

## Book Reviews

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## Recensions

### *Shifting Boundaries: Aboriginal Identity, Pluralist Theory and the Politics of Self-Government*

Tim Schouls  
Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003

Reviewed by Hugh Shewell

In her 1993 film documentary, *Blockade*, Nettie Wild explores the tensions between the Git'K'san Wet su'we'tan peoples of northwestern British Columbia and the white residents who usurped and settled their lands several generations ago. In one scene, a Euro-Canadian former high school teacher is heard to exclaim that whatever made the Git'K'san distinctively Indian is certainly no longer evident now. In effect, he was saying there's nothing Indian about them. What rights could possibly flow towards peoples who aren't even what they claim to be? Wild shows us just the opposite, revealing a people steeped in cultural heritage and with a strong sense of nationhood rooted in the land. In addition, she explores the conflicts and doubts within their own communities. In this way, Wild explores the complexities of Aboriginal identity in Canada as First Nations peoples struggle to regain their self-determination. It is these very themes that political scientist Tim Schouls explores in his recent book, *Shifting Boundaries*.

Published in 2003, the book is long overdue for review. This is regrettable, because the author provides us with valuable insights into issues surrounding Aboriginal self-government in Canada. Schouls has adapted his doctoral dissertation into a finely sculpted, lucid discussion of pluralist theory, its relationship to Aboriginal identity and the consequent implications for Aboriginal self-government. While it is a highly theoretical account — I comment on this later — Schouls

nevertheless grounds his argument in testimony from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and its various discussion papers.

Schouls introduces his central thesis in his introductory comments. He questions the two principal assumptions upon which, he claims, the quest for Aboriginal self-government has been based. (Schouls confines his discussion to on-reserve Indians). These are, first, that Aboriginal self-government will ensure the preservation of Aboriginal cultures and thus protect Aboriginal identity; and second, that it will ensure the preservation of Aboriginal nations as political entities that can exercise control over their own affairs and thus protect Aboriginal identity. The problem with these assumptions, according to Schouls, is that they tend to put Aboriginal peoples into an adversarial position with the Canadian state, represented principally by the federal government. As well, because Aboriginal peoples have been for so long incorporated into the machinery of the Canadian state and, in particular, have felt the impact of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, they experience greater conflict within their communities with respect to individual rights and freedoms. On this latter point Schouls concerns himself mainly with issues raised by women and youth before the RCAP. The perceived fragility of the rights of Aboriginal women, it might be recalled, was a factor in the defeat of the 1992 Charlottetown Accord.

Schouls reviews in detail the problems associated with more traditional theories of identity and pluralism as they relate to Aboriginal aspirations for self-government. I cannot do his intricate discussion justice in such a brief review, but his conclusions lead him to argue that these aspirations would be better served if Aboriginal peoples embraced relational pluralism. Here, the influence of Alan Cairns is apparent. Cairns's book *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State* (2000) argues that Aboriginal self-government, while desirable, is problematic on several fronts. These include the limits of Canadian federalism, the lack of viable populations to maintain large geographic territories, and the demographic of increasing numbers of urban Aboriginal persons who wish to identify as Aboriginal but also want to be part of the urban mix. Schouls agrees that Aboriginal identity and cultures are today fluid and uncertain. In this sense, relational pluralism depends less on identity defined in cultural and/or national terms and more on subjective choice of identity, and is more aptly suited to understanding and supporting Aboriginal hopes for self-government.

Why is this so? Relational pluralism is about how groups relate to one another, especially in the context of the hegemony of one group. However, in a democracy there must be freedom from domination and a "relative equality of relations" established so that less powerful groups are able to pursue, develop, and protect their own unique identities. Whereas communitarian and individualist forms of pluralism tend to set groups apart as different from and in opposition to the dominant group, relational pluralism does not rest on difference and exclusion.

"Instead," Schouls writes, "group difference is established as a function of relations; it exists in places where relations among people result in choices being made about establishing boundaries between people so that certain ties of group identification can be nurtured (e.g., ancestry) and objectives fulfilled (e.g., community development)" (p. 36). While Schouls acknowledges that culture and nation are still intrinsic to Aboriginal identity, he argues that even they are "capable of change over time" (p. 38). What is important, he believes, is that Aboriginal peoples have the protected right and power to be self-defining, so that their communities and cultures evolve in ways they control.

This position, he suggests, is implicit in Aboriginal testimony from RCAP, which he subsequently examines in support of his argument. The final report of the commission, in effect, recommended that the right of Aboriginal peoples to political equality and self-determination be upheld and promoted within the overall framework of confederation.

What Schouls has done is to provide an interpretation, a theoretical foundation for how that might be accomplished. In this I think he has been very successful. Yet there are four aspects of the book that left me less than fully convinced. First, while Schouls draws substantially on Aboriginal testimony and writing, he does not seek out primary Aboriginal actors or communities to confirm his viewpoint. His argument consequently remains at a highly abstract level and lacks a certain authenticity. Despite its best intentions, the unfortunate effect is that of another academic telling the Natives what's right for them. To this end, I was also unclear as to whom the book was addressed. Who is the primary audience?

A second issue was the lack of attention to the rich literature on Indian self-government — especially the many books, papers, and reports that were spawned in the period following the 1983 Penner report. How does this literature fit or not fit into his argument? While in many respects self-government is not the primary focus of the book, this omission nevertheless struck me as a serious gap in his approach. A preliminary chapter that put this literature into perspective in relation to his interest in the subject matter would have been helpful.

Third, part of Schouls's thesis rests on his assertion that making self-government paramount for the protection of Aboriginal culture and nationhood contributes to an unnecessarily adversarial stance with the Canadian state. This may be so, but not until later in the book does he begin to account for the reality of these issues, especially with respect to unresolved land claims — in which rest claims to nationhood — and to the identification of existing, unspecified Aboriginal rights in the constitution. These are legal and constitutional issues that must be resolved and that must be part of historical redress. They will not go away, and they bear greatly on what form self-government will take.

Fourth is the issue of power. For relational pluralism to work, there must be, as Schouls has said, a "relative equality of relations" (p. 36). But how will that

actually occur when, in the current state of relations, there is such an obvious and oppressive imbalance? Will greater equality of power flow from the eventual definition of the existing Aboriginal rights, or will it come about as the result of good will and some sense of moral or just imperative on the part of the Canadian state?

Despite these observations, *Shifting Boundaries* is a welcome addition to the discourse on Aboriginal-state relations in Canada and on the nature of Aboriginal communities themselves. This short review does not do justice to the complexity of Schouls's discussion, nor has it touched on all the issues he raises. The best way to engage in the ideas is to read the book. I enthusiastically recommend it.

## ***Challenging the Market: The Struggle to Regulate Work and Income***

Edited by Jim Stanford and Leah F. Vosko  
Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004

Reviewed by Jonathan Eaton

*Challenging the Market*, edited by Jim Stanford and Leah Vosko, emerged from a working group and conference of the same name that brought together approximately 30 academics and policy researchers from several countries, "each pursuing research critical of the assumptions, practices, and social and economic consequences of labour market flexibility" (p. vii). Their goal in this collection of essays is to portray the roots of neo-liberal labour market policy, its effects, and potential alternatives to it. The breadth and insight of the contributions found in this volume illustrate the benefits of this interdisciplinary (and international) approach.

While specific elements of labour market deregulation have been implemented piecemeal by neo-liberal governments since the early 1980s, it was not until the mid-1990s that a more unified and intellectually coherent policy agenda took form. Stanford and Vosko point to the *OECD Jobs Study* (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 1994) as the intellectual touchstone of this new agenda, and *flexibility* — "a carefully chosen euphemism that disguises and makes palatable a more controversial underlying vision" (p. 11) — as its holy grail. The "flexibility agenda" flowing from the *OECD Jobs Study* includes a range of specific policy recommendations geared towards creating a less expensive and more flexible workforce: restricting access to (and cutting) income security benefits; relaxing direct regulation of the workplace through employment standards