

HOMELANDS AND EMPIRES:

Indigenous spaces, Imperial Fictions, and Competition
For Territory in Northeastern America, 1690-1763

Jeffers Lennox

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. xiv and 334 pp.
cloth, ISBN: 9781442614055

Reviewed by Nicolas Houde

Département de science politique Directeur du GRIAAC / CIERA-Montréal,
Université du Québec à Montréal,
Montréal, QC

With *Homelands and Empires*, Jeffers Lennox sheds light on the first decades of the colonization of Northeastern North America, a time when colonial empires were competing for power in a land they knew little about. “To talk about Acadia or Nova Scotia in the eighteenth century is to engage in an act of imagination” (3). Through the angle of cartographical knowledge, the author pens a powerful account of how imperial competition happened through partial cartographic knowledge and relied on connections with local Indigenous communities.

This book, published by the University of Toronto press, is part of a new collection focusing on the history of New England and the Canadian maritime provinces. This collection is a welcome one, as this geographical area is not extensively published about in the field of history. In the words of the author himself, “many studies that are focused on broad themes, such as negotiation, lack specificity, however, and places such as Nova Scotia are either ignored or subsumed into New England’s sphere” (12).

What is of particular interest in *Homelands and Empires* is the use of ancient maps circulated at the time in Europe to promote colonization of North America, used as a source of data to show how competition for control and colonization was done as much in the offices of power and newspapers of Europe as on the ground in Acadia and New England. This is rich data that has seldom been used while explaining the early years of colonization.

The first part of the book sets the stage by explaining very well how Acadia and Nova Scotia were “imperial fictions,” for they existed “on a few maps and in the minds of many officials, but not on the ground” (16). It was an area claimed by both French and British crowns, but controlled by Indigenous peoples. We are led to understand how it was essential for both colonial powers to weave alliances with local Indigenous peoples in order to control and secure the land to be settled and act as a buffer between French Acadia and British New England. It shows that it was through the knowledge of local Indigenous groups that European reports about what was going on inland far from the shores of the ocean could be penned, and land could then better be described to imperial centers of power.

The second and third chapters focus more specifically on maps, and on how these maps were used in Europe to create the fiction of a French and a British empire. It convincingly shows

Book Reviews

how the vagueness of hard knowledge about North American land was used to manipulate maps to one or the other's advantage, and how maps were a central instrument in setting borders between empires when on-the-ground knowledge was lacking. Geographic fiction required a cartographic foundation. These two chapters offer vivid images of the role of cartography in the early seventeenth century. Maps were used in European publications to build a narrative of an existing empire in North America, and throughout the literate population, to promote colonization with potential settlers willing to emigrate to the new continent. Maps created an illusion of a land controlled by an empire, ready for a new population to settle, even if the reality on the ground was quite different as the land was still mostly controlled by local Indigenous populations. By explaining this situation, the chapter gives life to the argument that the concept of terra nullius is a fiction. "European maps that emphasized boundary lines favorable to one side or the other could not prevent the Mi'kmaq and their allies from exerting geographic control over the northeast" (65).

In the fourth chapter, the reader is transported to the time following the founding of Halifax, when the British Empire intended to "transform an imperial fiction into a territorial force that could defeat French Acadia and pose a real threat to the Indigenous homelands in the Northeast" (124). The reader really feels that as the knowledge of Nova Scotia by the British augmented, their foothold on the place became stronger. The British were establishing themselves as a regional force, able to push Indigenous and Acadian populations to the margins.

In chapter 5, *Acadia in Paris*, the author focuses on the knowledge (or lack thereof) mobilized by the French in the Acadian border dispute with Britain in the mid-18th century. Here again, the reader is shown how maps and geographical knowledge were "diplomatic tools used to reify a geographic fiction in the face of weak political authority and limited military power" (172).

The final chapter of the book reports on the transition of Nova Scotia from "imperial fiction to British plantation" (237) and enlightens the reader on how a war of information was raging between the French and the British in the period leading up to the deportation of the Acadians, which vastly increased the capacity of the English to establish a strong foothold in Nova Scotia. Chapter 6, which explains what happened after the deportation of the Acadians, is interesting in that it shows the power vacuum that was left after the deportation, and the subsequent knowledge building that had to happen for the British settlers to gain a stronger foothold in Nova Scotia. We feel that the settlers gain in confidence progressively, as their knowledge and encroachment of the land expands. The book ends with the end of the Seven Years War, at a time when the British have a stronger foothold on the continent.

This well-written book is a useful addition to the study of the connections between mapmaking and imperial power, and to Maritimes studies. The book is the first of this new collection published by University of Toronto Press that tries to shed some light on the Maritimes, an understudied area. It brings life to Acadia and Nova Scotia during the years of 1690 to 1763. We hope that this collection will be expanded in the years to come. It is a book that will be useful to history and geography students and scholars alike and is a welcomed contribution to the understanding of the construction of imperial power in the context of North America.