

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Conflict in Caledonia: Aboriginal land rights and the rule of law

by Laura Devries, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2011, 242 pp., hardcover C\$85.00 (ISBN 9780774821841)

DOI: 10.1111/j.1541-0064.2013.12034.x

In February 2006, protestors from Six Nations of Grand River took control of a 40 hectare parcel of land in southwestern Ontario known as the Douglas Creek Estates or Kanonhstaton. Located approximately 100 km southwest of downtown Toronto, in one of the most populated regions of Canada, the protest soon attracted the attention of major media organizations as tension and violence between police, native protestors, and anti-protestor activists increased. This protest was the culmination of frustration with an over 200-year-old land claim dispute that remains unresolved as of August 2012.

In writing *Conflict in Caledonia*, Laura Devries provides an excellent synthesis of the complicated historical and legal background behind what is now known as the Grand River land dispute. Yet, for DeVries, land claim disputes in Canada are about more than land or land law. Using critical discourse analysis to examine how parties involved in the land dispute publicly characterized each other and the dispute itself, Devries convincingly argues that the discourses surrounding this particular dispute offer a window into conflicting understandings of law, justice, sovereignty, land, and history in Canada. The results of her analysis point to the troubled foundations of the Canadian legal and political systems, and to contradictions between the treatment of Aboriginal communities and the societal values espoused as central to Canadian national identity. This book is a welcome addition to case study-based analyses of land claims and nation-making in Canada. Moreover, it is a critical, logically reasoned antidote to publications that advance political agendas by using the Grand Rivers land dispute while failing to entirely grasp the legal and historical context of the dispute itself.

The book is organized into six substantive chapters. Chapter One, the most interesting in my opinion, represents the author's unique idea to inspect competing understandings and uses of the term "rule of law," in addition to how historical violations of the rule of law undermine the current land registry system. Chapter Two deals with the significance of land in national identity and how that impacts current land management policy. Chapter Three outlines how discourses that create ideas like economic efficiency and Aboriginal disunity are used to solidify a Canadian normalcy that isolates Aboriginal communities from governance decisions and alienates their legal rights. Chapter Four examines different conceptions of sovereignty and how governance and land might fit into these different conceptions. Chapter Five tackles different ways in which justice is understood by parties to the Grand Rivers land dispute, how justice must be understood in context, and how different understandings of justice impact responses to government proposals of financial compensation. Chapter Six examines the possibility of resolving Aboriginal land claims through constitutional and local changes that takes into consideration some of the above different understandings about law, justice, and sovereignty.

While I recommend this book, some aspects could have been improved to make it stronger. First, the writing does not follow a clear logical or temporal sequence between chapters. As a result, the reader is left feeling that these chapters were possibly conceived of as unique articles and there is quite a bit of repetition of facts and of the central argument of the book. Second, and perhaps most important to geographers, the theoretical framework of this research fails to make strong links to the rich geographic literature on related topics like the politics of scale, jurisdiction, territoriality, property rights, identity, nation-making, and conflict. Yet, rather than seeing this as a problem with a book that is well-grounded in legal theory regarding aboriginal rights, I view this as a call to geographers to make their research more accessible to law, anthropology, and indigenous studies scholars. Finally, while it is clear that there is no simple resolution to Aboriginal

land claims, the author's focus in Chapter Six—that in order to find justice for Aboriginal communities Canada must change the foundations of national governance, institute new treaty processes, and change the national psyche—does not readily lend itself to actionable policy outcomes.

In conclusion, I would recommend this book to political and legal geographers and to those interested in Aboriginal land claims. The author's ability to connect the narratives and the legal and historical

details of the Grand Rivers land dispute to the constitutional framework that guides Canada, to Canadian identity, and to Canadian geographic imaginaries makes this book a valuable addition for scholars interested in land claims, law, and geography.

Arthur Green
Okanagan College