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"Women with no femininity": gender, race and nation-building in the James Bay Project

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Abstract

This paper seeks to gender the nation-state through an analysis of the links between gender, colonial history and governmentality in Québec's James Bay region. In the early 1970s, a new governmental framework was introduced in Northern Québec with the construction of a large-scale hydroelectric complex. The James Bay project coincided with an intensive period of nation-building by Francophones in the province, which led to the 1980 referendum on separation from Canada. Looking at the space of the labor camps, I explore the differential positioning of men and women in dominant narratives of the nation-state. While both men and women who worked in James Bay were cast as heroes of the nation, everyday geographies in the work camps reveal several axes of difference on the basis of gender, race and class. By looking at the production of these geographies and the dual positioning of women as both "outcasts" and "daughters" of the patriarchal state, I call for a broader understanding of difference in the elaboration of a feminist political geography.
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> The art of government, as becomes apparent in this literature, is essentially concerned with answering the question of how to introduce economy—that is to say, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth within the family (which a good father is expected to do in relation to his wife, children and servants) and of making the family fortunes prosper—how to introduce this meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state. (Foucault, 1991: p. 92)

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Introduction

In using the image of a patriarchal family to characterize the new forms of political rationality that emerged in 17th and 18th century Europe, Michel Foucault gives us a sharp point of entry to conceptualize the gendered nature of the state, especially since it is precisely in the transition from sovereign power to governmentality that he sees the entrance of "biopower" in the political sphere. In Québec, this junction of the art of government with a father's care for his family was powerfully expressed during the construction years of the "James Bay project", a major hydroelectric development scheme whose first phase was built 1400 km north of Montreal during a key decade of nation-building and state expansion for the province. Premier Robert Bourassa launched the project in 1971 and remained firmly behind his goal of fueling the province with "Power from the North" (Bourassa, 1985), even against strong opposition from native people, chiefly the Eastern James Bay Crees, who inhabit the region.[1] For Bourassa, the building of an extensive hydroelectric network could not only provide cheap, renewable energy to support the expansion of Québec's industrial base, it also meant the opportunity of "opening" new lands and tightening the relationship between the Québec state and the sparsely populated territories that lie north of the 49th parallel.[2]

While James Bay rivers were being dammed and diverted, a new governmental framework took over the region: Bourassa's first action after officially launching the hydroproject was to introduce a bill to the National Assembly (Québec's parliament) to create a corporation which would oversee all aspects of Northern development, whether in the area of water resources, forestry, mining, transportation or tourism. To fulfill that purpose, the "James Bay Development Corporation" (*Société de développement de la Baie James*, subsequently referred to as *SDBJ*) was created, with a subdivision responsible for the creation of a hydroelectric network that would be known as the "James Bay Energy Corporation" (*Société d'énergie de la Baie James*, SÉBJ).[3] Asked why such an extensive administrative structure

[1] Approximately 90% of Québec's seven million residents live in a narrow population belt stretching along the St.-Lawrence river. The Northern part of the province, nearly two-thirds of its territory, is inhabited by some 20,000 indigenous people, including approximately 12,000 Cree. Although my analysis focuses on the Crees, it must be noted that the Inuit also opposed hydroelectric development in the region.

[2] Bourassa served as Premier of Québec from 1970 to 1976 and from 1985 to 1993 when he resigned due to failing health. He died of cancer in 1996. "Power from the North"—in the original French, *L'Énergie du Nord*—is the title of a book he wrote after completion of the first phase of the project.

[3] Although they initially existed apart from the central public utilities corporation "Hydro-Québec", the SDBJ and SÉBJ both became subsidiaries of it since Hydro-Québec was to run the installations once they were built. State policy was implemented in James Bay through these various institutions, all of them nestled like Russian dolls under different imbricating levels of administration that were ultimately contained by the Québec government. The SDBJ is now defunct and the activities of the SÉBJ have been redirected to providing local and international engineering expertise for large-scale energy project. Although most documents pertaining to the first phase of the project bore the sole stamp of the SÉBJ (not that of Hydro-Québec), their archives are filed with those of Hydro-Québec, which is indicative of the symbiotic relationship between the two organizations.

should be deployed, and so quickly, Bourassa defended his vision vehemently: "To govern is to predict, know and decide. The knowledge that we have of this dossier, the unequivocal advice of experts and specialists, the imperatives of economic revival, everything pushes us to begin without delay the development of James Bay" (Lacasse, 1985: p. 69).

The Premier's words suggest that he was keen to introduce "economy—that is to say, the correct manner of managing individuals, goods and wealth" into the vast resources James Bay offered and which were, in his view, being "wasted" without a rational structure tapping into them (Bourassa, 1981: p. 145). By virtue of this structure, Bourassa and his government did not only introduce the "meticulous attention of the father towards his family into the management of the state", but regarded the people of Québec themselves as an extended family, that of the national community. This community was said to be strengthening itself though the proper management of its territory as people worked together, in Bourassa's words, "to put Québec's resources at the service of all the Québécois" (Bourassa, 1973: p. 129). Bourassa, as well as other proponents of hydrodevelopment in James Bay, frequently smoothed over the political differences that flared with the project by appealing to the fraternal solidarity of the people building it. Due to his relentless efforts to bring together the national family—which was sharply divided over the project—it is not surprising that Bourassa should have become known as "the father of James Bay" and memorialized as such next to the large reservoir that now bears his name.[4]

Against this background, I want to discuss the gendering of the state in Québec in this important instance of modern Québécois nation-building, one which continues to have repercussions in the contemporary politics of the province and, for some Québécois nationalists, its possible future as an independent nation. The James Bay project has also fostered a new national awareness for the Crees; since I cannot speak from a Cree perspective nor do justice to the complexity of Cree nation-building within the scope of this paper, I have limited my analysis to Québécois nationalism in the province. This paper is based on archival research and fieldwork accomplished at different times in the Montreal and James Bay areas over the course of three consecutive years (1998–1999 and 2000). I adopted mixed methodologies, including media analysis and archival research at Hydro-Québec and the Québec National Library, as well as interviews and focus groups conducted with ex-workers, male and female, on the James Bay project.

For the women who worked on the initial phase of the project, the government's paternal attention to people and resources in a new space of development added several masculine geographies to an already patriarchal state. The work camps that housed laborers in James Bay were perhaps the most powerful expression of how state-building policies can become materialized into spaces of everyday life where the categories of gender, race, class and sexuality are actively (re)produced. James Bay work camps gathered, organized and deployed various social actors who, in

[4] This is one of the reservoir that feeds the LG-2 powerhouse—the largest on the La Grande river—which was also renamed in honor of Bourassa.

producing a new space of development territorialized the Québec nation further into Cree territories, effectively spatializing patriarchal—and postcolonial—state structures into a new political landscape. In these masculine spaces of labor, the presence of women seemed at best paradoxical, at worst acutely out of place: a situation that did not bode well for the place of women within the national community James Bay workers were meant to symbolize. And yet, women *were* granted a place—even from the margin—in this community, whereas the inclusion of native people was a much more controversial issue in the nationalist narrative surrounding the project. If James Bay "belonged to all the Québécois", the development scheme spelled a policy of assimilation for the Eastern James Bay Crees. It was argued that Cree people should take the opportunity to move beyond their subsistence activities and become more fully integrated into the market economy of Southern Québec. Therefore, if represented in the hydroelectric landscape, native people can be said to have *appeared disappearing* (Derrida, 1972).

In an effort to understand the role of gender and race in structuring the Québec state, I adopt a feminist political geography framework in which the state is analyzed at a multiplicity of scales, including the body, and therefore intersects with multiple axes of difference. In this particular instance, some of these axes are determined in complex and consequential ways by the colonial history of Québec.[5] Feminist geographers have long called for an approach to the state and to political geography that integrates theories of difference within an understanding of political processes, theories that treat gender, race, class and sexuality not as marginal categories of objective and unified state structures but as elements that enter into the very constitution of the state (see Hyndman, 2000; Kodras, 1999; Kofman & Peake, 1990; McDowell, 1999; Staeheli & Cope, 1994). Looking at the place of women in the James Bay work camps, my study analyzes how difference was constructed inside the administrative structure of the state, such as it acted through the SÉBJ as well as through the symbolic discourse of nation-building surrounding the project. It is important to note that the boundaries between nation, state and nation-state are usually porous and that Québec is no exception. While the creation of a nation-state represents an ideal for militant nationalist forces in the province, the contemporary political landscape reveals the existence of several competing national discourses, including those of Canada and of First Nations people. I use the term "state" to refer to the provincial government that supports the Québécois nation within the territory of Québec yet, in the existing political structures that ultimately bind Québec to Canada, the Québécois state, nation and territory are by no means coextensive with one another.[6] Québec is not an independent nation-state yet several of its institutions can be said to actively nurture the Québécois nation within its boundaries in and through the governmental structures available to it within the

[5] See Courville (2000), Hamelin (1998) and Morissonneau (1978). For a specific analysis of the impact of colonialism on the Crees, see Morantz (2002).

[6] One example, among many, is that Québec is granted some special powers by the Canadian federal government as a means of protecting and enhancing its French character, most particularly in the areas of immigration and language policies.

Canadian federal state. In addition, the state in Québec actively fosters Québécois identity and citizenship, sometimes in contradiction with the Canadian discourse of identity and belonging. In this context, the concept of nation I invoke always implies the state, or "state-like" processes, that support the Québécois nation in Québec and, conversely, my understanding of the Québec state always implies the nation-building strategies that seek to bind nation and state within the single denominator of "Québec." Women workers in James Bay provide a rich insight into how nationalist discourses and state policies functioned together to create a new political landscape in Northern Québec: their presence in the work camps outlines some of the patriarchal strategies of territorialization, governmentality and nation-building that fostered Québécois citizenship and facilitated access to the resources of the territory. Yet, as I was able to observe in my research through interviews and archival work, female laborers at times also reinscribed elements of the patriarchal state in and through the process of its deconstruction: this goes against the common assumption that women are not part of "hegemonic" state projects. This, I contend, can be better understood by engaging more fully the colonial history of Québec and its production of race with the ways in which the state reproduces gender categories. In order to address these questions, my analysis will be threefold: firstly, I will discuss the gendering of spatial categories in representing James Bay as a site of "national" labor; secondly, I will examine the sexualizing of space in the work camp; and thirdly, I will explore how women's responses to the reproduction of difference in the work camps gives rise to strategies that both reject and reproduce the gender and racial order of the state. But before I turn to this analysis, I shall briefly sketch the initial context of the James Bay project.

Political context of the project

> It will not be said that we will live poorly on such a rich land. The government, which has a great part to play in this project, will assume it entirely. (Lacasse, 1985: p. 67)

Bourassa pronounced the above words on the anniversary of his first year in office in front of an enthusiastic and partisan audience: he had gathered his congress to look back on the beginning of his term and announce the direction the government would take for the immediate future. The upbeat atmosphere of the event deflected attention from what had been a rocky start: the "October Crisis" erupted a few months after the Liberals had taken office when militant separatist forces kidnapped and assassinated minister Pierre Laporte, a key member of Bourassa's government. The James Bay project then was launched in the wake of a political upheaval that had shaken the province to its core.[7]

[7] Members of the "*Front de libération du Québec*" ("Québec National Liberation Front" or FLQ) were responsible for the kidnapping and for that of another hostage, British diplomat James Cross who was eventually freed. Bourassa's government sought federal support to resolve the crisis. Pierre Trudeau, who was Prime Minister at the time, eventually decided to invoke the War Measures Act and call on the Canadian army to maintain order.

The Premier had built his recent election platform on the bold campaign promise that his government would create 100,000 jobs. As a way of meeting such a promise, hydroelectric development was a timely choice: not only were energy needs pressing for the province, electricity production had become an emblem of Québec's political strength since the government's deprivatizing of the energy sector during the 1950s, which was accompanied by the creation of the public corporation "Hydro-Québec." This so-called "nationalistion" of electricity was an important precursor of a period of state expansion in the mid-20th century.[8]

According to the initial plans, the James Bay development scheme was to have encompassed three phases with a projected total cost of nearly 50 billion dollars: these were the La Grande, Nottaway-Broadback-Rupert (NBR) and Grande-Baleine (Great Whale) complexes. My analysis focuses on the first phase built on the La Grande river, the only one to have been fully completed, which involved the creation of eight powerhouses and six reservoirs, and the diversion of two additional waterways.[9] Between 1971 and 1981, a total of approximately 100,000 people worked to build these various structures, with a maximum of 18,000 employees during the peak period prior to the inauguration of the largest powerhouse (LG-2) in 1979.

That the project was launched without consultation with the native inhabitants of the region led them to build an organized opposition. Amounting to approximately 8500 people in 1970, the Cree population of Northern Québec has nearly doubled since, with 60% of its members under the age of 25 (Dougherty, 2001: p. 1). The Crees heard about the hydroelectric project from a day-old Montreal newspaper picked up by Philip Awashish—who would later become an important advocate for the Crees—in a small northern Québec town (Richardson, 1991: pp. 80–84). Shocked to read that what was termed as the "project of the century" was to destroy vast amounts of native ancestral territories, Awashish organized a meeting at the end of June 1971 where elders and chiefs discussed a course of action: they eventually took their cause to the Québec Superior Court where they were granted an injunction to stop construction on the project. The injunction was overturned a week later, but it forced the provincial and federal governments to negotiate with the Crees a more equitable use of land resources. These negotiations led to the signing of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (JBNQA) in

[8] This period is known as the "Quiet Revolution" and lasted roughly throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The nationalization of electricity was conducted under the popular slogan "*Maîtres chez nous*" ("Masters in our own house"). As minister of natural resources, René Lévesque—who would become Premier in 1976 and conduct the first referendum on separation—regarded Hydro-Québec's take-over of private utilities across the province as the "decolonization" of the energy sector from the control of Anglophone "energy barons" (Lévesque, 1986: pp. 170–171). The plan was also advertised as the "key to the kingdom" that would put the francophone majority of the province in control of its territory, industry and development (Hogue, Bolduc, & Larouche, 1979: pp. 228–349).

[9] The completion of additional structures in 1992 places the complex third in the world in terms of size, after Guri in Venezuela and Itaipu in Brazil and Paraguay. If completed, the Three Gorges project in China is poised to take the first rank (Hydro-Québec, 1998: p. 17).

November 1975.[10] Its implementation brought massive changes in the education, social services and economic infrastructure of the territory.

This relative peace was shaken after Robert Bourassa's return to power in 1985 and his announcement three years later that the government would proceed with the second phase of the project, known as Great Whale. The Crees opposed this decision and demanded an environmental impact assessment that would consider the ecological damage already suffered by their communities as a result of the first phase of building. Unable to reach a consensus with the Québec government, they decided to cross national borders and take their concerns directly to the decision-makers acting in the intended markets for the surplus power of Great Whale, namely the state of New York and those of New England. Throughout their campaign, the Crees worked jointly with major environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, Audubon Society and Greenpeace to raise international awareness. This was perceived as a great affront by Québec officials who insisted on treating the dispute over James Bay rivers solely as a domestic issue. Nevertheless, the Cree were successful in their approach: in March 1992, the New York Power Authority, Hydro-Québec's biggest client, canceled a four billion dollar contract.[11] Against this background of Francophone militant separatism and the Cree struggle for recognition of their land rights, the James Bay project would therefore unfold along multiple lines of division not only between the indigenous and French communities of Québec, but also *within* these respective groups. I now turn to an analysis of the labor camps in order to demonstrate how these divisions were materialized in the James Bay landscape.

North and south: a gendered geography

During the building of the La Grande Complex Phase I, at least five labor camps were created across the James Bay territory and they became highly dynamic centers of activity. Beyond providing food, accommodation or leisure to laborers, they symbolized a relation to people and place in this newly expanded national geography that was as utopian as it was regulated. Long working hours,

[10] One of the main features of the agreement is its division of the land into three categories with variable rights over each of them. Category 1 includes Cree and Inuit villages and lands reserved for exclusive native use (1.3% of the whole territory); category 2 encompasses public lands with exclusive hunting, fishing and trapping rights for natives (14.4%); category 3 corresponds to public lands where natives retain their harvesting rights (84.3%) (Mainville, 1993; Vincent et al., 1993).

[11] While the Crees were able to stop the second phase of the project, they continued to be engaged in other legal battles around the use of James Bay resources, notably concerning logging policies. They have argued that the Québec and Canadian governments have misused the JBNQA, allowing clear-cut logging practices that deplete land resources and prevent Cree hunters from exercising their trapping rights, which are legally protected by the agreement. These court battles, which involve monetary compensation worth several billion dollars, were recently dropped upon the signing of a new agreement "from Nation to Nation" between the Québec government and the Crees of Québec (February, 2002). For the text of the agreement, see http://www.cex.gouv.qc.ca/w/html/w2057004.html.

isolation, and the difficulty of taking root in temporary communities gave the workers a feeling of being marginalized. "Down south" was the common appellation for what lay beyond the labor camp, encapsulating a series of "normal" places with "normal" ways of life that were interrupted both by the "wilderness" of James Bay and by the rationality of the camp. Due to their overwhelmingly male population, the work camps functioned as highly masculine spaces and what lay beyond them was often regarded, in turn, as feminine territory. The latter was symbolized not only through nature but also through an imagined geography of the "South." The lived and imagined relations signified by these geographical markers of "North" and "South" are reminiscent of those commonly invoked at the international scale, but the polarities are here reversed, as they are in the rest of Canada. In Québec, the South is characterized by a population belt in the St. Lawrence valley that is disproportionately dense in comparison to what lies North of the 49th parallel. Patterns of resource extraction, industrial development and standard of living reflect those that commonly determine, although simplistically, global North and South relations, with Southern Québec being significantly more prosperous.[12] If these spatial categories are produced through colonial power relations, in James Bay they were also marked by several gender dualisms with the "North" symbolizing a masculine, rugged area of conquest while the "South" connoted a feminine domestic environment. Whereas men went up to the open space of the North and its modern colonial outpost which was the construction site, the reverse image of this geography symbolically bounded women, home, and South.[13]

This gendered geography was strongly expressed by Corinne Lévesque who accompanied her husband when he visited the work camps during the referendum campaign of 1981.[14] In a speech addressed to the workers, she acknowledged the role of female laborers in James Bay but also evoked, speaking to the majority of men in the room, that archetypal female figure "who is raising children, who is faithfully and courageously assuming the responsibilities of the household, that woman you think about so often and who is waiting for you" (Tremblay, 1980). Reproducing the common dualism between the sexes, the gendered division then between North and South also worked to spatialize the division between public and private. Corinne Lévesque saw herself as a spokesperson for the homemakers left behind and reminded her audience that these women were also doing their part "with the same courage, the same difficulties and the same hopes" and that it was thanks to them as well that Québec was gradually being built. Her speech suggests that, for women, the display of heroic qualities was associated primarily with the home rather than with the "unbounded" space of the North. Occupying separate

[12] See Cohen (1994: pp. 35–36).

[13] For a similar analysis on the gendering of different environments, see Norwood and Monk (1987: *The Desert is No Lady*).

[14] A first referendum on the question of sovereignty for Québec was held in 1982 when separation was rejected by a majority of 60%; Bourassa was no longer in power at the time. Given the project's political weight, the two leaders of the opposing camps organized special tours of the James Bay construction site where they took their message directly to the workers.

spaces, both sexes could nevertheless partake in the work of nation-building. Largely absent from James Bay, women were invoked as distant but necessary agents of the public construction works. Women's place seemed to be "down South", where they could be the wives at home whose dedication to their family constituted a benefit for the nation which was as great as that of the men who lived and labored in the camps. Although the division between public and private was less definite in the camps where workers shared communal living spaces, women were often associated with social reproductive functions. Addressing specifically the few female workers in her audience, Corinne Lévesque asserted that: "Every day you are valiantly assuming the administrative and secretarial duties, the food, the daily service to all in a modest, often anonymous manner, but always providing to the entire work camp the most indispensable support" (Tremblay, 1980).

In contrast, other widespread sentiments around the camp reveal a less idealized perspective on women. Clearly, the gender stereotypes that were projected and reinscribed into the geographical categories of North and South also point to a great deal of nostalgia, even anguish, on the part of workers who experienced their time in James Bay as a lengthy exile from home.[15] Since approximately 90% of the work force was not local to the region, working on the dams often entailed a long-term separation from spouse, family or place of origin. While the provision of jobs to several thousand Québec men was meant to boost both economy and social morale, everyday speech in the camps often reduced this vision to a commonplace anguish concerning men's role as breadwinners and how it related to a sense of their sexual self. For many laborers, the necessity of leaving home to find employment and better wages was experienced as a form of sexual disempowerment. A popular metaphor for LG-2 returned again and again when I talked to ex-workers that aptly illustrated this fear: *vol au-dessus d'un nid de cocus* ("one flew over a cuckolds' nest"): a twist on the popular book by Ken Kesey (2002), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.* Behind its ironic humor, the expression also conveys a great deal of discomfort with the idea that women could be experiencing a sexual freedom which was not readily available to their (heterosexual) spouse or partner in the camps, due mainly to the small female population and the restrictions surrounding dorm access. In counterpoint to this sentiment, the dominant national discourse of hard work, solidarity, propriety and pioneering of "virgin" space sought to reiterate a self-assured masculinity. As the following section exemplifies, the state's ambivalent attitude towards issues of sexuality—issues that insisted on pushing their way into the public spaces of dam and nation-building—were given concrete shape in the spatial order of the work camp.

[15] This was captured by a popular song—entitled "La Manic"—written about another large-scale hydroproject that preceded James Bay. The song experienced a new popularity during work on the La Grande as many of the workers identified with its nostalgia.

Placing women: space and sexuality in the work camp

In its administration of the camps, the logistics of integrating a small number of female workers in living quarters that were servicing an overwhelmingly male population were an important concern of the SÉBJ. The initial ratio of 40 women for nearly 5000 men gradually improved over the 10 years it took to build LG-2, but women never formed more than 6% of the total workforce that built the complex, usually in traditional female occupations such as nurses, secretaries, maintenance workers and kitchen staff (Tougas, 1979: pp. 16–17). The difficulty of "placing" women in James Bay—of altering spatial structures so that they could sleep, eat, work, or relax—is a powerful example of the extent to which gender can guide the organization of space, and even more so in this case where the remote labor camp was seen to have been painfully carved out from a "rugged wilderness." When this organization of space intersects with national territorial expansion, the gendered geography of the state is rendered in concrete terms.

For the women who flew there, the experience of traveling in a plane full of men was a precursor of how gender would pervade the various spaces of their lives in James Bay. One woman described her first contact in the following terms: "What surprised me arriving at the airport was dozens and dozens of male faces behind the counter, these avid eyes scrutinizing me, the new woman. It was unbearable. I felt like a circus freak" (Lacasse, 1985: p. 150). Once they had gone through the regulatory procedure for checking their papers and issuing an identification card, newly arrived workers—male or female—would be taken to the dorms where they would share a room with another employee. Until the end of 1974, when the permanent village of Radisson was built to accommodate children in family housing, the sleeping arrangements in the work camps influenced who could come to work in James Bay at the same time as it effected a degree of control on relations between men and women (Conditions de vie, 1980). No person of the opposite sex was allowed in the dorms, a rule which included even married couples and was of course excessively naive—or oblivious—in its assumption regarding the sexual preferences of workers. Although strict application of this regulation was in fact uneven, security agents were nevertheless assigned to male and female dorms and any employee who contravened the rules could face eviction. The issue of incorporating spaces where couples could be intimate with each other remained a controversial one throughout the duration of the project. The option of constructing motels or small cabins that could be rented was considered, but the fear was widespread that such sites would encourage sexual impropriety—i.e. prostitution—in the work camps. The SÉBJ's extreme concern over the sexuality of the workers is signified by its zero tolerance, at least on paper, for trespassing in the dorms. Because of its importance as a high profile, government-sponsored construction project, James Bay simply could not be perceived as a space of sexual license, or even as a space where any sex took place at all. All in all, camps were organized to reproduce labor power with minimal attention to the more intimate components of the

workers lives, or to needs that did not directly concern the advancement of the project.[16]

If women and men could be kept separate through a tight monitoring of access and movement around the privacy of dorms, these rules had to be relaxed in public areas. Nevertheless, occupational segregation continued to determine employees' trajectories; whereas women found themselves overwhelmingly in the office, the hospital or the kitchen, the majority of men tended to work outdoors and travel more broadly across the territory as part of a construction crew (Anderson, 1978a,b). And yet despite these differences in occupation and status based on gender, race and class, there was a strong desire to emphasize sameness rather than difference among the members of the workforce since difference could threaten the "fraternity" of collective labor, the latter representing both a focal point and symbol of nation-building. In that spirit, women were often said to be "one of the boys", and yet the claim that James Bay could be a gender-neutral space is easily challenged by looking at the spaces of daily life. While the dorms negotiated gender difference by regulating access, co-ed areas seemed to register even more forcefully how the primary challenge of including women in James Bay resided in the issue of sharing space. As a central meeting place, the cafeteria represented a daunting obstacle to women who were meant to "fit in" at the same time as they remained the subject of constant scrutiny. Here is how two women describe their experience:

> I found it terrible, humiliating, dreadful to have pointed at me, and spying on my smallest gestures, the insisting looks of hundreds of men who would sense right away the new woman.
>
> Their gaze would land on you as soon as you came through the entrance door and follow you up to the front [...] You felt like you were being sized up, guessed, undressed and would experience a terrible awkwardness. And it was worse if you turned your head, because you saw I don't know how many pairs of avid eyes. (Lacasse, 1985: p. 152)

Although it would become less acute over time, women's discomfort while moving through the camp's public areas indicates how strongly the gendering of space hinges on sexuality. Submitted to this scrutiny, female workers experienced an added degree of surveillance in an environment already controlled by various levels of regulation, albeit uneven, from the government to the development corporation, to the private companies they worked for. In discussing the transition from "sovereign" to "governmental" power, Foucault mentions that: "Government as a general problem seems to explode in the sixteenth century, posed by discussions of quite diverse questions. One has, for example, the question of the government of oneself, that ritualization of the problem of personal conduct which is characteristic

[16] Facilities were built—among them a gym and a ski hill—to allow workers to engage in leisure activities in spite of their long working hours, but the issue of the lack of access to shared housing remained a central point of contention between the workers and the administration throughout the building of LG-2.

of the sixteenth century Stoic revival'' (Foucault, 1991: p. 87). In James Bay, this ''ritualization of the problem of personal conduct'' is intensely focused on the workers' sexuality, a sexuality which is regulated chiefly through women's bodies. The sexual desire of male workers was translated into the masculinism of the state when the project's administration responded by treating female employees as elements of ''risk'': this is one of the ways in which the state can be said to have operated at the scale of the body for women workers in James Bay as it acted upon its patriarchal underpinnings.[17] At the same time, the fact that sexual desire was so strongly aimed at female bodies alleviated what was perceived as a greater risk of sexual misconduct, which was that of homosexuality. The SÉBJ's response to these concerns was to consider opening a brothel. Although the plan never went through, this suggests that the creation of a sex-trade in James Bay was considered less a sexual impropriety than gay relations between consenting adults.[18] Clearly, the SDBJ's control over what constituted proper sexual behavior was aimed at protecting its employees' masculinity, which it defined solely in heterosexual terms. The result was that women faced tremendous odds in their efforts not to be treated solely as sexual objects in the work camps. As far as I could observe in my research, women's response to this gaze went two ways, sometimes challenging the masculinism of James Bay, sometimes playing directly into it. I wish to sketch briefly these responses in an effort to open new avenues for analyzing race and the larger question of difference in this political landscape.

Female workers dealt with some of these pressures by creating a separate sphere where they could return the masculine gaze and regain a certain amount of control over the sexualizing of their bodies in the work camp: it was called *Club Fémina* and consisted of a large room with a dance floor surrounded by tables and private alcoves that could welcome up to 260 people. Unlike the tavern whose access was forbidden to women, men were welcome in *Club Fémina* but only if a woman accompanied them. This simple measure did create some frustration for men who had to line up at the door in the hope of being invited in, yet it helped to introduce a more balanced ratio between the two genders and decrease some of the sexual tension by providing a sphere for informal dating with dance and music. The fact that the club was perceived as female territory—women ultimately decided who could or could not gain access to it—necessarily altered the gender balance that prevailed in the camps and created a somewhat more equal sexual playing field through dancing, dating, drinking and flirting. Both men and women seemed to

[17] The association of women and ''risk'' in the camp were not necessarily covert or unconscious. I found in Hydro-Québec's archives a picture showing a chart of explosives and detonating devices lined by several photos of topless women.

[18] While many people I talked to confirmed that the possibility of opening a brothel had been considered, it was difficult to find tangible proof in the archives since the SÉBJ did not keep extensive records of this controversial issue. At least one cartoon appearing in the SÉBJ newsletter was unequivocal about the wishes of (some) male workers. It shows a worker kneeling next to his bed under pictures of naked women and saying: ''Oh lil' Jesus, please let us have our lil' hotel for '1976'' (*En Grande,* vol. 3.3 [March 1976]).

welcome such a change and similar spaces would be opened in the labor camps subsequently built across the territory. The creation of these female centered sites—social clubs as opposed to sex clubs—outlines how control over space not only shapes the categories of male and female by enforcing normative relations, but can also serve to resignify them; the same can be said about spaces that are marked by race and class.

As it relates to governmentality and the performance of national identities in James Bay, the important point exemplified by the opening of Club Fémina is that the solidarity of the national community is also crisscrossed by other affiliations that equally impact notions of identity and yet are not necessarily delimited nor defined by the state or its dominant national narrative. Even at such a small scale, the positive introduction of a different subjectivity in the space of the work camp contradicts the disembodied enframing of James Bay as a homogenous and consensual sphere of nation-building, controlled by a paternal gaze and patriarchal form of governmentality. It reminds us that community and political citizenship can be made democratically accessible not through the stubborn negation of difference—i.e. "women are one of the boys"—but through the active creation of diverse geographies where a broad range of identities can be deployed and accepted, even when they challenge the reiteration of a simple horizontal, and implicitly white and male, comradeship. Unfortunately, racial difference proved to be much more difficult to inscribe in the hydroelectric landscape since it brought into question the legitimacy of appropriating James Bay resources "for all the Québécois" with only limited benefit, if any, for the local Cree population. Women in Québec are included *de facto* in the nation: their main struggle lies in the terms of this inclusion. On the other hand, the colonial past that has marked relations between native people and people of European descent in the province has erected boundaries between the two communities that even the inclusion of difference within the nation or the state cannot easily bring down. I now turn to these issues in an effort to draw some connections between gender and race as they related to the presence of native subjects in the James Bay work camp.

Women with no femininity: gender and race in a postcolonial state

In light of the above, I want to suggest that race and gender are not separate issues but must be analyzed together in order to understand how, in Québec, the homogenizing of the national community was effected in and through geographies of nation-building and state expansion. Furthermore, the difficulty of opening James Bay labor camps to a female workforce—and women's response to this by creating "a space of their own" in *Club Fémina*—is indicative of larger issues concerning the place of all forms of difference within the nation and the state. If a feminist approach to political geography seeks to conceptualize difference as a constitutive element of the state, it must also consider how various axes of difference are not divorced from one another but function as a whole. The introduction of women in a highly masculine national space contained an element of "risk"

which institutional regulations attempted to mitigate and, in so doing, ended up reproducing. Such a risk was partly rooted in the fact that the presence of women outlined how space was sexualized according to a heterosexual order. In doing so, it brought to the forefront how the space of the work camp—and the national solidarity it was meant to symbolize—was not neutral but gendered, which implied also that it was racialized and classed. As a result, this presence disrupted the abstract comradeship the workers' solidarity rested on and, by extension, the nation upholding this image to signify its own unity. In the initial building years, the presence of women in James Bay seemed to act like a magic marker bringing to the surface the relations patriarchal state structures maintain by covering them over. In the process, the categories of gender—but also those of race—were destabilized and opened to several outcomes. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that subversion was the norm. A look at how female workers performed gender identities within the work camp will illustrate that point.

As a space of nation-building and development, James Bay acquired the national prominence that it did during the 1970s because of its intensity as a site of production. For an emerging modern nation, there could be no better way of representing progressive change than through the regular chronicling in the media of an "empty" space gradually being built up with large-scale technological monuments. A much-publicized spectacle of nation-building, James Bay encompassed a rich iconography of production; one which largely overshadowed social reproductive functions. This is exemplified by the initial absence of family housing in the work camps. When such housing did become available in the village of Radisson, it was reserved for employees who fulfilled executive functions, most of whom were male, with the result that class was combined with gender in the organizational structure of the SÉBJ.[19]

The workers' limited access to a private and/or family environment had many repercussions as to the positions available to women in James Bay, and in the larger national sphere it pointed to. One of the most obvious is that women could not be assigned the usual function of "reproducing" the nation both culturally and biologically. This, I suggest, left a void which was partly filled by sexualizing women once they were detached from their roles as mothers or wives. Yet, placing women in the labor camp is a much more complex affair; throughout the course of my research I have been looking at a space where women are heavily sexualized at the same time as they are, seemingly, beyond gender constraints. What is more, I believe both effects are produced by a spatial/state governmentality that reinscribes gender even as it removes one of its most important productive forces, which is domesticity. During a focus group conducted with ex-employees, a male participant crystallized this contradiction for me by declaring that, in James Bay, "there

[19] In 1980, the SÉBJ finally accepted to grant shared housing to female executives who wished to bring their spouse to James Bay and allowed them access to social clubs that had been open only to their male counterparts. However, it continued to deny couple housing to the broader work force despite the fact that a human rights commission recommended the length of stay as a primary criteria to qualify for this type of accommodation (Droits et Libertés, 1980).

were women, but no femininity.'' His assertion cleanly divorced socially constructed gender attributes from the bodies of women who worked for the project and, in some way, opened up a space for resignifying these bodies outside accepted categories. It was delivered with a note of disappointment as if James Bay was lacking bona fide women who would fit the usual attributes of ''femininity.'' Other participants however—one man and six women—responded differently to this claim.

Some women described the necessity of dressing in sturdier and warmer clothes as a daily annoyance that stripped them of the prettiness and elegance they had enjoyed, and come to rely on, in the city. Those who performed secretarial duties objected that for them nothing had changed, stating that they continued to wear skirts and high heels in their work environment. In fact, the capacity to perform dominant gender roles seemed strongly attached to the professional occupation of each worker and those who crossed over—female cops, engineers, doctors or trades professionals for example—were seen as ''pioneers'' of a different kind of uncharted territory (Girouard, 1977; Legault, 1980/LINK). One female engineer, who objected most strongly to the idea that femininity was challenged on the construction site, illustrated her point by saying that she put on make-up and perfume every morning and that, even at the end of a damp underground tunnel, other workers knew that she was making her way down by the distinct smell around her. Her story suggests not only the performative aspect of gender identities (Butler, 1990) but also the role of space in supporting or challenging these categories. As a hyper-masculine space, the construction site makes her aware of her own means of signifying femininity and pushes her to insist on them, almost as a rebuttal of the patriarchal sphere she encounters routinely at work. Her strategy can be taken to equate femininity with the ability to remain sensual even as heavy layers of clothes muffle the body. In the final analysis, it appears consistent with the pervasive objectification of women in James Bay—and their treatment as elements of ''risk''—by redirecting the gaze towards the female body, albeit in a gesture that is intended as a form of empowerment. The effort to retain common attributes of femininity invites the same desiring gaze adopted by male workers that contributed to the excessive sexualizing of women's bodies on the work site.

The latter seems to foreclose the challenging of unequal gender relations that was exemplified by an initiative such as the *Club Fémina.* Since my main intention through this research—of which the focus group was part—had been to analyze the ways in which difference was played out in the workforce against the larger ''official'' narrative of nation-building, I was unsure as to whether I should ignore this anecdote as our discussion continued or push it to open new avenues of inquiry. The conversation took its own unforeseen turn, however, as racist notions towards the Crees were expressed by those same women who had so eloquently described different aspects of the masculinism of James Bay. Our exchange became extremely uncomfortable when one participant made the following comment: ''These people go crazy when they see a goose in the sky. They quit their work, look for a stone to kill it'' upon which another added: ''They are never on time; we must understand that the Cree are a fundamentally lazy people; that may be

because there is a lot of inbreeding.'' Some participants were visibly embarrassed, others nodded in approval. I suggested that a certain form of ''time-discipline'' enacted through a clock, a strict schedule our long working hours could be seen as cultural attributes introduced by industrialization and the group then spent some time discussing how these were implemented in the work camps.[20]

What this exchange sharply outlined to me is that white women also performed the colonial masculinism that sanctioned the dispossession of native land, even as they were in some way agents of its deconstruction. More contradictory even was their reassertion of a Western understanding of labor-discipline by casting a negative look on Cree hunting practices, even as those same patriarchal categories were often responsible for their own lower ranking as members of the work force relegated to ''care-taking'' tasks or, as Corinne Lévesque put it, those tasks that provide ''the most indispensable support'' (Tremblay, 1980). The pivotal point brought into focus by this intersection of gender and race is that race and racism emerged in James Bay not only as products of the reiteration of colonial power relations between whites and natives in the North, but also of women's attempts to make space for themselves within a patriarchal sphere, which was also a sphere of nation-building. For that reason, I want to propose that it is necessary to view the marginalizing of women in spaces of nation-building such as James Bay not as something that exists on a different plane than the exclusion of the Crees on the basis of race, but is instead deeply connected to it through structures of governmentality that are simultaneously patriarchal and colonial; if Foucault noted the former in his lecture on governmentality, the workings of the latter deserve a more sustained inquiry through contemporary case studies. In James Bay, both axes of difference can be seen to result from the mechanisms through which the nation sought to expand its territorial—while in turn constricting its *cultural*—boundaries. The separation and privileging of gender over race—or race over gender—helps to maintain the processes of separation and exclusion that are constantly at work within the nation, which is why the task of bringing them back within the same sphere, and subsequently tracing how they are enacted through state governmentality, is such a difficult one.

Conclusion

Poststructuralist analyses of power suggest that there is no proper ''outside'' to ideology, and consequently to gender representations (Althusser 1971; Butler, 1990; de Lauretis, 1987; Foucault 1979). While patriarchy negates women's subjectivity, we cannot forget that they are nevertheless constituted as women in and through these various structures of power and the hegemonic meanings they enact. Along these lines, the creation of *Club Fémina* can be seen as a reconstruction from the center which altered some of the gender and sexual dynamics of the work camp;

[20] This transcript is dated April 18, 2000.

women reworked these dynamics from the site of their own production as the "other" of James Bay by virtue of their minority status in the camp. Consequently, they were also subject to the push and pull that moves women from margin to center, and back, in their attempts to fashion new subjectivities (de Lauretis, 1987; Hooks 1984). Furthermore, these subjectivities were constructed through other forms of power relations existing within the Québec state, power relations that are undoubtedly informed by the province's colonial past.

Through this case study, I have outlined some of the material effects of the patriarchal governmentality that sought to produce "Québécois" subjects via the remaking of James Bay—a Cree land—into a Eurocentric space of nation-building and development. As my analysis of women workers in James Bay demonstrates, these governmental processes reproduced gender, race and class categories at the same time as they functioned to erase the traces of this production. Because this social production of difference is constantly covered over, it should come as no surprise that those who are marked by such categories should also play a part in rendering them invisible. This contradiction signals how, in the struggle to bring subjugated identities (Spivak, 1988) into positions of power, these identities can nevertheless draw from hegemonic meanings: such a multi-level terrain forces us to reassess, although not uncritically, both the power of hegemony (or the state) and the powerlessness of subaltern identities.

The struggles of the Québécois to overcome the long-ranging negative effects of the British Conquest and gain control of their economic and cultural becoming within the province is a key instance of these mixed categories. While Francophones were for a long time economically marginalized in Québec, some of their strategies of "decolonization" have called upon the very colonial meanings and practices that constructed them as the "other" of British rule. The building of an extensive energy network in Cree ancestral territories can be said to have given new impetus to the province's colonial past, indeed instigating it as the colonial "present", one that is characterized by an uneven geography. The spatial distribution of impact and benefit illustrates this geography well. Although the native population of James Bay overwhelmingly bear the impact of the ecological change brought about by the damming of rivers, the lion's share of the energy generated by the dams flows South to fulfill the demand of urban centers both in Québec and the US (Hodgins & Canon, 1995; Salisbury, 1986; Simard, 1996). Workers in James Bay, including female workers, were positioned within this colonial present and uneven geography; they were themselves state actors who produced and regulated this space of development.

It is from that position that female workers in James Bay provide a useful starting point towards a feminist understanding of the state. For they did not simply open a paradoxical space—what Gillian Rose has termed an "elsewhere" (Rose, 1993)—where the categories of gender, race, class and sexuality could be resignified "beyond" the patriarchal state: instead, they crafted this elsewhere "inside" power structures, poaching on their meanings to be sure but also sometimes falling prey to them (Desbiens, 1999). This, I suggest, offers a pragmatic avenue for moving difference from the margins to the center of the state by showing a commitment to

understanding the production of dominant subjectivities; not from a position of exteriority but from the very site where these subjectivities are produced, *in and through* the workings of the state. An understanding of the state through the various lines of difference that constitute it—not just gender, not just race nor sex but a "gendering" that contains all these categories—calls for a much more contextual, much more multi-scale understanding of political geography. Thus, a gendering of the state also means complicating our view of gender and further theorizing what may be subsumed within such a category when we take it to designate a single axis of difference. The colonial past was constitutive of gender categories in James Bay since these categories were constructed not only through male/female relations but also through a dominant white narrative of nation-building.

Finally, the sexualizing of women in James Bay reminds us that colonial territories are expanded through bodies and, consequently, that the space of the body is a political space. When Bourassa's government sought to push Québec's Northern frontier into Cree territory, it had to do so through the labor of men and women who would physically build and concretize this new geography of development. Thus, the "meticulous attention of the father" was a corporeal strategy as well as a territorial one: the charting of that dual action of the state must remain a central concern of a feminist political geography and continue to spell out its immediate research agenda. Such an agenda, however, necessitates feminist theoretical tools that envision difference through a broad landscape of interconnected subjectivities. The James Bay hydroelectric development was such a landscape despite the dominant nationalist discourse that sought to enlist it as the unified terrain of a single national community in the making. In this space, women introduced "just enough difference" for the nation to claim diversity in its work camps. On the other hand, they also asserted "enough sameness" for the state to maintain its Eurocentric claim to native territories in an effort to turn them into (Québécois) "national" ones. In deploying a new governmentality in James Bay, the Québec government needed to represent the nation as an open yet unified collective. Feminist political geographers then must pay attention to how women, as political subjects, are constructed both with and against the "meticulous attention" of the patriarchal state. If Premier Bourassa was indeed the "father" of James Bay, to what extent did female workers in James Bay embody and perform their role as "daughters"? Reintroducing difference into our political geographies may start with addressing the ways in which women are at times outcasts, and at other times daughters, of dominant masculinist geographies.

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