The contours of colonialism: A book review symposium

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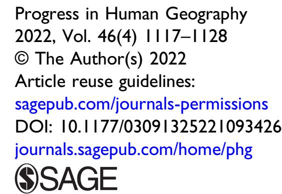

Emilie Cameron, Daniel Clayton, W. George Lovell & Cole Harris. *A Bounded Land*, by Cole Harris, 2021, UBC Press: Vancouver, pp. 344.

Unsettling colonialism: Commentary 1

I first met Cole Harris as an undergraduate student at UBC, almost a quarter of a century ago. He was magnetic. Cole had a particular way of entering a room – he would make his way to the lectern or seminar table, set down his papers, and then peer over his reading glasses and down his long nose, surveying the room, with a hint of a smile peeking through his very serious frown. This would last longer than you might think. It was intimidating and warm at once, a kind of initiation ritual that immediately quieted the room and opened our hearts to whatever would follow. As a lecturer he was, it will surprise no one, both lyrical and pointed, deeply knowledgeable, a gifted storyteller, and a pleasure to listen to. As a seminar instructor he was restrained, leaving ample room for students to flop and flounder with their half-formed thoughts. I remember feeling like I didn't quite get it and Cole seemed to like it that way – he was (and remains) not a man for tidy resolution or easy answers. His passion for understanding the history of Canada was infectious, and it played no small part in my own intellectual path.

What a pleasure, then, to be invited to sit down and assemble some thoughts about Cole's recent book, *A Bounded Land: Reflections on Settler Colonialism in Canada*. It is an authoritative work, collecting and contextualizing lightly edited and abridged writings from across his entire career. The goal was not to simply republish his greatest hits but rather to tease out lines of argument within them and consider the broader intellectual contribution they collectively make. It is, in other words, not just a book but a conversation with a life's work. As such, even those who are amply familiar with Harris's writing will find much to chew on. An abridged 1971 article on Petite Nation, a region of Quebec not far from where I currently live, was a downright riveting read for me, in part because it illuminated dynamics that still shape that region and deepened my understanding of this place, and in part because it is yet another example of how brilliant a scholar Cole Harris is: deeply researched, sympathetic to his subjects, attuned to specificity, and always willing to rethink (he notes in the preface to the chapter that some of his original conclusions were wrong). Ditto the chapters from his earlier work in Acadia. There is a passage in the introduction that retells the history of early colonial settlement in Canada so succinctly and yet in such compelling detail that I felt I understood that history in a new way.

Where I found myself puzzling, and ultimately in disagreement with Harris, is around the primary argument he seeks to develop in the book's introduction and conclusion – that the settler colonial project in Canada was fundamentally bounded by geography and specifically by the Canadian Shield, the rocky terrain of BC, and the aridity and cold of the northern prairies. There is an important difference, he argues, between the kinds of relations that developed between settlers and Indigenous peoples in regions with productive farmlands and forests, and those that emerged in the barren hinterlands of so much of the country, where a large and lasting immigrant population never managed to establish itself. This is not controversial, I agree with him on the empirical facts, and on the stubborn geographical

reality that very little of Canada is arable. But if I am reading him correctly, Cole seems to go so far as to argue that settler colonialism itself only really happened in these southern margins, and that the rest of the country was either subject to a different colonial formation or not really colonized at all (unfortunately he does not elaborate on this corollary to his argument); either way it remained more "Indigenous." Here, again, at the level of population he is right (demography is a key aspect of his argument), and it's true that, in the Far North, for example, colonization became most intensive after World War II, never resulted in the creation of reserves, and most northern Indigenous peoples do remain "where their ancestors [have] always lived" (10). These differences matter. But what are the analytical and political implications of arguing that settler colonialism only really happened in the parts of the country that were intensively settled by immigrants, and of suggesting that Indigeneity itself persisted only in areas north of these regions? What does this argument open up, and what does it occlude?

One thing it does do, that is consistent with Harris's important 2004 paper "How Did Colonialism Dispossess?" is insist on the specificity of what was happening on the ground. In that paper he argued that painting all colonies with the same theoretical brush overlooks important differences between histories and places. He developed this argument in relation to a version of colonial theory and colonial studies that he rightly claimed was neither sensitive to the specificity of settler colonies nor sufficiently attuned to what was happening on the ground; it lent too much credence to imperial imaginative geographies and thus misrepresented and misunderstood the material processes of colonization itself. Since then, a vibrant literature has emerged theorizing settler colonialism specifically and more and more writing has focused on settler colonial formations in Canada (e.g., Coulthard, 2014; Daigle, 2016, 2019; De Leeuw and Hunt, 2018; Dorries et al., 2019; A. Simpson, 2014, 2016; L. Simpson, 2017; Holmes et al., 2015; Hugill, 2017; Pasternak, 2017; Todd, 2018; Tomiak, 2017; Veracini, 2000; Wolfe, 1999, 2006). With these writings in mind, you would be hard pressed to locate any part of Canada, even the more remote and "Indigenous" in Harris' terms, that has not been deeply shaped by the settler colonial project. Remoteness did not guarantee Indigenous control over their lands, nor did it protect against residential schooling, missionaries, the Indian Act, police violence, the vagaries of industrial capital, or the insidious reach of white supremacy. Harris acknowledges all this, but he would argue, I think, that only intensively settled lands were subject to settler colonialism specifically. This seems to me to be an overly literal definition, one that severely limits attention to the structural and relational dimensions of settler colonial formations. After all, exploiting, controlling, and repositioning northern bodies, lands, and resources has been part of southern colonial policy (and has generated southern Canadian wealth) since at least the fur trade. How to account for this analytically? It also runs counter to an understanding of settler colonialism that is almost axiomatic at this point in many disciplinary corners; that is, following Wolfe (1999, 2006), that settler colonialism is an ongoing structure, not an event, aimed at control over land and resources. It is a deeply malleable and relational formation and it never really ended.

While settler colonialism was contained to the south, Harris argues, Indigenous peoples in the more northern and remote parts of Canada were able to remain Indigenous because they remained on the land; they were "buffeted," as he notes, by many pressures, but ultimately prevailed and are now "speaking back" to settler Canada in increasingly powerful ways. Indigeneity, he writes, "rather than resources, is the principal yield of the Canadian Shield and the rest of the sparsely inhabited North" (284). This line of argument makes me wary. Certainly, fostering, protecting, and renewing relations with the land is a cornerstone of many Indigenous intellectuals' scholarship and activism, and northern Indigenous peoples do emphasize the centrality of the land to their well-being and survival (see, e.g., McGregor et al., 2010; Wildcat et al., 2014). But there is a fine line between acknowledging the centrality of land and land relations to specific Indigenous peoples and *equating* Indigeneity itself with land and wilderness – a habit of thought that traces itself directly to imperial conquest and lives on in contemporary settler fantasies. This imaginary helps maintain the lie that cities themselves are not

Indigenous lands (see Dorries, 2022 for controversy over a brownfield development proposed on unceded Anishnaabe lands in the heart of Ottawa) and reinforces the colonial notion that Indigenous peoples are somehow out of place or less Indigenous when they live in cities or live 'modern' lives. It also draws a false line between south and north, urban and rural – Harris argues that settlers have been forced to listen to the "speaking back" of Indigenous peoples because "wherever there are settlers there is always land not far away to the north, where the population is largely or entirely Indigenous… [and so] Canadians have little choice but to listen" (281). Setting aside the question of whether there is actually much listening going on (as I write there are increasingly militarized efforts to shut down land defenders at logging and pipeline sites across BC) there is a geographical determinism in this statement that jars against both demographic reality (there are more Indigenous peoples living in cities in Canada today than not) and the dynamism of urban Indigenous political movements. Idle No More started with a Round Dance in a shopping mall in Saskatoon; urban First Nations were central to a months-long standoff against the expansion of the TransMountain pipeline in Vancouver. Indigenous peoples resist dispossession and injustice wherever they are, not just to the north of the city, and often in solidarity with struggles that span cities, reserves and remote communities (in 2020, for example, Haudenosaunee in Ontario and Quebec organized rolling railway blockades in support of Mi'kmaq fishers in Nova Scotia).

Part of the reason Harris and I see things differently is that we are reading different things and inclined to develop arguments from fundamentally different places. Harris is an historical geographer whose intellectual debts, he notes, are largely to historians. His arguments about the more general patterns of settler colonialism in Canada emerge not from an immersion in settler colonial studies, Indigenous studies, or contemporary conflicts over land and resources but rather from decades in the archive and from his vast knowledge of a particular body of historical scholarship. Historians, he notes, are constitutionally suspicious of both theory and generality. His goal in this book is to venture some conclusions about the patterns of settler colonialism not by starting with theory but by deduction from the empirical materials at hand. While I agree with Cole that a sweeping application of settler colonial theory to entire regions is analytically dubious (see also Bernauer, 2022) and, to the extent that it skips over or bends the details of lands, lives, and histories, even sloppy, I don't actually believe we can understand settler colonialism, historically or in the present, without critical theory, broadly defined. It is an essential tool both for questioning the epistemological frames that make things make sense (and make some things unknowable) and for drawing analytical connections between geographically and historically dispersed processes. Given that the traditional territories of every single Indigenous group in Canada are impacted in some way by industrial development, moreover (from hydro dams and mines to fish farms and pipelines), to say nothing of the mounting impacts of climate change, it seems to me that whatever conceptual framework is brought to bear on settler colonialism, it must in some way reckon with the devastating impacts of extractivism on Indigenous lands and the structures that authorize it.

Wherever readers land on these points, this book is immensely valuable and makes an important contribution to the broader project of understanding settler colonialism in Canada. Harris' grasp of the historical geographies of early settlement is unrivalled. This would be impressive as an edited collection of the works of many scholars; the fact that it is just a selection of the works of one person is astonishing. He revolutionized historical geography by finally turning empirical attention to Indigenous peoples and lands, and by attempting to unpack the lasting effects of dispossession on the creation of the country. His work has had a powerful impact well beyond the discipline (and the academy) and this collection gathers in one place some of the pivotal pieces in that overall project. Harris also forces readers to take a long, hard, and sympathetic look at settlers. This will be uncomfortable for some, but generic condemnations and disavowals of settler colonialism will not deliver us to a more just future or relieve us of the inherited privileges it has handed so many of us. These are our histories, our ancestors. We need to face them more fully. Harris also challenges us to be more specific and careful about how

we use theory in our work, and to take our time discerning the story we want to tell with the materials at hand. What a gift to those who are, as we speak, taking the study of settler colonialism in new directions.

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Shapes of Settler Colonialism and Questions of Dwelling: Commentary 2

A prodigious scholar, fieldworker and storyteller, and inspirational mentor and innovator in historical geography, with an innate and infectious curiosity about where he lives, Cole Harris has been writing about Canada for over fifty years and was engaging questions of settler colonialism – which he defines as “that form of colonialism associated with immigrants who became the dominant population in the territories they occupied and, in so doing, displaced the Indigenous peoples who previously had lived there” (p. 3) – long before they attained the critical reach and bite they have today. *A Bounded Land* comprises fourteen previously published writings stretching back to the early 1970s (some of them abridged, each briefly prefaced), packaged in five sections, and with an Introduction and Postscript and 22 maps (four of them historical, the rest purposed as tools of analysis), that tell a geographical story about settler colonialism and recount Harris’s journey through it. That journey dovetails a fifty-year period of Canadian reckoning with colonialism stemming from a 1969 Canadian Government White Paper on Indian Policy which promised but failed to deliver equality for First Nations. Political efforts at redress and reconciliation floundered, Harris affirms, because they “ignored the destruction wrought by colonialism”, and Indigenous peoples have since been “speaking back to settler Canada as never before and in a great variety of ways” (pp. 280–81).

Indigenous resurgence has been propelled by legal and political struggles over title to land and resources, and collective rights, and has found a propitious ally in a critically attuned historical geography, spearheaded by Harris, that mainstreams Indigenous experience and questions settler colonial identities and narratives of entitlement and possession. Also redolent in this book is the career-long symbiosis in Harris’s work between his vocation as a geographer and identity as a Canadian. This interleaved career and history does not seamlessly coalesce in this book and one perhaps should not expect this of it. Rather, the reader encounters a *mise-en-scène,* with various actors and sets in Harris’s story not altogether neatly choreographed.

On the one hand, he seeks to reflect on “analytical edges” in his work that might foster more general understanding of settler colonialism, chiefly although not exclusively in Canada, yet his engagement with recent theory and literature in this area is limited and comes mostly at the end (p. 3). On the other hand, there are clear affinities between the scattered fields of settler colonial studies and decolonial investigation and the twin pillars of Harris’s approach: namely, first, “that settler colonialism is most inclusively studied on the ground” and “remains inextricably tied to varied uses of… and values bearing on land”; and second, that such study should proceed from “sites of dispossession” rather than grand theories about colonial discourse (which he regards as partial rather than necessarily wrong) (pp. 230, 264; cf. Veracini, 2015).

Harris knows that the politics of location and enunciation in this are challenging, submitting: “It is not for me, a product of settler colonialism, to suggest to Indigenous peoples how to deal with the effects of what I am part of” (p. 283). For his part, resonances of his English grandfather’s experience of eaking out a new colonial life on a meagre patch of land in the Slocan Valley of British Columbia (B.C.) imbues his larger image of pre-Confederation Canada as a “reluctant land” (Harris, 2008), and much of Harris’s writing has this synecdochal quality, with scene coming from site. He is also acutely aware of his discipline’s complicity in empire by virtue of its mapping, reconnoitring, and ordering proclivities. Lastly in this vein, I started with Harris as a graduate student in 1987 and have an abiding memory of reaching his office door, there to marvel at how he was trying to ‘figure things out’ (as he often put it) from where he sat: bowed under an Anglepoise lamp in a dimly lit room, with unlined paper and pencil to hand, archival file cards hewn from hither and yond spread out before him, crafting a paragraph, fiddling with a sentence, alighting upon a telling piece of evidence, telling a story, yes, drawing maps, and with hand occasionally placed on brow in thought. This is of course a profoundly modern-Western representation of the intellectual operating in what Michel Foucault (1977: 90) described as a “new imaginative space” of reason, supplanting fable and fantasy, and residing “between the book and the lamp” – or more

accurately in Harris's case, between the archive, the field, and the study.

Indigenous understandings of the things upon which Harris reflects in this book come from and are taken elsewhere, and the settler colonialism literature starts with alterity – the idea that dissimilar epistemologies and voices on different sides of colonial divides have not been equally respected and are not easily bridged. Yet for Harris there is still an onus to represent, and this commentary imbibes his exhortation (not just to me) to look at and read things as they are, and closely, but knowing that they are never quite as they seem.

The trope – analytical edge – of 'boundedness' that he uses to frame this collection is not an easy one to come to terms with, for a start because of the strong critical association of colonisation with expansion and control, even when and where resistance and ambivalence are in play; and as I shall observe in conclusion, Harris's boundedness is wrapped up with something weightier yet intangible. Nor are the links he forges between the past (his core focus) and present unpacked as fully as they might have been. Such links proceed from his twofold claim that Indigenous peoples "are ever more sophisticated users of power in a modern society, partly because their numbers are growing rapidly, but most basically because settler colonialism in Canada has been a bounded enterprise" (p. 284). The first part of this formulation unsettles the idea of an authentic Indigeneity and prospect of an unadulterated decoloniality; the second binds 'Indigenous' and 'settler' (and a spectrum of permanent and transient newcomers/immigrants in this category) together in a thoroughgoing reorganisation of space and society, and differential landscape of power and injury. Both parts raise profound questions about what connects and separates these two settler colonial constituencies.

Nevertheless, boundedness serves as Harris's 'analytical edge' in four main ways. First, and foremost, through his configuration of this 'enterprise' in both discrete and comparative terms, and with a suite of adjectives and synonyms for bounded ('circumscribed,' 'constricted,' 'fringe,' 'hedged' 'limit,' 'pinched,' 'pocket') that issue from the Introduction (pp. 3–18). "Whereas a generous relationship with an ongoing land underlay the United States [U.S.], Canada was underlain by pinched relationships within bounded patches of land that stretched discontinuously across the continent" (p. 9). I shall turn to the comparative bit soon. For now, while not diminishing the commercial "sprawl" of empire (the fur trade, and resource frontiers and industries), Harris dwells on how colonial settlement and agriculture were pinned back by rock, cold and aridity to the north (the Canadian Shield), as well as the U.S. border to the south, and thus how the "large majority of the land of Canada has not fit this [settler colonial] project" (pp. 7, 9).

Whether or not his identification of settler colonialism with settlement is right, and whether much of what lay beyond Canada's bounded settler enterprise, can, as Harris ventures, be deemed "substantially Indigenous" (and perhaps more so today, he observes at the end, than ever), will augur debate (pp. 9, 280–85). Indeed, the latter argument can be tried on his own terms, for he also shows how such outlying 'Indigenous' spaces have been encompassed and punctuated by the colonising (territorialising and systematic) inroads of capital and the state, and now with Indigenous ways of life threatened by climate change, which is the precipitous product of an extractive carbon economy, which, in turn, has been integral to the settler colonial project in Canada.

Second, Harris's shows how both settlers and Indigenous peoples have led bounded – here meaning curbed and unsettled – lives, if in markedly different ways, and in a colonial situation in which "everything was somewhat altered" (p. 9). He deploys the word "primal" in different contexts and capacities to get at this two-way dynamic. On the one hand, it is used in connection with "the discipline imparted by a land system" (the holy alliance between colonial governance and private property) on "mobile Indigenous peoples" who used "many different places in many different ways" (p. 193). "The allocation of reserves in British Columbia defined two primal spaces", he declares, "one for Indigenous peoples and the other for virtually everyone else". On the other hand, European ways could not be wholly transplanted or fully reproduced in alluring yet alien new world environments and spaces. Right across Canada, news lands, vast distances, the fragmentary

and piecemeal nature of immigration, and fundamental reorganisation in the relations between land and labour, exerted "selective pressures" on the configuration of colonial economies and societies, on settler-Indigenous relations, and on what was "real or fanciful" about the connections between distant and adjacent places (metropole and colony, and regionalised colonial formations) (pp. 29, 122, 172).

In constricted spaces where Indigenous people and settlers/immigrants came into competition and conflict over land and resources, the latter were backed by the sovereign and disciplinary power of the state and the former got caught between machinations of settler disregard (ignorance and disdain) and imperialism's duplicitous civilising mission (with reserves, residential schools, and missionary stations spatial cruxes). Where the land appeared empty – not only due to disregard but also because Indigenous populations had been ravaged by epidemic disease (smallpox, measles, and influenza especially) – a prospecting vision of personal enrichment often lapsed into an everyday struggle with illusory riches, especially for settlers with few means. In this vein, Harris represents Acadia, the first (seventeenth-century, French, eastern seaboard) colony of what became Canada as both an "early window on social and cultural change" and a "frail creation" that inaugurated an enduring pattern of precarity. Acadia became "a moral and social primal", he writes, a place configured through a tangle of colonial desire and imperial frustration that was carried through to the nineteenth-century colonisation of B.C. (p. 55, cf. pp. 145–166, 201–230). In short, 'primal' has both a generative and expressive hue.

Third, the reader may venture out of the Introduction thinking that Harris will take the continuous land, and by implication uninhibited colonialism, of the U.S. as a comparative measure by which an alternative, more conditional (if hardly less violent or deleterious), Canadian project unfolds and is gauged. In some ways, and regardless of whether Harris's depiction of U.S. settler colonialism is a caricature (the issue can be discussed), this becomes a red herring. He is not preoccupied with continental comparison. In other respects, however, the book raises a much broader issue, and one not confined to North America: of whether it is land (as Harris has it, that "Europeans overseas had access to land in ways that Europeans did not") or the state and culture (political policy, state power, adventurism and boosterism, and discourses of civilisation and savagery) that make the difference to how settler colonialism is grounded and shaped (p. 125). Can the two be separated? Should one be prioritised over the other?

Fourth, and now reaching into the interstices of Harris's thought-provoking book, land works as a kind of magic lantern, flickering an array of messages. One of these messages concerns the question of human fulfilment - or dwelling in French and German philosophical traditions (see Lussault, 2015). It flickers through Harris's return, time and again, to how settlers and Indigenous people have been, and remain, both "proximate" to and "distant" from one another – "detached" yet "juxtaposed" as he puts it in a key passage in Part 5, on "theorizing settler colonialism" – complicating the idea of settler colonialism as a "logic of elimination", as some conceive it (p. 206; Veracini, 2015: 9). Each is displaced, and each struggle to be at home, if for markedly different reasons and with starkly unequal effects. Such discrepancy-in-mutuality becomes Harris's primal scene of interpretation. How might historical geographies that are irreparably forked be connected? And what should be made of his view that much of Canada's momentum now sits with Indigenous peoples? This flickering issue of proximity and distance – and with 'land', we now see, meaning 'coming to ground' and being in an 'altered space' rather than just terrain – is not just about patterns and processes of power and geographical change (although it is abundantly about that); it is also, for Harris, about the sentiments that make these relations. He does not lay his own feelings fully on the table in this regard, so excuse me for extrapolating.

For Harris, land is a fulcrum of human fulfilment and his treatment of it here is perhaps a way of asking about whether any succour or purpose can be wrought from unfulfillment – from the mixed and split sentiments of expectation, disillusionment, injury, possibility, and trauma that animate the forms of displacement and dispossession he examines. Land becomes a barometer of how or whether, in such bounded circumstances, lives can be "well" lived. Indeed, this adverb is omnipresent in Harris's story

(and, on my count, appears in over twenty guises). The relationship between land and life is 'primal' to Harris and operates via a humble morality of dwelling – one tempered (again) by the recognition that humility is not for everyone or the same everywhere. Let me end by trying to explain.

In *The Ends of Life*, Keith Thomas (2009) explores the diverse paths to human fulfilment in early modern England. Civility, faith, family, honour, protection, sociability, valour, wealth, and work all had a place, but he avers that civility attained a powerful presence as a composite, if not higher, end. More precisely, he shows how the human desire to dwell – not simply to inhabit and populate, but also to expedite and settle the self through a web of relations that one both makes and finds oneself in – culminated in the association (at least in England) of dwelling with cultivation and property, and of these two artifices of fulfilment with a more imposing link between civility and freedom (as a bulwark against tyranny and caprice). The enclosure of land was a key means by which human fulfilment became realised in this way, Thomas continues, and amounts, for him, to an enclosing of life and the imagination. Land and dwelling get pinned to, and stifled by, the commodity, with property puffed as protection against the vagaries of other 'ends of life', and of course with one person's freedom-through-civility often coming at the expense another's unfreedom (spectres of class and slavery).

I see much of Thomas in Harris's analysis, and not just in connection with "early settlements" (Part 2 of the book). Harris not only traces how the chain of associations that culminate in the colonial equation of land with property and civilisation came to pass; he also uses 'boundedness' to underscore its constricting arc, and to point to a more conditional – at once adverse and adversarial, yet newly possible – sense of dwelling amidst forked actualities of unfulfillment. Harris repeatedly, if somewhat furtively, brings his shapes of settler colonialism back to these questions dwelling – to what it means to strive for a good life in a colonial situation where lives were not, and could not be, equally well lived, and in a land that was not evenly, and in some ways only slightly, suited to such an aim.

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Engaging Cole Harris: Commentary 3

Early on in this absorbing collection of what he considers "reflections," as in one such previous exercise in taking stock, historical geographer Cole Harris (2020) posits a defining occurrence that gives heuristic context to what he has to say: that European invasion of the Americas, its consequences for Indigenous inhabitants thereafter, can only be understood properly if the role played by disease transfer is acknowledged, grappled with, and taken into account. Within geography, awareness of the catastrophic impact that Old World contagions had on Native American land and life may be traced back to the work of Carl Sauer and the Berkeley School in the early twentieth century (Denevan, 1996). "We know of scarcely any record of destructive exploitation in all the span of human history until we enter the period of modern history, when transatlantic expansion of European commerce, peoples, and governments takes place," Sauer ([1938] 1963: 147) wrote. "We have glorified this period in terms of a romantic view of colonization and the frontier. There is a dark obverse to the picture, which we have regarded scarcely at all."

For much of his distinguished career, Harris has devoted himself to illuminating the "dark obverse" not as it was enacted south of the United States, as Sauer did, but to its far-flung north, in the (p. 14) "closely bounded space" of Canada, a nation situated and forged "between rock and cold – and a border." Here, as they did across the globe, Europeans penetrated, settled, and imposed themselves – and their giddying, transformative ways – at Indigenous expense. The charged, toxic dynamic is particularly apparent in Canada's westernmost province, British Columbia, of which Harris is a proud native son, intent on making past injustices ones that his research addresses, makes better known, and helps redress. "Our luck has been built on others' misfortune," Harris (1997, xvii) states in his earlier stock taking, "and we should appreciate the havoc our coming has wrought."

The foundations of *A Bounded Land* are laid by indicating how an outbreak of smallpox in 1782, a regional episode in a pandemic of continental dimension, depopulated much of the area around the Strait of Georgia prior to European intrusion and the advent of "settler colonialism," defined as (p. 3) "that form of colonialism associated with immigrants who became the dominant population in the territories they occupied and, in so doing, displaced the Indigenous peoples who previously had lived there." The story told is heartbreaking. Though he concedes (p. 37) that "surviving Indigenous accounts of the arrival of smallpox are scattered and fragmentary," Harris takes pains to ensure they get a fair hearing, often in words recorded by Europeans passing through. David Thompson, for example, recalls being asked (p. 44): "Is it true that the white men ... have brought with them the Small Pox to destroy us? Is this true, and are we all soon to die?" The questions put to Thomson resonate palpably in these fearful pandemic times, even though fatalities caused by Covid-19 will be a fraction of those suffered by Native Americans in the aftermath of Columbus.

Indigenous testimony is reinforced time and again by written European observations. Captain George Vancouver, upon (p. 42) "reaching the southeastern end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, began to find deserted villages and human skeletons," reported to be "promiscuously scattered about the beach, in great numbers." Harris considers (p. 45) "Indigenous oral traditions and the texts of European explorers and traders" to be "mutually reinforcing," a joint reckoning of utter devastation. Room is always made in the narrative for "voices" unearthed by Harris from archival obscurity, if not oblivion. "The environs of Port Discovery," he reveals Vancouver (pp. 42–43) as noting, "were a general cemetery for the whole of the surrounding country." The attentive sea captain adds: "Habitations had now fallen into decay. Their inside, as well as a small surrounding space that appeared to have been formerly occupied, were overrun with weeds. Silence prevailed everywhere."

In essence, epidemic depopulation created a spatial vacuum, facilitating not only European appropriation of Indigenous lands and resources but also the illusion that the immigrant society British Columbia eventually became put down its roots in unoccupied terrain. "Here was an almost empty land, so it seemed, for the taking," Harris (p. 48) asserts. The world, for autochthonous souls, "was coming to an end." For wave after wave of newcomers, however, "it was opening towards a prosperous future." In Canada, settler colonialism (p. 15) "was accomplished in the wake of … horrific carnage wrought by [introduced] viruses and bacteria … and on severely depopulated land." Displacement, doom, and erasure for some; bounty and newfound belonging for others.

Though the disease factor features explicitly in but one of Harris's sixteen reflections, its relevance in accomodating settler colonialism underpins the entirety of his discourse. All throughout he writes with incisive clarity: while social theory and postcolonial musings inform empirical exposition, they do not clutter and obfuscate, too often the case in contemporary dealings with subject matter akin to that of *A Bounded Land*. Harris's talents at putting well into words, of gracing his work with literary flair, is reminiscent of that of Sauer, of whom (intellectually speaking) he is a gifted descendent (**1**). Geography is a beneficiary of both, fruitfully and enduringly so.

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Acknowledgements

I thank Mike Roche (personal communication) for pointing out (his designation) that Harris is an "academic grandson" of Sauer's, by virtue of the fact that Harris's doctoral supervisor (Andrew H. Clark) was one of Sauer's Ph.D students at the University of California in Berkeley. The make-up of the Sauer family tree, a veritable geographical genealogy, is an abiding interest of a great-grandson of Sauer's, Kent Mathewson et al. (2020). I, too, am a great-grandson of the twentieth century's greatest geographer. Of his place in the scheme of things, Harris (2020, 11) reflects: "I cannot say that, at the beginning, I had any clear idea of where I was going. I was interested in early Canada and curious about my own position in the country. What was it to be a Canadian, and where did my life fit in relation to the lives of ancestors who had come from Britain? I had done a combined degree in geography and history at the University of British Columbia and in 1959 went to the University of Wisconsin to study under Andrew H. Clark, then America's pre-eminent historical geographer. Clark, [a Canadian], was interested in the comparative study of mid-latitude European settlements overseas and asked me, as his research assistant, to find out what I could about the Acadians, the French settlers [of] the Bay of Fundy. It was there, tentatively, and with no larger sense of direction, that my investigations of settler colonialism began."

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A Response to the Commentaries

Nothing pleases the author of a book more than reviewers who seriously engage it. My warm thanks, therefore, to Emilie Cameron, Dan Clayton and George Lovell. I, in turn, engage with them – in so far as I can in a few words.

In response to Emilie's comments, I have always assumed that the European outreach into the non-European world was accomplished in many ways, settler colonialism only one among them. European fishermen altered Indigenous lives along an edge of North America in the 16th century, but there were neither settlers nor colonies. Nor were there in the vast Western Interior at Confederation (c. 1870), although the fur trade had created many new patterns of dependence. To lump these various changes within settler colonialism is, in my view, to obscure their particular character. The problems faced, for example, by Inuit on Baffin Island since W.W. II do not have to do with settlers, rather with relocations associated with the Canadian state, new modes of communication, and industrial capital in the form of a German-owned iron mine. I doubt that she and I disagree about what has been going on, rather about how to label it.

Overall, my work has been more dominated by the archives than by theory, which, for the most part, I have tried to use suggestively rather than deductively. It draws me to questions I would not otherwise have asked, to relationships I would not have considered. Yet I try not to get into a study with my mind made up, rather to soak myself in the record and see where I find myself. Moreover, and to reveal my antiquity, I hold to the idea of truth, which in my view is the most reasoned and supported understanding that can be offered at a given point in time.

Emilie may be right that I have drawn too sharp a line between the Indigenous experience within and beyond the pockets of dense immigrant settlement. Yet I am struck by the difference between the outreaching, land-consuming pattern of American settlement and the long interaction across much of Canada of traders and Indigenous peoples in the fur trade. The one sought to eliminate Indigenous

people, the other required them. This difference survives in two countries that have imposed themselves very differently on land and peoples. Of course, Indigenous people living on reserves in southern Canada are fully Indigenous, of course much current Indigenous momentum is urban. But were there not Indigenous people moving into Canadian cities from proximate norths, the Indigenous momentum in contemporary Canada would be very much weaker.

Dan Clayton knows me too well, and I perhaps him. Almost as soon as he arrived at UBC over 30 years ago, it was unclear who was teaching whom, though I had my suspicions. He is right that my interest in settler colonialism derives from the settler experience of my near forbearers, also right that I have tried to understand Canada as a particular geographical creation. He may be right that the concept of dwelling closely fits my undertakings.

My English grandfather, who settled on and farmed a narrow, mountainside terrace in southeastern British Columbia, considered the England he had left decadent and corrupt. A Fabian socialist, his was an English critique of England, and in many ways he remained English throughout his life. His children, raised in drastically un-English circumstances, were not English. Much of my work explores this reworking of former ways in new settings. My PhD thesis, on the seigneurial system in early French Canada, was an attempt to consider what happened to a body of French law and custom that turned around the management of land and the ordering of a hierarchical society when relocated in a different land and among a different mix and density of peoples.[1] Years later, I attempted to describe the immigrant society of early British Columbia, the Canadian province in which I live. In either case, the basic question was the same: what is the nature of social and cultural change when people are relocated in settings quite unlike those in which they had lived? Broad answers to this question are probably not helpful. One needs to discern cause and effect with some precision, and, however inadequately, I have tried to do so, for the most part in rural societies in early Canada.

I have always felt that Canada and the United States are very different countries, and that this difference has much to do with the ways they have arranged themselves on the land. I have tried to explore this arrangement – this emerging human geography – in Canada, and to suggest some of its implications. Early Canada was not a melting pot. It produced and sustained different societies in different places within a narrow archipelago of detached settlements stretched between rock and cold to the north and an international border to the south. America, on the other hand, has dealt expansively with a generous land. These differences are reflected in different countries, even in different constitutions. The American Constitution grew out of a debate over the means of protecting republican liberty, the Canadian out of a debate over the means of protecting identity and respecting the rights of others.[2] The one drew deductively on Enlightenment philosophers, the other was a deeply inductive response to the fragmented pattern of immigrant settlement.[3]

My work on Indigenous issues has been relatively recent. I have tried to understand the creation of the reserve system in British Columbia, and in so doing the effects of reserves on Indigenous livelihoods.[4] I have tried to sort out the workings and interconnections of the powers newcomers wielded to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands.[5] Beyond this, I have hardly ventured.

I am intrigued by Dan's reference to dwelling. Indigenous people dwelt on the land very differently to settlers, and settlers somewhat differently from Europeans. I have explored some edges of these different dwellings. As a product of settler dwelling, I am both proud and dismayed, knowing as I do that, inevitably, such dwelling has created and destroyed. Its most egregious error may have been the residential schools, direct assaults as they were on Indigenous ways of being. It is those very ways that now seem so needed. Demographically, Canada is becoming more Indigenous, and my hope is that a fair measure of traditional ways has managed to survive. Hopefully, the long detachment of most of the Canadian land from the principal inroads of settlers has increased that possibility.

I appreciate George's observations about introduced disease, a topic on which he has written so powerfully. You are right that my chapter on disease underlies the book. While I fear my Sauerian pedigree is weak, I share his opinion of this remarkable scholar.

Like Sauer, I have never been very concerned about disciplinary boundaries. Curiosity runs where it will. That said, I consider myself a historical geographer situated somewhere in the borderland between geography and history. The interrelations of society and land, of people and place, have always fascinated me, and have been at the heart of all my investigations.

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Notes

1. R.C. Harris, 1966, *The Seigneurial System in Early Canada: a geographical study,* Madison Wisconsin and Quebec City, University of Wisconsin Press, Les Presses de L'Université Laval
2. For much more in this vein Samuel LaSelva, *Canada and the Ethics of Constitutionalism: Identity, Destiny and Constitutional Faith*, Montreal and Kingston, McGill Queen's University Press, 2018, especially chap. 10.
3. Dan is right about caricature, but at this scale it becomes necessary. Land based abundance also contributed to the hold of liberty on American thought.
4. Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia,* Vancouver, UBC Press, 2002, 415 p.
5. "How Did Colonialism Dispossess?" in the volume under review, pp. 231–64.

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