

# Anthropology Book Forum

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Tom Özden-Schilling, *The Ends of Research: Indigenous and Settler Science After the War in the Woods*. Duke University Press, 2023. 320 p. ISBN 9781478027669.

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In *The Ends of Research*, Tom Özden-Schilling takes us through a nuanced and detailed account of both Euro-Canadian and First Nation researchers in the ‘ambiguous afterlives’ of a resource conflict in British Columbia, and how through their varied research projects they produce potent relationships to place whilst enduring the professional precarity brought on by the withdrawal of the state. He details the complex hopes and difficulties faced by researchers, and the subtle politics of the fine-grained environmental science they practice, as well as the potentials and potencies of the scientific artefacts they produce.

Özden-Schilling begins with the question of who ‘won’ the War in the Woods, using the futility of this question to begin to unpack the ambiguous legacies and place of those involved in it. This ‘war’ was a period of intense protest by First Nations groups (namely, Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en) and citizen activists around the clearcutting of forest in British Columbia in the 80s and 90s. This, too, is a conflict that is far from over, with protests again flaring up in 2021, and where the underlying injustices remain unresolved. While the book does not focus on the activists themselves (reflected on later, p. 229), the period of activism and protest ran parallel with a proliferation of research projects that brought researchers from other parts of the country to the region, as well as the funding of indigenous mapping projects, as part of an effort from the state to better ‘know’ the ecological terrain to ‘govern better.’ *The Ends of Research* is focused on these researchers, and how they understood their modes of knowledge production in relation to these wider struggles, and how they find their place and articulate claims after being left in the lurch by the withdrawal of the state.

Thematically, Özden-Schilling focuses on how the politics of expertise intersects and relates with issues of indigeneity and coloniality, and the various lives and effects different techno-scientific artifacts and techniques have. He details both the particularities and convergences of Euro-Canadian and First Nations researchers, and the different ways these professional and social communities of researchers work to maintain viable connections to place and profession. This is skilfully done, balancing an account of the different interests informing both settler and indigenous science while maintaining interior heterogeneity to each group, giving an interwoven narrative of the politics and practice environmental science in northwest British Columbia.

In the first chapter, *Nostalgia: Placing Histories in a Shrinking State*, we consider the role of Euro-Canadian researchers that moved into the region. Here, Özden-Schilling discusses ‘rural researchers’ and their fraught relation with the state: on the one hand, they are nostalgic for the technocracy that brought them security and authority, but this inability to secure solid financing has also led them to develop other ways to guarantee a place in this environment they have come to feel obligated toward. We are given a detailed account of how these researchers negotiate this position, and how they interlace their scientific expertise with their position as residents in the area, producing fine-grained and detailed ecological knowledge, as well as how through this they write themselves into the future of the area. Özden-Schilling’s use of ‘rural researchers’ neatly captures this fraught position, wherein they balance commitments to place with professional ambitions – a move that works to complicate more morally firm portrayals of technocratic actors.

In the second chapter, *Calling: The Return of Gitxan Research*, we turn to First Nations counter-mapping projects and the attempts to leverage scientific instruments and methods to develop alternative infrastructures of self-governance. They, like their white counterparts, take seriously the interest of the state *vis-à-vis* developing detailed ecological knowledge of the area, and focus on producing exquisitely detailed research to better campaign for their desired ends of greater autonomy. This emphasis on the need for technical expertise in order to develop evidence toward more autonomy leads First Nations groups to be invested in the making of experts – a process where the personal tolls can be extremely trying (loneliness, distance, constant travel), and where the rewards of such efforts are continually deferred to the future. Özden-Schilling overviews these ‘paths to professionalization’ through two interlocutors,

giving a sense of the distinct modes indigenous researchers have understood and wielded their responsibilities to collectives alongside their scientific authority (p. 103).

In Chapter Three, *Inheritance: Replacement and Leave-Taking in a Research Forest*, the issue of the reproduction of these research projects and the labour of ecology (and adjacent sciences) is considered. This is a particularly stimulating chapter, attentive to how this mode of research (long-term engagement, detailed recording, maintaining plots, etc.) offers a space to ponder one's own attachment to place, addressing with the potentials for reconciliation (p. 129) alongside the dangers of one's research fortifying state agendas that would undercut indigenous claims. This comfort in addressing but not resolving tensions is a strength of the work and the utility of the category of 'rural researchers' as an ambiguous position between abstract science and committed attachments to place, where through the affective investment one makes gradually through mundane, repetitive, and collaborative work in the forests one cultivates diffuse, tacit knowledge and appreciation of the environment and professional community. Focusing on the succession of one scientist to his younger apprentice, Özden-Schilling brings these precise issues that define the ever-fraught 'rural researcher' to the fore.

Chapter Four, *Consignment: Trails, Transects, and Territory Without Guarantees* focuses on research funded by an oil company to assess their pipeline proposal that includes both indigenous and white researchers. This is a charged and uncertain project, but the author explains how despite the controversy around taking the money from an oil company, this is understood as a strategic decision to allow the research to survive. This is justified through the deferral of the promises of this research and a focus on "a subtler politics of collecting, refining, and repurposing data drawn from decades' worth of chance encounters in the field: depoliticized in the instant, perhaps, but latent in their power, and consigned for confrontations to come" (p.176). Özden-Schilling also advances a wider argument around the utility of these technoscientific artefacts produced through field mapping and how these have purchase for indigenous groups in producing knowledge legible management institutions, through which they can exert influence, while also understanding how this focus on a particular form of knowledge has led to the professionalization of indigenous knowledge and its codification into abstracting, technical documents.

Lastly, in the fifth chapter, *Resilience: Systems and Survival After Forestry's Ends*, takes us to consider the contestations of collaborative research, and how in these debates different ideals

and hopes for the future are made manifest. We are given an account of how resilience theory has spread to British Columbia, with its focus on simplified knowledge and collaborative projects that sideline rather than enhance different expertise, particularly regarding indigenous researchers. Özden-Schilling explains how resilience theory's focus on technocratic simplification, directed toward centralised authorities rather than local bodies, endangers the 'federalised' organisation of expertise that currently persists (p. 201), how 'rural researchers' are pressured to adapt or perish, and indigenous researchers increasingly find their work unvalued in this new, neoliberal paradigm. This, in the context of the book, feels like a graver threat than others, as it undermines the fundamental meanings of their research even more thoroughly than alternative donors might. Overall, this last chapter highlights the heightened stakes and difficulties of maintaining a coherent research community, the increasing doubt around the reproduction of this community, ending on a dubiously hopeful note that this 'mode of living' may yet persist even if the promise of a more radically open future fades slightly more.

*The Ends of Research* is a stimulating ethnography that productively lingers on the ambiguities of environmental research, unveiling how 'rural researchers' and indigenous researchers alike make and contest place through detailed research despite increasing disregard by the state in British Columbia. It should be of great interest to anthropologists of science, the environment, and governance generally, science and technology studies scholars, and those interested in issues of 'post'-colonialism and indigeneity.

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