach their treaties in the 1870s, for Cole notes that news about land policy moved rapidly in Native circles. I also gained a new perspective on the Dominion government from *Making Native Space*. For a few years and a few pages of this book, Ottawa’s bureaucrats appear progressive and enlightened as they attempt to persuade the White settlers of British Columbia to make treaties, and to be more generous in granting reserve land. But the book documents the consistent resentment toward any interference in their affairs by a distant authority.

The attention given to the resistance of Aboriginal people is a great strength of this book. I particularly appreciated the lengthy quotations from speakers, with little interpretation and interjection, that provide sustained glimpses of deep grievances over the loss of ancestral land, suspicions, strategies, and of Aboriginal conceptions of the land and resources. There are many eloquent statements “best read as poems” (239). It is interesting to learn of how often Queen Victoria was invoked by spokesmen who referred to themselves as her “children,” as in the prairie treaties, despite the absence of treaty relationships. As one chief petitioned, “We know the Queen does not want us to die, you told us, and others have told us she is good, then we [want] her to help us as her children, and we will be good too like her” (185).

I admire the very succinct dismissal of the often simplistic arguments that are made about Native “agency” mitigating the effects of colonialism. Cole writes that “In recent academic analyses of contact processes and colonialism it has become fashionable to emphasize Native agency and even, in extreme forms of this position, to insist that Natives and others met approximately as equals in, as it were, colonial theatres of reciprocity. This, however, is wrong, at least in British Columbia.” (206)

Cole’s willingness to address the present, to propose solutions to the current land question in British Columbia also makes this a unique study. Most historians remain highly reluctant to engage with the present-day, even though the public—my neighbours in Calgary, for example—want to know much more about current concerns than about the past. I found the approach of the “new” Western historians of the United States refreshing in this regard. In defining what made their approach new, Patricia Nelson

Limerick wrote that they “surrender the conventional, never-very-convincing claim of an omniscient, neutral objectivity ... [they] admit that it is OK for scholars to care about their subjects, both in the past and the present, and to put that concern on record.”¹ Cole does not hesitate to show that he cares about both the past and present, and to put that on record. Native people, Cole writes, “are here in a more rooted sense than any of the rest of us, their former lands are the basis on which the whole country has been built, and the case, in justice, for redressing the drastic imbalances of colonialism is overwhelming” (303).

This ambitious and accomplished book establishes a foundation for studies that can now take off in new directions. The issue of gender and land policy could be pursued. Gender ideals were at the heart of the White settler mentality described here, and this could be emphasized. In comparative colonial perspective, there are some intriguing divergences that could be explored. In South Australia, for example, land was granted to Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal men as an inducement to “legal” marriage and to cultivation. A broader comparative or transnational approach to the issue of land and Aboriginal people could build on this foundation. There are theories that Aboriginal people of seaboard locations were much more quickly and disastrously affected by European colonization, and some discussion of these broader patterns would have been interesting. But it is difficult to find anything to criticize in such a brilliant book, so deserving of the Canadian Historical Association’s John A. Macdonald prize.

Note

¹Patricia Nelson Limerick, “What on Earth is the New Western History?” in *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, eds. Patricia Nelson Limerick et al (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 86-7.

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Kathryn McPherson, York University

In forums such as this it is very tempting for commentators, like me, to focus on what an author should have included in a study—to identify the “lack” in a particular piece of work. Of course, the author, then, quite correctly, could reply that no one study can do everything, choices must be made, and the book was long enough as it was! In the case of Cole Harris’ *Making Native Space* such a response would be completely justified. *Mak-*

ing Native Space is a magnificent and exhaustive study, highly deserving of the Canadian Historical Association's John A. Macdonald Prize. Indeed, *Making Native Space* leaves the reader drained by the incredible litany of maneuvers, machinations, deceit, and plain stubbornness of government officials and local citizens, all to deny British Columbia's Aboriginal peoples land or justice. At the same time, Harris takes the discussion well beyond historical analysis to address how recognizing patterns of past exploitation helps us craft contemporary strategies to achieve the economic health of Canadian Aboriginal peoples and communities.

In making these valuable historical, theoretical, and political contributions, *Making Native Space* also suggests areas of further analysis and study, particularly around how gender shaped the historical processes that Harris delineates. At first glance, gender seems an unlikely analytic theme to pursue. Very few women made their way into the documentary evidence that Harris uncovered. In this theatre of power, the cast was almost entirely male. But Joan Scott's now well-worn observation that gender is present even when women are not reminds us that gender organized the activities of men and women, and that we should question the meaning of silences and absences, as well as documented actions. For instance, I was struck by the ease with which, as white men, government officials could traverse the British Columbia countryside, moving in and out of Aboriginal communities and territories without any apparent concern for safety or invitation. And when Aboriginal leaders traveled to Victoria to petition the British Columbia government, it seemed that they, too, were all men. Following Scott, we can see that the absence of women is revealing. In a region where the mobility of women constituted a threat to the social order—think of the efforts to cloister the women on the Tynemouth “bride ship” or the sexual stigma assigned to First Nation women because they moved in and out of western Canadian urban centres—it was a masculine privilege to cross the province's social, cultural, and geographic boundaries.

Masculine privilege was reinforced within the system of land ownership that government officials were trying to impose. It is telling, I think, that none of the contemporary theorists whom Harris consulted nor the historical actors who crafted colonial land policy explicitly acknowledged that colonial land policy sought to reproduce an economy based on patriarchal ownership of land with individual male title as the norm. The Dominion Lands Act of 1872 enshrined this principle in federal law and policy, while campaigns to promote immigration and revocation of

dower rights were designed to facilitate white, male property ownership in the Canadian West.

Even with this emphasis on male-owned private property, white women clearly shared in the material advantages that settler society's legal regime and land policy produced. Female "pioneers" joined their male kinfolk in colonizing Native land, physically (in cases where women bought, inherited, or homesteaded land) and ideologically. They might, though, have produced a slightly different articulation of colonial ideology. For example, *Making Native Space* introduces us to Mrs. Bertha Fadden, secretary treasurer of the Upper Sumas Women's Institute. In 1915, Fadden petitioned the McKenna McBride Commission to release a piece of Aboriginal reserve land so that the white community could create a park for the annual Empire Day picnic. In the Institute's campaign to create "a prosperous and contented community," Fadden criticized her Aboriginal neighbours for what she perceived to be a their failure to use reserve land productively. Declaring that Aboriginal use of land was "unfair to us builders of and home makers in this country," Fadden thus entered into the public discussion of colonial land policy. In doing so, Fadden and the Women's Institute members for whom she spoke effectively claimed a stake in Canadian nation-building, despite the fact that, as women, they were still politically disenfranchised. Native land and land policy thus became physical and ideological terrain for a kind of women's politics. Whether this was "feminist" politics is a matter of considerable debate, but there is no doubt that such political interventions constituted a means to gender the nation and the empire. White women's claim to "home" thus referred to the house itself and women's household labour—they were self-proclaimed "home makers"—and to the national "home" that they were "building." This female-specific rhetoric of colonialism may not have altered the overall story that Harris told, but it does matter to the wider history of colonialism and white women's politics.

In the same paragraph where we meet Mrs. Fadden, Harris also cites "another home make, Mrs. Joseph Gabriel speaking for the women on the Langely reserve." Gabriel claimed that what the McKenna McBride Commission should be doing was cleaning up the drinking water on the Fraser River. In the sequencing of Harris' argument, documents generated by Fadden and Gabriel are presented together, almost as if these two women were actually talking to each other—Fadden complained about the failure of her Aboriginal neighbours to make land productive and Gabriel responded that white settlers and government had polluted

the environment. The women were not, however, in dialogue, or at least not in that order (Gabriel's letter was dated two days before Fadden's). Regardless of sequencing, this evidence makes Harris' point that white and Aboriginal women might have held very different priorities as to how "homes" were built. But this documentation also raises the thorny question of how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women managed to not speak to each other—a historical absence that is curious given the physical proximity in which some of them lived, though perhaps not surprising given the profound cultural and social distance between them.

Gabriel's letter raises a further interesting issue. She was speaking "for the women in the Langely reserve." Why did the documents insist that she was speaking "for the women?" Jo Ann Fiske and others have documented the significant leadership roles that women have assumed in First Nations communities, past and present. Why would Gabriel not speak for her whole community? Harris offers no evidence of white officials consulting with women as community leaders or chiefs. Was this the result of white patriarchal norms, that government officials could not "see" female leaders as legitimate community representatives? Or did First Nations communities not trust white men to treat First Nations women fairly (a completely understandable position given the history of Euro-Canadian men's sexual exploitation of Native women)? Did this exclusion of women from negotiations over land undermine women's traditional claim to political leadership in their own communities? Would women have negotiated differently, and over different issues, than their male peers? And did Mrs. Gabriel really seek to only speak for the women, or was she only permitted to do so by Euro-Canadian conventions? This question of convention is particularly salient given that Gabriel identified herself by her husband's name—was that decision an effort to achieve per white definitions of feminine respectability and sexual-social propriety?

Despite these silences and unanswered questions in the documentary record, Gabriel's testimony alerts readers to the ongoing importance of land and the physical environment to women in Aboriginal communities and economies. Women's particular relationship to harvesting berries, herbs, and vegetables must have been profoundly affected by the restrictions on land use that colonial administrators imposed and by white agriculture that appropriated land and disturbed local eco-systems. Yet these important and legitimate economic and cultural activities were silenced in the records of land negotiations and it is important that we not sustain that silence when we discuss contemporary solutions to Aboriginal economic

change. Likewise, as John Lutz and others have shown, women’s waged labour and market production has been essential to the survival of First Nations’ communities, but it was often seasonal, casual, required limited capital investment and, in the case of prostitution, was not socially or legally sanctioned as legitimate. When we think of contemporary solutions to the economic problems in Aboriginal communities, we need to put the full-range of women’s economic activities (before and during colonization) on that agenda.

Placing land at the centre of economic policy, as Harris does, also demands that we acknowledge Aboriginal women’s contested relationship to reserve land in Canada. The racist and sexist provisions of the 1876 Indian Act stripped Native women of their status (including rights to resources) when they married non-status men. Their children also lost those rights. Over time, then, large populations of people who identified as Aboriginal had been alienated from the resource base of many Aboriginal communities. Campaigns by First Nations women in the 1970s and 1980s rectified some of these inequities. The histories of sex-based discrimination and women’s campaigns to restore their rights are equally important to our understanding of how resources have and should be organized for Aboriginal communities.

As we extend Harris’ discussion, then, to ask how a specific focus on women helps us expose the gendered assumptions that underlay colonial policy and to pose new questions about what “equity” means in our rethinking of Aboriginal resource bases, we must also examine how our categories of analysis, more generally, are gendered. Here I turn to socialist-feminist questions about the relationship of reproduction to production, a relationship too often ignored in economic theory. How did reproduction relate to production in the initial allocation of land, and how do those two concepts reframe our strategies for reallocation of resources today? In *Making Native Space*, Harris insists, quite correctly, that Aboriginal communities need sufficient, productive land. There is no doubt that Aboriginal peoples are entitled to a resource base sufficient to produce an adequate standard of living as measured in economic terms, but what about standard of living measured in other terms? What about the need for “unproductive” or “reproductive” space? Aboriginal communities need resources sufficient to ensure cultural and spiritual, as well as economic, sustenance.

For example, Miriam McNab’s excellent analysis of the women from Pinehouse Lake, Saskatchewan, reveals a gender-specific pattern whereby

women (sooner and more frequently than their male peers) have moved to Saskatoon, which the women believe offers superior jobs, education, and health care. McNab shows that those women seek to reproduce their language and cultural values within urban spaces. The women also like to return to Pinehouse Lake to renew family and community ties, and to enjoy the “quietness” of northern living. Such research suggests that this type of “non-productive” use of community resources might be equally important to many members of Aboriginal communities. As well, issues of “reproduction” relate not only to cultural reproduction, but also generational reproduction. Many of the women in McNab’s study placed high priority on securing greater opportunities for their children. In other research, Jo-Anne Fiske has shown how laws pertaining to family relationships, parenting of children, and adoption have been central to some First Nations communities’ critique of colonialism. But Fiske’s research also suggests that in some cases mothers and grandmothers may have very different relationships to family law than do community leaders.

These examples, drawn from scholarship on Canada’s Aboriginal women, reflect the kinds of avenues for future research that are opened up by the important research presented in *Making Native Space*. Out of Cole Harris’ comprehensive and detailed analysis come new and challenging questions regarding how Aboriginal communities may win long-overdue economic and social justice. As scholars extend and build on *Making Native Space*, how gender shapes our analysis needs to be central.

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James Murton, University of British Columbia

One of the nice things that I have found about Cole Harris is that his focus on the complexities of the local can give new understanding of long-familiar places. On the edge of the highway leading out of Port Alberni, B.C., where I grew up, a sign once stood announcing the reserve of the Hupacasath First Nation. But I could never figure out where the reserve was. The sign sat right next to the river, and on the other side of the road were mostly houses and a gas station. Reading *Making Native Space* made me realize that this is likely a fishing reserve, a small patch of land designed only to allow the Hupacasath access to the river. Not that they could sell the fish to make a living. This was, until recently, prohibited under federal law, though I am sure that it was not a coincidence that salmon would appear in our freezer shortly after one of my father’s former

Native students came to the back door after dark. The Hupacasath’s tiny reserve, in other words, offered them little more than the prospect of a bare subsistence eked out on the margins of Euro-Canadian society.¹

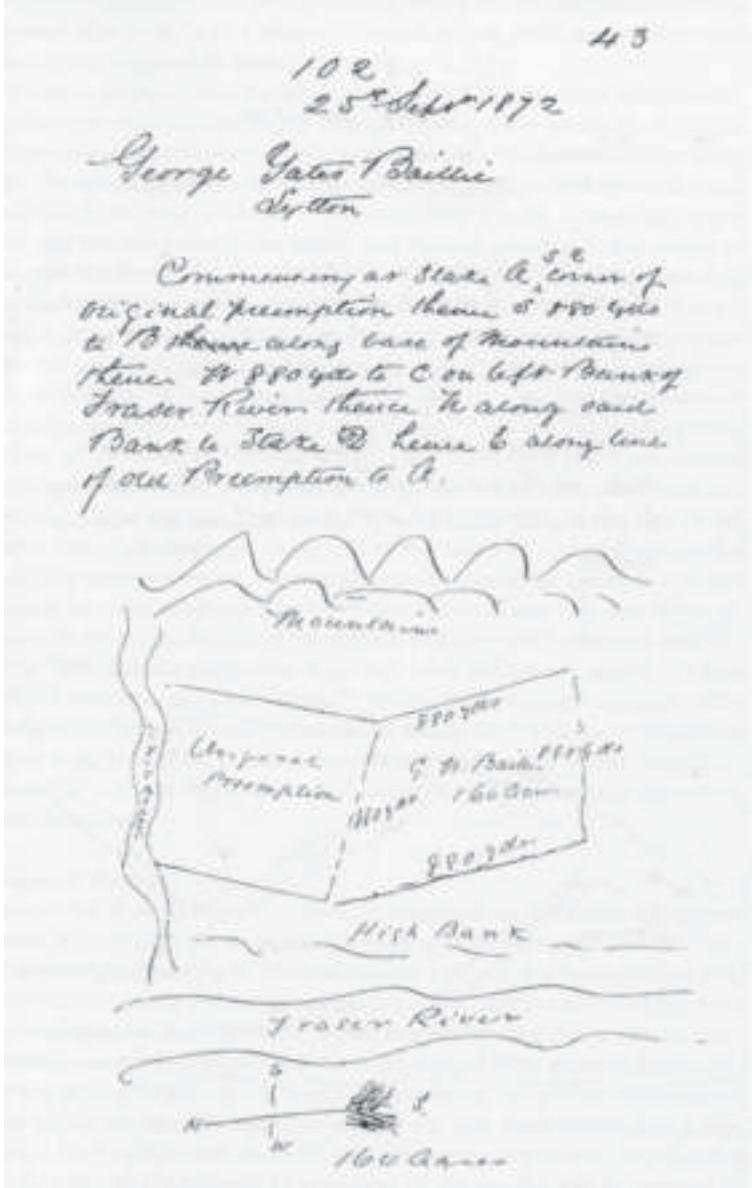
Harris builds *Making Native Space* out of close attention to “on the ground” issues such as the size and usefulness of the Hupacasath reserve. Land is at the centre of the book, a deliberate and important focus. “Colonialism,” Harris argues in the introduction, “particularly in its settler form ... is about the displacement of people from their land and its repossession by others” (xxiv). As Harris makes clear in a recent article, this argument is a critique of recent postcolonial scholarship that, he believes, has missed the “principal momentum” and the central power relations of colonialism by focusing almost exclusively on colonial discourse. Colonial discourse, he argues, was important as a way to justify the removal of Native people from their land. But the major momentum to dispossess Native people of their lands came from two interests: capitalist enterprises seeking to acquire forest and mineral lands, and settlers’ quest for agricultural land.²

What interests me as an environmental historian is the extent to which land is made an actor in the story, and so the extent to which the relationship between the natural and human-made world is central to the analysis. What I want to do here is explore briefly three ways in which land is made central, and then conclude by commenting on the implications of this approach for Canadian history. First, Harris carefully delineates the environmental and geographical nature of the places in which reserves were laid out, as in the example of the Hupacasath. Second, Harris puts considerable stress on the distance traveled by the commissioners who laid out Indian reserves, the difficulty of that travel, and the resulting haste with which they necessarily laid out reserves. Third, Harris shows how colonial administrators found power in abstracting lands into representations such as maps and statistics.

Land and Place

Figure 1 demonstrates how the colonial state was much more concerned with turning land into the property of settlers than with accommodating Native uses of the land. This figure is a pre-emption map. By creating such a sketch—“little more than a few scratched lines on a slip of paper,” (76) according to Harris—a settler could claim a piece of land as his own property. Such vague claims inevitably led to conflicts with Native

Figure 1.



Cartographer Eric Leinberger. Reprinted with permission of the Publisher from Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance and Reserves in British Columbia by Cole Harris © University of British Columbia Press, 2002. All rights reserved by the publisher.

peoples as settlers scrambled to secure arable lands and other associated necessities like water rights, while Native people tried to keep access to enough land to survive.

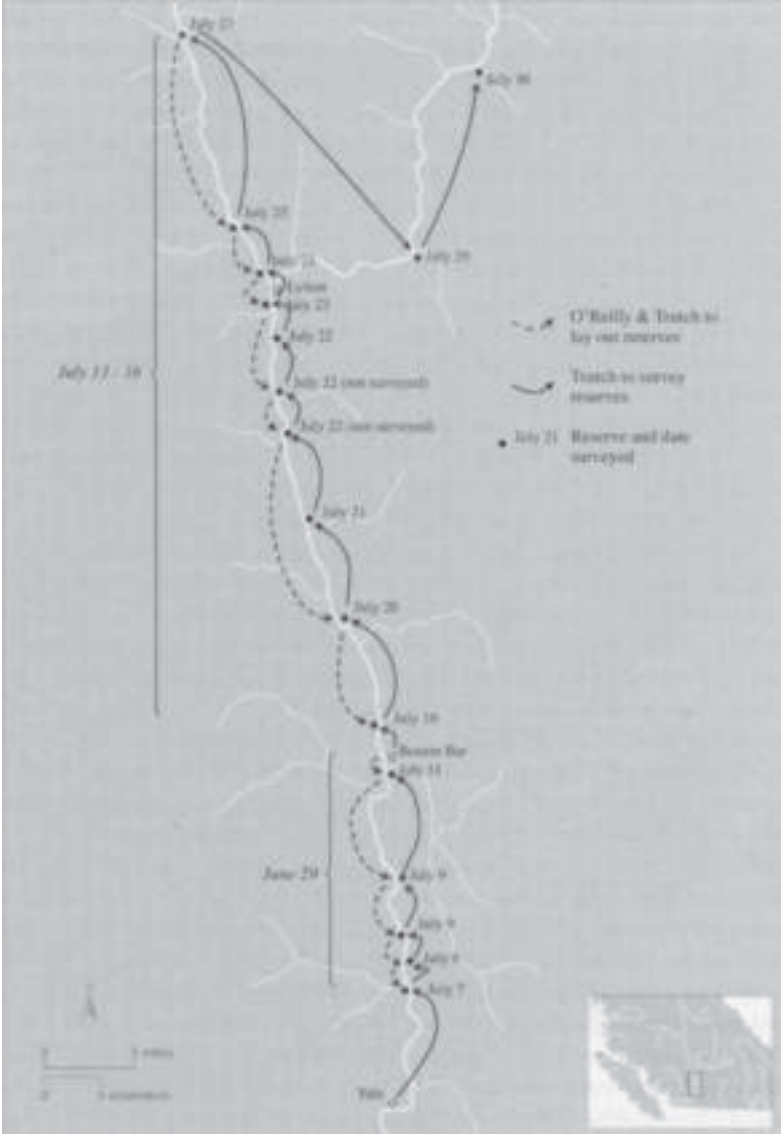
Harris recounts how Indian Reserve Commissioner Gilbert Malcolm Sproat—for Harris the “colonizer who eventually listened” (v)—attempted to deal with the challenge of securing enough useful land for Native people while still respecting the colonial property system. In the Fraser Canyon, Sproat found reserves that consisted of little more than fields of stones, reserves with arable land but without the right to take water from the only nearby stream, and reserves encroached upon by settlers on the basis of pre-emption sketches. The scarcity of good agricultural land in B.C. and the colonial land system, in other words, translated into reserves where Native attempts to adapt to new ways of living were bound to fail.

Harris might have further explored the impact of ecological conditions. As environmental historians have made clear, environmental change was a key force in the dispossession of Native peoples from their lands and livelihoods.³ So, for instance, in the arid lands around Kamloops, and similarly in the Okanagan Valley, the ability of Native people to use the land for hunting and gathering was cut off by the transformation into cattle ranges of lands formerly populated by game. New fences kept wildlife away, while cattle likely altered the composition of grasslands by trampling on grasses and preferring to eat some grasses over others. This ecological change must have been part of the process that prepared Native peoples to accept the more formal dispossession of reserves by ending the viability of their earlier subsistence practices.

Space and Distance

A second way in which land shaped the reserve system is represented in **Figure 2**. Harris makes clear that the Indian Reserve Commissioners were hampered by the vastness and difficulty of much of the terrain that they needed to cross, and by the limited time that they either had or were willing to devote to the job. This lack of time generally resulted in reserves laid out in great haste and with little attention paid to the needs of the local Native people. The work of Indian Reserve Commissioner Peter O’Reilly provides the best example. In 1870, O’Reilly and Joseph Trutch, O’Reilly’s brother-in-law, laid out reserves in the Fraser Canyon. Harris and cartographer Eric Leinberger nicely illustrate O’Reilly’s haste in moving through the Fraser Canyon (**Figure 2**). It exemplifies the cre-

Figure 2.



Cartographer Eric Leinberger. Reprinted with permission of the Publisher from Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance and Reserves in British Columbia by Cole Harris © University of British Columbia Press, 2002. All rights reserved by the publisher.

ative use of maps in the book not just to locate places in space, but to make arguments, in this case demonstrating the amount of time actually spent in each place—usually about a day, surely not enough time seriously to consider the actual uses of the land and the real needs of the people living there. Land in the form of space and distance, then, coupled with the state’s lack of interest in taking the time and effort to overcome it, shaped the reserve system for the worse.

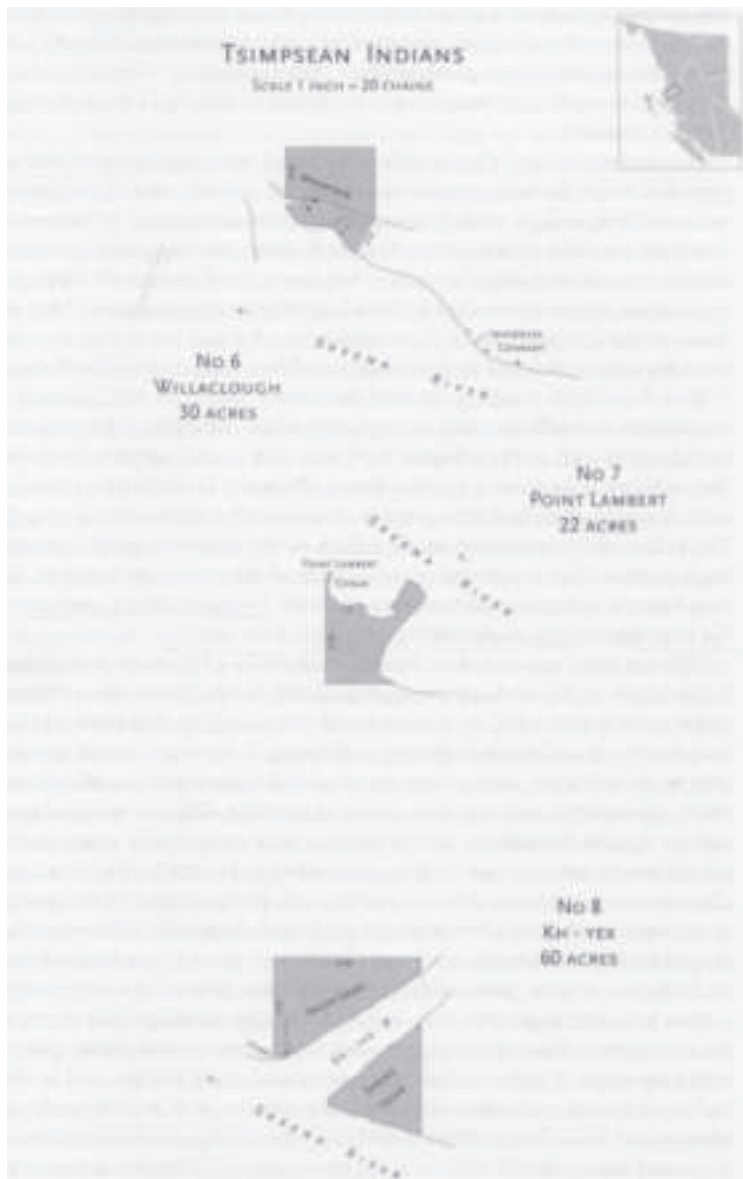
The Colonial Gaze

A third point concerns Harris’ treatment of the power/knowledge practices of the state. The colonial state, Harris argues, depended on turning physical land into abstractions in order to make it possible to deal with its complexities, and so make it governable. Maps were particularly important to this process, allowing the commissioners “to locate their decisions in abstract geometrical space devoid of content except that which their own data collections and predilections inclined them to place there” (235). **Figure 3** powerfully demonstrates this strategy of rule. In this redrawing of an Indian Reserve Commissioner’s map, the reserves are essentially just geometric shapes, lifted completely out of their surroundings, displayed “rather like insects on pins, exhibits mounted on blank sheets” (271).

As James Scott has argued in *Seeing Like a State*, one reason that state projects involving large-scale alteration of the natural world have often failed is because the abstractions necessary to make nature governable from a distance have left out factors critical to the success of the project.⁴ Maps like **Figure 3** allowed the colonial state to ignore local concerns, local ways of doing, and local details, as Harris makes clear. But they also ignored the geographical and ecological complexities—the details of land—that were critical to Native people’s ability to wrestle a subsistence life out of the lands left to them by the colonial state. Harris’ finely-grained analysis suggests this, but he does not make this point explicitly.

Harris’ focus on land is central to the book’s political and historiographical significance. Politically, in concentrating on events “on the ground,” Harris is performing an anti-colonial act, opposing his textured analysis to a colonial process that used abstraction and objectification as a form of power. This, of course, is exciting stuff for sheltered academics—Harris has combined postcolonial theory with the traditional toolkit of the historical geographer to produce a work of great significance to the

Figure 3.



Cartographer Eric Leinberger. Reprinted with permission of the Publisher from Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance and Reserves in British Columbia by Cole Harris © University of British Columbia Press, 2002. All rights reserved by the publisher.

contemporary debate on Native land in B.C. Historiographically, Harris shows that land and the social and ideological structures used to give it meaning shaped the sort of reserves that Native people got, the process by which their livelihood was taken away from them, and the small chance that the reserve system might have provided some sort of minimal livelihood. Geography and environment are critical—the story cannot be properly understood without them. Environmental historians are increasingly concerned that the field is not sufficiently relevant to the work of historians with other interests. This is partly the fault of environmentally concerned historians who have had much to say about environmental problems but have not shown environment to be an important category of historical analysis. Harris suggests how this might be done, and I find that exciting.

Notes

- ¹ The reserve is now more obvious, for the band has put up some buildings to support their new business of cultural canoe tours. The sign that I remember has also been replaced.
- ² Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94.1: 165-82.
- ³ The best known works are William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) and Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Harris comes close to making this argument in chapter 8 (written with David Demeritt) of his *The Resettlement of British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), though he never quite connects ecological change directly to the displacement of Native peoples.
- ⁴ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

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My reviewers are generous to a fault, and I feel a certain reticence in the face of their enthusiasm. One is immersed in writing a book, eventually it is done, there is a certain numbness, and then one is on to something else. The book is hatched and on its own, its parentage increasingly obscure. But these reviews pull me back to it, if only to take some brief stock of a now somewhat distant offspring.

Making Native Space, as my reviewers note, is a study of the changing control of land as settler colonialism took hold of British Columbia. Having fixed on this topic, the archives then took hold of me, and I largely went where they allowed. Because the opening up of land to settlers and capital accompanied settler colonialism elsewhere, the book is also somewhat situated in an international literature on colonial power, especially as it bears on land. When I had worked out as well as I could how and why Native people were dispossessed of almost all their land—the bulk of the book—I then offered a summary account of the effects of dispossession on Native livelihoods and suggested some means by which a sorry colonial record might begin to be redressed.

This was the framework within which I worked, and did what I could with the time at hand. I am a little startled, and exceedingly gratified, that Keith Carlson and Jamie Murton find in *Making Native Space* a platform for new avenues of research on Native space and on the environment as an historical actor. Should that be so, I would be delighted. I agree that some topics could have been more explored. As Sarah Carter suggests, I could have taken a comparative colonial analysis somewhat further, and, as Keith Carlson points out, I could have done more with Sproat (he warrants a biography) and with Native understandings of the Douglas treaties. Ecological relationships, as Jamie Murton avers, could have been more developed. Agreed: we need not discuss these matters. However, I do want to discuss the proposition raised by Sarah Carter, and put more forcefully by Kathryn McPherson, that I have not made enough of gender. In so doing I will touch on Keith Carlson's observation that I have insufficiently problematized Native space.

All would agree, I think, that the values, social customs, and laws that accompanied settlers and capital to British Columbia were massively gendered, and that patriarchy was a principal axis of power in colonial society. If anything, given the preponderance of men and the scarcity of paid work for women, gender became particularly salient in early-modern British Columbia. Life in the province accentuated the growing gendered separation in urbanizing and industrializing societies between place of work and place of residence. Men were in the camps, and home, women, and civility were elsewhere, often hundreds or thousands of miles away. But the issue is not whether British Columbian society was gendered. In the context of my book, it is whether gender affected the ways in which Native people were dispossessed of their land.

It could have if immigrant men and women judged Native society differently. Although the matter has not been exhaustively investigated, my sense is that they both subscribed to the broad outline of a colonial cultural discourse that located civilization and savagery and considered British Columbia a wilderness awaiting progressive development. It is quite possible that men tended to think of development in terms of livelihood, whereas women, as the example of Bertha Fadden suggests, tended to think of home and community, but in either case it was in their interest to acquire Native land. A few men in British Columbia thought that an aggressive colonialism had taken too much from Native people, as probably did a few women, but I found nothing in the archives to suggest that gender differentiated attitudes towards the dispossession of Native people. The archives are themselves gendered, and it is possible that a fuller representation of women there would reveal attitudes that are now hidden, but given the centrality of dispossession to the interests of both settlers and capital, I rather doubt it.

If, as many have suggested, the land itself was gendered female, then the energy that went into the taking of it can be interpreted sexually—the reckless male energy of early-modern British Columbia, the photographs of loggers lying in the undercuts of massive trees, the rape of the land. But was land gendered female? Gordon Gibson (*Bull of the Woods*, Vancouver, 1980), a logging operator from the west coast of Vancouver Island, left home, which for him was the locus of women and civility, to wrestle with a harsh land that he gendered male. Were one to assume, Gibson and his like apart, that the land was commonly gendered female (a difficult proposition to demonstrate or negate), then the question would remain as to how such gendering bore on the ways in which capital and settlers took up and used land in British Columbia. One would have to situate gender within the arsenal of colonial powers that bore on British Columbia and, in that light, assess its relative salience. Although there is no way to settle the matter definitively, I strongly suspect that the motivation to dispossess Native people of their land came overwhelmingly from the interest of capital in profit and of settlers in livelihoods and social reproduction. If this is so, regardless of how the land of British Columbia was gendered, dispossession would have proceeded much as it did.

Considering only the colonial side of the land question, I do not see other sites at which gender could gain much purchase. To put it as succinctly as possible, it seems to me that, Missionaries apart, the dispossession of Native people in British Columbia was motivated by interest and

supported by the full arsenal of the colonial state, a legitimizing cultural discourse, and many technologies of disciplinary power, of which maps, numbers, and particularly the law were probably the most important.

The Native side of the land question is another matter altogether. Native land uses were gendered, and the dispossession of Native people of almost all their land undoubtedly had far-reaching gendered effects. Gathering, for example, which was women's work, was both a localized and extensive activity that was particularly vulnerable to the imposition of an alien system of private property rights. When women could no longer gather at favoured traditional sites, it was not just that food supplies became less secure. When they turned to the industrial fishery, it was not just that a new source of employment had opened up. This is not my domain, but I do agree entirely with Kathryn McPherson that any fulsome analysis of the impact of dispossession on Native lives, livelihoods, and land uses must be preoccupied with gender.

This brings me to the question of whether I have sufficiently problematized Native space. Of course I have not, or I would have considered the gendered effects of colonialism! My title, *Making Native Space*, was intended to be ironic—reserve commissioners making Native space out of Native space—and partly to allude to current possibilities. But my book is essentially about dispossession, about the making of the tiny, cramped spaces that are the province's Indian reserves. The real Native space of British Columbia extends now, as it always did, far beyond the reserves. Across the province, Native groups have been assembling information about this space, and the picture that emerges is of an intimately known, intimately used space, the memory of which is by no means gone. In my view, British Columbians of all stripes need to come to new and far more generous terms with this space. If they are to do so, it seems important to show both how that space was taken away from Native people (which my book has attempted to do), and how they lived in, remember, and, in many cases, still occupy this space. Keith Carlson, working closely with Native people, has done as much as anyone to show how this can be done.

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