Temagami's Tangled Wild

Race, Gender, and the Making of Canadian Nature

JOCELYN THORPE

FOREWORD BY GRAEME WYNN

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FOREWORD

Nature and Nation in a "Little Known District amid the Wilds of Canada"

BY GRAEME WYNN

Some thirty years ago, after reflecting critically and historically on such concepts as culture, society, individual, and class, the novelist, critic, and cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams famously suggested that "nature" might be the most complex word in the English language.[1] Despite the nominal continuity of its use through many centuries, the term is richly freighted with intricate and quite diverse meanings. Does "nature" refer to the "essential constitution of the world" or to the inherent and immutable laws that govern (or describe) its physical processes? Is it "red in tooth and claw" or an "extraordinary interlocking system of mutual advantage"? Do references to "nature" include or exclude people? What of the common idea that "nature" betokens the "essence," the "ultimate, irreducible character or quality of something," as in the "nature of things," the "nature of existence," or in the way that we explain human characteristics or athletic gifts as "natural"? Little wonder that the American cultural historian Leo Marx concluded, toward the end of a career devoted to studying such matters, that "the word nature is a notorious semantic and metaphysical trap."[2] The lean and "proper" definitions found in dictionaries provide neither escape nor intellectual comfort for those alert to these contradictions and fascinated, as Williams was, by the ways in which the shifting and contrasting connotations of certain words expressed "radically different and often at first unnoticed changes in experience and history."[3]

Much ink has been spent, since Williams wrote, pondering the nature of Nature (so to speak). Indeed, the Australian environmental historian George Seddon used this very phrase in 1991 as the title of a lively essay

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devoted to understanding how various meanings have been ascribed to nature. After exploring some of the antonyms to "Nature" and "natural" – including Supernatural, unnatural, human, and artificial – Seddon concluded that the contrasts between human and "not-man" and natural and unnatural underwrote "most current discourse using the word 'Nature'" and that the use of "unnatural" often carries "specifically moral overtones." To illustrate the latter claim, he recalled the once common assertion that "sodomy is an unnatural practice" to remind his readers that although "not many people use that expression today [this] does not mean that the concept of the 'unnatural' has disappeared, but rather that its range of application has changed. Some will now say, for example, that celibacy is unnatural, or that it is not natural for a young girl to lock herself away in her room reading books all day, or whatever." The larger point, of course, is that the societal consensus about what is natural and unnatural changes through time and that "our concept of Nature is a cultural product."[4]

Postmodern and post-structuralist scholarship has made similar claims, more formally and more strongly, in describing nature as a social construction or insisting, more tendentiously, that it is solely a product of discourse. As the geographer David Demeritt noted a decade or so ago, much writing in this vein "has challenged the apparent self-evidence and ontological fixity of nature," to the point of insisting that unmediated knowledge of the material world is impossible.[5] These are complicated matters. Following the philosopher Ian Hacking, Demeritt has usefully sought to categorize and clarify the various forms of constructionism by distinguishing between two broad types – social construction-as-refutation (which usually evinces strong political commitments) and the "more metaphysically inclined" sense of social construction-as-philosophical-critique. The latter is further subdivided, according to the primary intellectual wellsprings from which differing approaches derive, into phenomenological and discursive constructionisms, approaches associated with the reflexive stance of those interested in the sociology of scientific knowledge, and ideas of embodied practice as reflected, for example, in actor-network theory. The intricacies of these distinctions are of little concern here, except to note, as Demeritt does, that "construction-as-refutation" generally maintains the "conventional distinctions between culture/nature, subject/object, and representation/reality" upon which divisions between true and false conceptions of nature rest, whereas "construction-as-philosophical-critique" generally challenges these dualisms. Beyond this, all these approaches share a commitment to the notion that things are not what they are generally taken to be and insist that "what we had once accepted as self-evidently pre-ordained and

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inevitable is in fact contingent and might conceivably be remade in some other way, if only we would try."[6]

Similar impulses have affected the ways in which scholars have come, in recent years, to think about many things, from race, gender, and class through wilderness to the nation. These and more have come, increasingly, to be understood as made rather than given, as ultimately malleable products of history and relationships, rather than as preordained immutable entities. Contingency and power, it is now widely acknowledged, shape knowledge claims and the ways in which the world and its constituent parts are comprehended. In the end, of course, it may be true, as Ian Hacking has pointed out, that all constructionist arguments "dwell in the dichotomy between appearance and reality set up by Plato, and given a definitive form by Kant."[7] And it may thus appear that contemporary discussions are prefigured to some degree in earlier works. Indeed, Hacking has gone so far as to suggest that although "social constructionists bask in the sun they call postmodernism, they are really very old-fashioned."[8] But scholarly agendas, emphases, and purposes shift, for they, too, are constructed, and it is unwise to draw too direct a line between past and present, or to posit continuities where there may be ruptures.

Consider by way of example the shifting reception of E.P. Thompson's 1963 book *The Making of the English Working Class.*[9] Emphasizing agency in its title, this landmark work offered an intricate, robustly empirical account of "out-workers, artisans, and factory workers" constructing, in ways that were clearly historically and geographically contingent, "a consciousness of their own interests as opposed to the interests of those who sought to dominate them."[10] It argued that class was not a structure or a category but something that "happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships." In this view, the English working class was forged through a complex dialectical relationship between experience and consciousness; it was created by men and women living in particular circumstances, coping with a certain "ensemble of social relations" and interpreting (and acting within) their specific situations on the basis of their inherited culture and expectations. It was the result of "an active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning."[11]

Hailed as a tour de force of historical scholarship and serving as an inspiration to a long generation of social historians, the book spawned considerable debate in the 1960s and 1970s for its rejection of the base-superstructure model of Marxist thinking, which Thompson described elsewhere as reducing "human consciousness to a form of erratic, involuntary response to steel-mills and brickyards, which are in a spontaneous

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process of looming and becoming."[12] A quarter century or so after its publication, however, the fundamental arguments of *The Making* were found wanting for other reasons. Although Thompson's central claim – that culture was as important as economic activity in shaping people's lives – may have contributed to the rise of discourse theory, Gareth Stedman Jones and Joan Wallach Scott drew inspiration from "the linguistic turn" and post-structuralist theory to offer sharp critiques of Thompson's work. Elevating discourse above agency and experience, they made "cultural dynamics" the driving force of class formation. For Jones, it was the radical discourse of Chartism, derived from Thomas Paine and the idea of natural rights, not the harsh experience of economic exploitation and political oppression, that "determined the form taken by the democratic movement."[13] By Scott's account, both experience and agency are "actuated in discourse," and class is a discursive field with "multiple and contested meanings." In her view, Thompson marginalized the feminine by locating the roots of class formation "in labour exploitation and rationalist radical politics" and failing to treat class construction as contingent on shifting meanings of gender.[14]

All of this discussion of social constructionism, and of the ways in which scholars have sought to understand the lives of poor English "stockingers" and "'obsolete' hand-loom weavers," might seem to have carried us a long way from considerations of nature and nation, and even further from the wilds of Temagami, which are the declared subjects of the significant, provocative book that you hold in your hand.[15] Not so. With this work, Jocelyn Thorpe follows along the trail opened, in earlier part, by Gareth Stedman Jones and Joan Wallach Scott, turning to discourse analysis and asking us to rethink the ways in which we interpret the world by constructing such categories as wilderness, race, gender, class, nation, homeland, forest, park, and tourist attraction. Trained in English literature and equity studies, women's studies, and environmental studies, Thorpe brings the perspectives of post-colonial theory and social nature scholarship to her inquiry, and thus brings social constructionism to bear as both refutation and philosophical critique. She employs Michel Foucault's genealogical method to shape *Temagami's Tangled Wild* as "a history of the present" intended to question contemporary convictions about this place and to demonstrate how knowledge and power have joined to yield particular, and by no means unimpeachable or self-evident, ideas ("subjects and truths") about the territory and those associated with it. At the same time, she challenges "the fiction of a culture-free nature" to insist that "nature and society are everywhere implicated in one another" (14, 13).

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With this book, then, Thorpe aims, as she writes on page 5 of her Introduction, to have us "examine again the ground we thought we knew" – and that ground ranges from the storied indigenous territory of n'Daki Menan, through the region later known as Temagami, Ontario, to the larger invention we call Canada.

These commitments differentiate Thorpe's work from most other writing about Temagami, of which there has been a significant amount because the area has long been valued – in different ways by different groups who have often disagreed over how it might be used. From Thorpe's perspective, even the most thorough of attempts to see the contested past of Temagami as a series of struggles between competing interests fails to account for the making of this place as "a site of Canadian nature" and falls short of explaining the asymmetries of power that made the region available to some people and denied it to others. In her view, such approaches are not only wanting, they are dangerous because they tend to reinforce the status quo. Continuing to address contemporary and enduring conflicts in Temagami through compromise, by balancing the competing claims of diverse interests, "risks reproducing colonial and nationalist relationships of power and inequality" (29).

Thorpe is not the first, on the larger canvas of Canadian scholarship, to develop such a perspective. She acknowledges the methodological and substantive parallels between Bruce Braun's account of the historical and contemporary processes that produced the British Columbia rainforest as a site of nature and her own interpretation of Temagami, noting that environmental activists not only drew attention to destructive logging practices in both places but that these protests "also helped to mask contemporary Aboriginal claims to land, thus making the forest appear unproblematically a part of the Canadian wilderness" (16-17). There are echoes, too, in this account of Temagami, of Braun and Joel Wainwright's discussion of the BC rainforest as a discursive construction, which concludes that "struggles over nature, land, and meaning are simultaneously struggles over identity and rights" – of indigenous peoples, the state, corporate interests, forestry workers, and others.[16] For all that, Thorpe moves analysis of these matters in new directions as she examines persistent portrayals of the Temagami region as both a wild territory and a space encompassing iconic Canadian characteristics to expose "the processes of colonization upon which a racialized and gendered Canadian nation rests" (24).

Through the successive chapters of this book, it is clear that Thorpe has a message to convey and an important purpose to her argument. By recounting how the indigenous homeland of n'Daki Menan was reconfigured

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as a forest reserve and part of the Canadian wilderness, through the imposition of powerful colonial (and, to those with power, seemingly obvious) ways of thinking about, describing, and organizing the world, she hopes to better equip readers of this short but impassioned book to "tackle the complex questions and demands that result from the history of colonialism, exclusionary nationalism, and environmental exploitation." More than this, she would aspire to bring non-Aboriginal Canadians to "support rather than impede or remain silent about Aboriginal struggles for self-determination" (129).

Because these aims are not universally embraced, and because the ideas of several of the scholars from whom Thorpe draws theoretical insight remain relatively unfamiliar to many, some may carp at the way in which she explicates the arguments underpinning her advocacy. There are precedents to hand. As ideas about the construction of nature have come to prominence, critics have noted a certain ambiguity in much writing about the hybridity of nature and culture; some discussions of socio-nature, for example, couple strong idealist claims that things can be known only through words and concepts with assertions of the materiality of the world. Others have suggested that those who are critical of the ways in which people living in different circumstances framed their understandings of the world might be a little more reflexive about the rhetoric and the contexts of their own accounts.[17]

There are shades, in such claims, of the criticisms leveled at Gareth Stedman Jones and Joan Wallach Scott for their unsympathetic assessments of *The Making of the English Working Class,* which drew fire for constructing, as Marc Steinberg had it, "a neostructuralism of discourse in which language is invested with imperial ascendancy, and actors have diminished agency," and for assuming that "experience has no reality outside of its signification."[18] Reflecting upon these tendencies and the linguistic turn in historical scholarship more generally, Marxist historian Bryan Palmer argued that something important was "lost in the assimilation of agency and structure, culture and materiality," and that Thompson's claims had been "all too easily incorporated into an emerging orthodoxy," in which "the cultural became the material; the ideological became the real."[19]

But much has also been lost in the adversarial tone of intellectual debate over these issues, and this is worth bearing in mind in thinking about *Temagami's Tangled Wild.* Here it is important to recognize that although Thorpe draws upon Foucault's theory of discourse in her analysis, she also insists that "this book maps stories" (6). This is significant. Although the formal term "discourse," as it has come to be understood in the humanities

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and social sciences, bears some similarities with the everyday concept of "story," they are not equivalent and there is important interpretive space between them.

"Discourses" have been defined in various ways, but for followers of Foucault the term generally implies "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak."[20] Although Foucault noted that discourse "contains the power to say something other than what it actually says, and thus to embrace a plurality of meanings," some insist that discourses set "the limits of acceptable speech" and define what can be said about a topic.[21] By more self-conscious definition, discourses are specific, heterogeneous, regulated, embedded, and situated "representations and practices through which meanings are produced, identities constituted, social relations established and political and ethical outcomes made more or less possible." To put this slightly differently, discourses "shape the contours of the taken-for-granted world, naturalizing and universalizing a particular subject formation and view of the world."[22]

Stories also help people to make sense of their world and of their places in it, and they have been shared in every culture as a means of entertainment, education, and cultural preservation, and in order to instill moral values. Typically, stories are accounts of events (actual or imagined) in words, images, and sounds; they include plot, characters, and narrative point of view, and their narration is often marked by improvisation or embellishment. Much has been written on the differences and relations between stories and discourse (in the formal sense outlined above), but one recurrent distinction, worth attention here, can be expressed quite simply: the story is what is told, but discourse shapes the way in which it is told.

Although Thorpe pays little explicit attention, in the pages that follow, to this difference between "what" and "how," to this distinction between mapping stories and identifying the systems of thought that constitute a prevailing discourse, her treatment of Temagami works between these poles to open space for further reflection upon the ways in which people make sense of their places in the world, and indeed their very being, even as it "demonstrates that wilderness and nations are made" and challenges us "to tackle the complex questions and demands that result from the history of colonialism, exclusionary nationalism, and environmental exploitation that brought us here in the first place" (129).

One way of thinking about these things actually returns us to Gareth Stedman Jones' discussion of English radicalism, in which he sees discourse

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less as a naturalizing, universalizing force than as a construct mediating between experience and consciousness. On this view, which is not incompatible with materialist theories of language and history, discourse does not so much construct the objects of our knowledge as it marks "the process through which actors create propositional or evaluative accounts of the relations between themselves, other actors and situations, and larger social processes."[23] In other words, discourses help people understand, or create meaning in, the world by tying "actors and contexts" together "historically and reciprocally." Forged in the course of everyday activities through social routines and engagements with the material world, they are shaped by networks and reflect people's collective efforts to make sense of their experiences. They may be ideological and hegemonic, but they are invariably "tied to particular social and institutional contexts," and each exists in severalty with others. Individuals exercise agency by adopting or adapting what they take to be the most intelligible, plausible, and comprehensible of these different discourses to structure their view of their situation.[24]

Another is suggested by J. Edward Chamberlin in his remarkable book *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* which offers a luminous reflection on the ways in which stories give meaning and value to the places we call home, and to much else in the world besides.[25] Taking his cue, and his title, from a question posed to government officials in British Columbia by a Gitksan elder, Chamberlin ranges widely to show how stories hold us together and keep us apart. Challenging questions lie at the very heart of these reflections – *"Where do we belong?"* and *"How should we live?"* foremost among them – and it is Chamberlin's singular accomplishment to show that even as people confront these existential mysteries, as almost all do, they readily settle for easy answers framed and passed on in "stories" of many diverse forms, "from creation stories to constitutions, from southern epics and northern sagas to native American tales and African praise songs, and from nursery rhymes and national anthems to myths and mathematics." For the most part, these stories draw from two basic forms – one describing "stages and sequences, causes and effects," the other telling "how things and events fulfil an overall purpose and design." But most "shuttle between" these archetypes, and – it is important to recognize – almost all of them bring "imagination and reality together in moments of what we might call faith" so that they are "ceremonies of belief as much as they are chronicles of events."[26]

On this view, Chamberlin's stories are rather akin to Jones' discourses, in that they articulate what groups and individuals take to be the most

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intelligible, plausible, and comprehensible account of their particular circumstances. But precisely because these accounts exist in severalty – because different groups invoke different stories to guide their actions and explain their place in the world – they work to produce multiple forms of *"Us"* (we who subscribe to this particular version) and *"Them"* (who don't). So, too, the varying constructions of, or stories about, Temagami to which Thorpe draws our attention in the pages that follow – the indigenous inhabitants' view of their homeland n'Daki Menan, the foresters' vision of the territory as a timber reserve, the recreationists' conception of it as an empty land of woods and water, the legal professions' assumption that truth is arbitrated rather than produced by law – worked to separate, divide, and entrench asymmetries of power and entitlement among groups and individuals.

Need it be ever thus? Stories of the sort we have been considering here – creation stories to constitutions and myths to mathematics – are powerful and enduring. Shaped by history, embedded in tradition, compelling to those who believe in them, and dear to hearts and minds, they are neither easily forgotten nor readily cast aside. Yet surely, one hopes, the answer is no – although the future is unlikely to turn out that way unless we learn to see things anew and act accordingly. Injustices produced by time and chance, by "colonialism, exclusionary nationalism, and environmental exploitation," or by other circumstances, will not be resolved by continuing insistence on the particular virtue or unassailable "rightness" of any single discourse or foundational story (129). Distinctions between "Them" and "Us" are inevitable, inescapable corollaries of our ways of being in the world. Moving forward requires a commitment to tolerance and understanding, a capacity to see things from multiple perspectives and a willingness to embrace and respond to the consequences of difference. This will require serious, careful, and thoughtful attention to the stories of others and the ability to marvel at what is new and strange. To develop inclusive, mutually respectful, and more equitable communities, we need, Ted Chamberlin and Jocelyn Thorpe insist, to avoid the monocular vision that ultimately translates religion into dogma, myth into ideology, and community into conflict, and to find the common ground of wonder that lies at the heart of all our stories.

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Notes

1 The most complex word claim appears in Raymond Williams' *Keywords* (London: Collins, 1976), but the larger discussion of these matters, on which much of this paragraph rests, is Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), 67-85.

2 Leo Marx, "The Idea of Nature in America," *Daedalus* 137,2 (Spring 2008): 9.

3 Williams, "Ideas of Nature," 68.

4 George Seddon, "The Nature of Nature," *Westerly* 4 (1991): 7-14, republished as "The Nature of Nature," in George Seddon, *Landprints: Reflections on Place and Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 9.

5 David Demeritt, "What Is the 'Social Construction of Nature'? A Typology and Sympathetic Critique," *Progress in Human Geography* 26,6 (2002): 768. See also Noel Castree and Bruce Braun, "The Construction of Nature and the Nature of Construction: Analytical and Political Tools for Building Survivable Futures," in *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millennium,* ed. Bruce Braun and Noel Castree (New York: Routledge, 1998), 3-42; Noel Castree and Bruce Braun, eds., *Social Nature: Theory, Practice and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); D. Demeritt, "The Construction of Global Warming and the Politics of Science," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91 (2001): 307-37; D. Demeritt, "The Statistical Enframing of Nature's Limits: Forest Conservation in the Progressive Era United States," *Environment and Planning D*: *Society and Space* 19 (2001): 431-59; and J.D. Proctor, "The Social Construction of Nature: Relativist Accusations, Pragmatist and Critical Realist Responses," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (1998): 352-76. In the conclusion of "What Is the 'Social Construction of Nature'?" 786, Demeritt notes that "the 'social construction of nature' is used in so many ways that it is not always clear what is meant by the term. Some use it in a nominalist vein to denaturalize 'nature' as always conceptually and discursively mediated, others in a more literal, ontologically idealist way to suggest that natural phenomena are literally built by people, while yet others use the construction metaphor to explore the ways that the matter of nature is realized discursively or through networks of practical engagements with heterogeneous other beings."

6 Ibid., 776; and Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What*? (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

7 Hacking, *Social Construction of What?* 49.

8 Ibid.

9 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Victor Gollancz, 1963).

10 Marc W. Steinberg, "The Re-Making of the English Working Class?" *Theory and Society* 20,2 (April 1991): 174.

11 Thompson, *The Making,* 9; the phrase "ensemble of social relations" is widely attributed to Karl Marx in his *Theses on Feuerbach* (6th Thesis); see *Marx/Engels Internet Archive*, available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm (accessed 9 November 2011).

12 E.P. Thompson, "Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines," *The New Reasoner: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Humanism* 1 (Summer 1957): 113-14.

13 Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 126.

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14 Joan Wallach Scott, "Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*," in Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 68-90; and discussed in Steinberg, "The Re-Making," 179-80.
15 "Stockingers" and hand-loom weavers from Thompson, *The Making,* 12.
16 Bruce Braun, *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); Bruce Braun and Joel Wainwright, "Nature, Poststructuralism, and Politics," in Castree and Braun, *Social Nature,* 59.
17 See, for example, Demeritt, "What Is the 'Social Construction of Nature'?" 785.
18 Steinberg, "The Re-Making," 182-83.
19 Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 210. See also B.D. Palmer, *The Making of E.P. Thompson: Marxism, Humanism and History* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1981).
20 As defined, for example, in Iara Lessa, "Discursive Struggles within Social Welfare: Restaging Teen Motherhood," *British Journal of Social Work* 36,2 (2006): 283-98, quote on 285 (and see also 286: "through discourses, realities are constructed, made factual and justified, bringing about effects").
21 M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 134. I am indebted to Matt Dyce for this point and for his careful reading of and insightful comments on a draft of this essay.
22 Derek Gregory et al., eds., *Dictionary of Human Geography,* 5th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 166-67.
23 Steinberg, "The Re-Making," 187.
24 This discussion depends substantially upon arguments outlined in ibid., especially 187-91.
25 J. Edward Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003). Ted Chamberlin's characteristically gracious reflections on this foreword arrived too late to affect its substance, but, as so often, his words led me to consider horizons beyond the limits of my current vision.
26 Ibid., 210, 2-3.

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When I began this endeavour, I had no idea how much work it would be for the people around me. I am sure that many of them had no idea either. But when they figured it out, they neither stopped talking to me nor suggested I choose another path. Instead, they walked this one with me, for which I am more grateful than I can express, but I will do my best to try.

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All of this moving around makes me think about what it means to be at home. From my new vantage point at the eastern edge of Newfoundland, I see home as where my people are. Sometimes the fact that they are so scattered makes me feel scattered as well, but it also reminds me of the importance of family, of friendship, and of finding home in new places. Deborah McPhail and our daughter, Willa, have made this process easier. They have come with me, and they are my home. My parents, Wendy and John Thorpe, have encouraged my sisters and me to be brave and kind, to do our best, and to follow the paths of our lives, even when those paths have resulted in having daughters and granddaughters living far away on opposite sides of the continent. My faraway sisters, Hilary and Dinah Thorpe, are never more than a phone call away. Thank you to them, to our parents, and to my other people who make home home, wherever that is: Dawn, Judi, and Quinn Burgess Dalley; Libby Dawson; Cindy, Anne, and Kate Fleming Holmes; Gillian, Paul, Emma, Maggie, and Rebecca Hilchey Street; Sarah Lamon; Zoë Newman and Sapphire Newman-Fogel; Tyler and Hazel Peet; Wendolyn Schlamp; J.J., Angela, and Clayton Sheppard Donnelly; and Julie Sinden.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to n'Daki Menan (Our Land)

On Highway 11, about an hour's drive north of North Bay, Ontario, a new sign marks the entrance to an ancient territory: "Welcome to N'Daki Menan," it reads, "Homeland of Teme-Augama Anishnabai" (see the photo on p. 2). The sign has stood on this spot since 2007, but the Teme-Augama Anishnabai – People of the Deep Water – have called n'Daki Menan home for thousands of years.[1] Nonetheless, many non-Aboriginal people know this same place as Temagami, Ontario, and consider it not the Teme-Augama Anishnabai's homeland, but an iconic site of wild Canadian nature (see the map on p. 3). Temagami is forested with pine and other tree species, including maple and birch, and contains many lakes as well as the rocky shores and thin soils considered typical of the Canadian Shield. It has served as a popular destination for campers and canoe trippers since the turn of the twentieth century. This book examines how n'Daki Menan became a famous Canadian wilderness, even as the Teme-Augama Anishnabai continuously asserted their rights and responsibilities toward a very differently understood territory.

The main argument of the book is that Temagami has been *made* – imaginatively and materially – as a site of wild Canadian nature. Its appearance as naturally wild and Canadian is the result of historical processes and relationships of power that disguised themselves as natural and worked to dispossess the Teme-Augama Anishnabai of their territory. For many generations, the First Nation governed the use of n'Daki Menan according to a system of family hunting territories, where each family had a responsibility to steward its two- to three-hundred-square-mile area in a way that

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Welcome to N'Daki Menan –
a road sign on Highway 11 at the entrance to n'Daki Menan. *Author photo*

ensured the continuity of the species upon which the nation depended for survival.[2] As non-Aboriginal people began to encroach in growing numbers upon n'Daki Menan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Teme-Augama Anishnabai found their ways of life and relationships with n'Daki Menan disrupted. Over the ensuing years, they became increasingly excluded from their lands until, with the creation of a reserve in 1971, the federal and provincial governments officially recognized them as having claim to only one square mile of the four thousand comprising n'Daki Menan. Since then, the Teme-Augama Anishnabai have taken legal and direct action to assert control over n'Daki Menan, but according to Canadian law and popular imagination, the region exists, with the exception of the one-square-mile reserve, as part of Ontario.[3]

Temagami's reputation as wilderness has travelled far beyond the boundaries of the region itself. Tourist operators certainly try to tempt visitors

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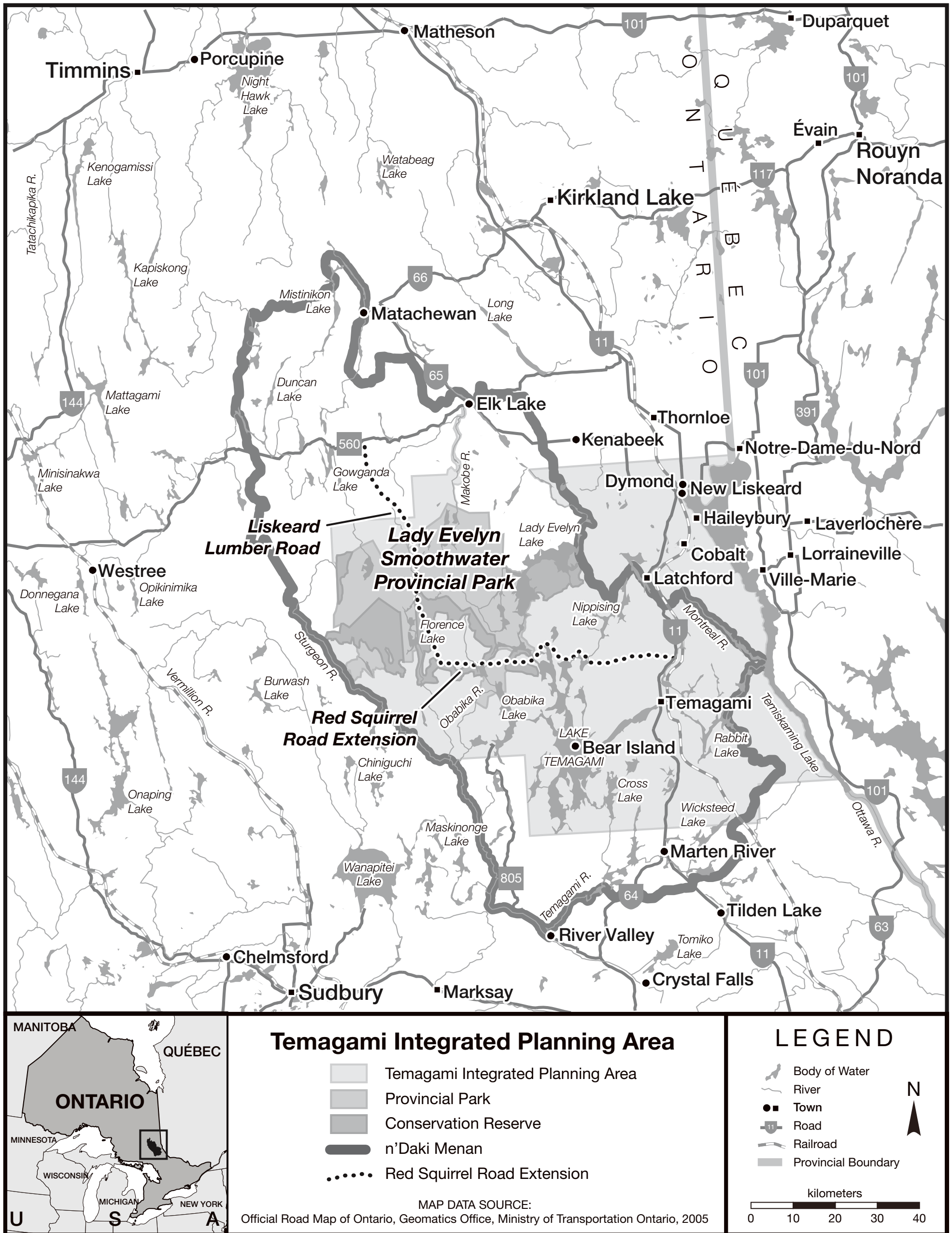

The Temagami Integrated Planning Area.

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with the promise of "pristine lakes," "magnificent old pine," and "miles upon miles of unspoiled wilderness to explore," but many people who have never set foot (or dipped paddle) there also know of it.[4] Its fame stems in part from a 1980s conflict that is widely remembered as a fight between environmentalists and the provincial government regarding the construction of a logging road.[5] In 1985, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources announced its plan to extend the Red Squirrel Road, which would connect two logging roads and open up new stands of timber south of Lady Evelyn Smoothwater Provincial Park for extraction by local forest companies (see the map on p. 3). Environmentalist critics of the government's plan soon formed the Temagami Wilderness Society and managed to attract national and international media attention as well as a great deal of public support for their attempt to block the logging of what they began to call the "last great pine wilderness." They gained support from prominent Canadians such as Margaret Atwood, David Suzuki, and Bob Rae, which helped to raise the profile of the Temagami issue, as did the arrest of more than ninety environmental protesters who blockaded the logging road in the fall of 1989. (Bob Rae was arrested with other protesters.)[6] The road extension was eventually completed, but it never opened. In response to environmentalist pressure, the province decided to prohibit logging in this "particularly sensitive area" of the Temagami forest.[7] Since then, the issue has faded from mainstream attention. What remains, however, is the idea of Temagami as a wilderness, a wilderness worth fighting for.

My argument – that the Temagami wilderness is a product of history and relationships of power rather than simply of nature – hinges upon the understanding, elaborated in Chapter 1, that wilderness is a social category that works alongside other social categories such as race and gender, gaining legitimacy through its appearance as self-evident, or natural. The naturalizing force of wilderness, race, and gender disguises the exclusionary practices through which places and subjects are created. As I explain in the following chapters, the existence of Temagami as a Canadian wilderness space depended variously upon the Teme-Augama Anishnabai's eviction from n'Daki Menan, their confinement onto a tiny fraction of their traditional territory, their collapse into the category of wilderness, and the denial of their presence in and claim to the region. The creation of Temagami as a Canadian space was also part of a larger nation-building project that attempted, in part through the exclusion, or limited conditional inclusion, of immigrants of colour, to make Canada into a white settler society. To unravel the Temagami wilderness, as I aim to do by

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revealing the cultural threads holding it together as a site of wild Canadian nature and making it seem self-evidently so, is to remove the naturalizing power of this social construct.

Such an unravelling is a necessary part of moving toward more just futures for those of us living in what has become the Canadian nation. As most non-Aboriginal Canadians now acknowledge, the first explorers in what eventually became Canada did not discover an empty wilderness. Instead, they happened upon territory new to them but familiar to the many First Nations whom they met along the way and who led them to the lakes, rivers, and landscapes that they later named and claimed. The diverse First Nations who encountered European explorers spoke approximately fifty languages, divided lands according to their own systems, and depending on their geographical and cultural circumstances, lived by fishing, trading, trapping, hunting, gathering, and farming.[8] When French, then British, then Canadian governments divided First Nations lands into colonies, a nation, provinces, and territories, they imposed new orders onto pre-existing systems, thus disrupting those systems. And yet, like the Temagami wilderness, colonial and national territorial divisions have come to assume a certain naturalness, at least to the extent that non-Aboriginal Canadians rarely consider, as we drive north on Highway 11 or walk in downtown Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver, the contested character of these "Canadian" places. The Teme-Augama Anishnabai's sign challenges the *Canadianness* as well as the *wildness* of Temagami, demanding that we examine again the ground we thought we knew.

This book provides such an examination with the hope that readers will understand and take seriously the embeddedness of colonial relations in the present, even in terms as seemingly innocuous as "Canadian" and "wilderness." Colonial relations include a Canadian nation built upon the dispossession of First Nations peoples, the preferential treatment of certain settler groups, and the exploitation of the non-human world. We are shaped by and left with these legacies, albeit in differing ways depending upon where we fit within the nation, but we do not need to pass them along unquestioned to future generations. Indeed, the persistence with which First Nations have demanded lands, rights, and recognition, as well as the efforts by marginalized groups within the nation to have their concerns addressed, has made this virtually impossible. The non-human world has also grabbed our attention recently, forcing us to recognize what some have been saying for generations – that our actions affect the world around us and that if we hope to live in a world with clean air and water, with

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healthy soil and good food, a world that will sustain the lives of humans and others, we need to live with rather than against the non-human life that comprises and shares our world. Movement toward justice requires not only the recognition that non-Aboriginal people and governments live on Aboriginal lands, but also the establishment of more equitable relations among First Nations, the diverse population of non-Natives who live here as well, and the (again diverse) animal and plant worlds upon which we depend for survival and with whom we inhabit this earth.[9]

This book maps stories. It shows how the making of Temagami as Canadian wilderness had and has everything to do with the (incomplete and always contested) dispossession of the Teme-Augama Anishnabai and therefore with the non-Native Canadians who have benefited from this process. I recognize that non-Aboriginal people living in Canada are a diverse group (as are Aboriginal peoples). Some, many with white skin, have been encouraged to make Canada their home, whereas others have had to fight systemic discrimination to carve out a place in the nation. But in spite of our significant differences, the fact that we all live in Canada, that we all arrived later to this Native land, makes Aboriginal issues our issues as well. The story that I tell is very specific. It transpired as it did because of the particular interactions that occurred over the years among the Teme-Augama Anishnabai, n'Daki Menan, and people from other places. Yet I hope that this specific story also resonates more broadly. The processes through which the lands of particular First Nations became part of the Canadian nation are inextricably linked to a larger story of colonialism and nation building, and this larger story becomes visible through the place-based account I tell.

Learning about the history of n'Daki Menan/Temagami has made it impossible for me to think of the region (or any other) as a Canadian wilderness, but it will always be one of my favourite places on earth. I first visited Temagami as a teenager in 1992, when my fellow campers and I embarked on a two-week canoe trip organized by the summer camp I attended for many years. The purpose of the trip was to develop our leadership skills in a wilderness setting, and we took turns leading the group as we paddled past tree-covered shorelines, portaged along trails carved out of the forest, and camped in small clearings beside big trees.[10] Temagami's wilderness character appeared so self-evident that it never occurred to me to ask questions of wilderness. Instead, I embraced it wholeheartedly and paddled hard, stopping only when we approached a stark treeless slope to wonder what had happened there. Clear-cutting had happened. The experience of seeing this clearcut, devastating and frightening as it appeared,

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affected me profoundly and helped to shape an environmental consciousness that remains with me today. In part because Temagami appeared so wild, the destruction of even a small part of it seemed a crime. For this reason, I find myself sympathetic to the environmentalist efforts of the 1980s: I do not want Temagami destroyed by unsustainable forestry practices either.

And yet my attachment to this place is also connected to the history that first brought me there, a history that I now argue needs to be re-examined in the context of colonialism. We campers travelled through the wilderness region of Temagami, Canada, rather than through the Teme-Augama Anishnabai's n'Daki Menan. Indeed, our canoe trip followed hard on the heels of a 1991 Supreme Court of Canada ruling that the Teme-Augama Anishnabai had lost any Aboriginal rights they once enjoyed in n'Daki Menan. We paddled through Temagami, then, coming to know and care about it as part of the Canadian wilderness, whereas the Teme-Augama Anishnabai found themselves excluded from the territory that they knew differently, and intimately. I now believe that we campers, and our Temagami wilderness experiences, contributed to the Teme-Augama Anishnabai's difficulties in having their territory recognized by non-Aboriginal governments – and so it is my own implication in the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples that leads me to question and to study this place.

We were not the only campers/environmentalists, however, to participate in the creation of the Temagami wilderness and thus to perpetuate the erasure of the Teme-Augama Anishnabai and n'Daki Menan. In the 1980s, while environmentalists struggled to save it, the Teme-Augama Anishnabai battled in court to have the same land recognized in Canadian law not as wilderness, but as n'Daki Menan.[11] In 1988, the year before the environmental blockades, the First Nation set up its own roadblocks to prevent the extension of the logging road. Chief Gary Potts spoke out not only against the industrial logging of the region, stating that it would create "a desert," but also against the environmentalist vision, which would make the region into "a zoo."[12] More fundamentally, the Teme-Augama Anishnabai challenged the assumption that either the provincial government or environmentalists had the right to determine the future of their territory. They camped in the bush for more than six months to stake their claim, removing themselves only when the province agreed not to begin building the road until after the Ontario Court of Appeal had heard their case.[13] Within environmentalist representation of the conflict, however, the Teme-Augama Anishnabai struggle became invisible. Even after, separately

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from environmentalists, they again blockaded the logging road in 1989 to stake a claim to their homeland – this time over two hundred Teme-Augama Anishnabai protesters and their supporters were arrested – the issue was represented, and continues to be remembered, as a contest over wilderness.[14] Even as I sympathize with environmentalists and share many of their concerns, I am disappointed by their persistent reliance on the concept of empty wilderness, particularly given that criticisms of the idea are no longer new.[15] I write this piece in the hope that those who, like me, care deeply about the more-than-human world will see in this book solid reasons to let go of the wilderness concept while continuing to struggle, in perhaps quite different ways, toward a world in which all of us might live well.

Chapters

Each chapter of this book focuses on a specific period in the production, contestation, and transformation of n'Daki Menan/Temagami. The chapters cover differing time frames and differing discourses, following chronologically from scientific forestry in the late nineteenth century to Canadian law in the 1980s. The chapters reveal multiple constructions of the region – empty Canadian wilderness, tourist mecca, wasteful old trees, n'Daki Menan – and make it clear that it has long been a contested space. But it also becomes apparent that some versions of the region (Temagami as part of the Canadian wilderness) have come to dominate the imaginative and physical landscape at the expense of others (n'Daki Menan). By showing the contestations and fissures in the social construction of national nature, as well as by demonstrating how particular understandings of the region have come to exist as the common-sense truth, this work enters into the struggle for the constitution of the region, aiming in part to help put n'Daki Menan back on the map.

Chapter 1 outlines the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the book and explains what it contributes to writing on race, gender, and nationalisms, as well as to writing on Temagami. Chapter 2 traces how the Temagami forest became a timber commodity in the early twentieth century and how this process placed the region within the context of resource conservation, the Canadian nation and British Empire, and displaced the Teme-Augama Anishnabai from n'Daki Menan. Chapter 3 investigates tourism at the turn of the twentieth century, showing how travel writing constructed Temagami as a part of the pristine Canadian

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wilderness for white men (and, to a small extent, white women) to explore. Within this narrative, the Teme-Augama Anishnabai, who were vital to the success of tourism, appeared as part of a disappearing wilderness rather than as cultural beings with their own systems and connections to n'Daki Menan. Neither forest conservation nor tourism was an innocent enterprise, and both were implicated in gendered, classed, and racialized relationships of power and inequality through their fashioning of a wilderness. Chapter 4 examines a conflict between the Teme-Augama Anishnabai and the Ontario government that started, in 1929, when the province demanded that Teme-Augama Anishnabai members pay rent for the privilege of living on Bear Island. In the ensuing controversy, the racial and spatial order that had been (imperfectly) imposed through earlier tourist and forestry discourses and practices was uprooted and reconfigured, and the Teme-Augama Anishnabai found themselves spatially confined and temporally displaced in a process that also revealed the instability of categories such as race and wilderness. Chapter 5 focuses on another struggle between the First Nation and Ontario, a legal battle over title to n'Daki Menan/Temagami that took place between 1973 and 1991. More than a contest over a given territory, the court case served as an avenue for the construction and contestation of land and the categories of race and gender. This chapter shows how historical discourses and practices, often colonial in character, emerge in the present to deny subjectivity and land to Aboriginal peoples. The Conclusion revisits the main points of the book, discusses present-day implications of the creation of the Temagami wilderness, and considers how the arguments advanced here might provide an opening for considering alternative futures in n'Daki Menan.

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