Place Identity in a Resource-Dependent Area of Northern British Columbia

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Residents of northern British Columbia’s resource-dependent areas have struggled to maintain the integrity of their communities as nonlocal firms exert ever-increasing influence over the region’s resources and landscapes. Local leaders both construct and mobilize place as a vital part of their efforts to promote community well-being. This study focuses on the ways that the residents of three towns in the province’s northern interior politicized place as a strategy for resisting the political influence and geographic designs of outsiders. The residents drew from their shared emotional response to powerlessness as a means of highlighting the inequities between insiders and outsiders, thereby generating a regional identity that calls into question the socioeconomic effects of resource industrialization in the north. In describing this dialectic between place making and economic restructuring, the article not only expands upon existing theory on place identity, but also contributes to a fuller understanding of the cultural geography of North America’s resource-dependent communities. Key Words: British Columbia, place identity, resource-dependent community, rural development.

Rural communities across British Columbia (BC)’s northern interior experienced tremendous upheaval after World War II as late capitalism enveloped this vast and forested land, bringing residents and resources alike into international systems of production and exchange. Historical geographer R. Cole Harris (1997) wrote eloquently of how distance-diminishing technologies and market integration consolidated this once far-flung archipelago of cultural islands into a resource periphery that provides materials for value-added manufacturing in North America’s core areas. In fact, postwar industrialization in the north has led some to conclude that its endogenous place identities have now disappeared as outsiders increasingly appropriate the region to fit their own needs and visions (Marchak 1980; Hoagland 1982). Transnational resource firms, for instance, exploit the area as a reservoir of labor and raw materials whereas many urbanites see it as a romanticized wilderness to be consumed through tourism.

The observation that modernity eradicates local senses of place is an oft-repeated one in both popular and academic circles (Relph 1976; Tuan 1980; Kunstler 1993). Fordist restructuring is believed to have been particularly aggressive in transforming myriad lived geographies into abstract spaces that, at the extreme, deny all value for local experience and interaction (Soja 1989; Lefebvre 1991). Indeed, how do local senses of place fare amid modernization? Recent work in cultural geography has tackled this question by exploring how place identities are negotiated, transformed, and ultimately reconstituted as an integral part of modernity (Agnew 1987; Cosgrove 1989; Massey 1991; Entikin 1991; Keith and Pile 1993; Feld and Basso 1996; Casey 1997). The ethnographic study presented in these pages contributes to this line of research by investigating the place-making activities of three resource-dependent communities located in the province’s northern interior. The residents of these towns created a politically charged sense of place after World War II by pitting emotional attachments to their home region against the late-capitalist forces of Fordist industrialization and outsider power in the province. In so doing, they turned the act of place making into a tactic of resistance, using it to protest and, in some cases, defeat large-scale resource projects such as hydroelectric dams.

Previous work on place identity in resource-dependent communities has focused on how factions of capital and labor struggle to construct place meaning as an integral part of consolidating control over the local value-added process (Marsh 1987; Harner 2001). The group that controls that process obviously has an advantage in shaping the landscapes and narratives through which the locale is defined and interpreted. Marsh (1987) and Harner (2001) have discovered, however, that a stable and coherent sense of place will emerge only when the dominant cultural forms and practices resonate with those of vernacular experience in the locale. As Harner (2001, 660) wrote, “place identity arises when the shared beliefs about place meaning for the majority match the ideological beliefs of those in power.” Without that connection, social struggle ensues among the town’s
various factions—workers, unions, and corporations, among others—thereby preventing a stable sense of place from forming.

On the theoretical level, Harner has suggested that a coherent identity materializes when one faction is able to bring the company town’s “means” and “meanings” into “hegemonic equilibrium.” The term “means” denotes not only productive activity but also the social and ideological power needed to access and manage the value-added process. Meaning, by contrast, refers to the symbolic and emotive forms of human social and environmental interaction. A hegemonic equilibrium is achieved once discursive connections are made between dominant and vernacular uses and interpretations of the place. For example, Harner’s examination of copper mining towns in Sonora, Mexico, revealed that the strongest place identity emerged in the town of Cananea during the Mexican national era (1934–1982) when Section 65, a local chapter of a national labor union, gained control of American-owned copper mines. Through monuments, civic buildings, pamphlets, and the radio, the union was able to connect with vernacular experience by exalting folk heroes who had instigated labor strikes or died in mining accidents. It thereby constructed a “hegemonic equilibrium” of means (copper production) and meanings (labor experience) that projected an ideology of solidarity through the landscape while reinforcing its own authority to represent workers’ interests and manage the mines (Figure 1).

This study contends that “hegemonic” identities such as the one described above represent only one possibility in an ongoing process of place-identity formation and transformation in resource-dependent communities. The work to date has focused on efforts by capital and labor to consolidate control over the value-added process. Place identity, by extension, is seen as a byproduct of power consolidation. This study expands that conceptualization by shifting the scale of analysis. It explores how a local identity emerged within BC’s regional system and, in particular, how residents politicized place to define themselves as insiders positioned against all variety of outsiders—aluminum companies, timber firms, politicians, and tourists. By exploring local identity formation within this broader context, it becomes clear that tensions between insiders and outsiders compound capital-labor struggles, thereby producing a more complex identity that not only derives from local experience, but also exists in relation to other places.

The Study Area: Southside

The towns of Grassy Plains, Takysie Lake, and Southbank in north-central BC are known collectively as the “Southside” because they are located on lands south of Francois Lake, a 60-kilometer body of water that separates the area from the Alcan Highway and the regional center of Burns Lake (Figure 2). The region is accessible via a twenty-minute ferry ride across the lake. The towns are similar to those of Pennsylvania and northern Sonora in that their residents are largely dependent for their livelihoods on the extraction of a single resource: timber. In a total population of 2,000 individuals, just under half of the workforce is dependent on forestry for income, and almost 20 percent is directly involved in the primary sector (covering activities in agriculture and subsistence hunting). At $55,246, the average salary approximates that of BC as a whole, yet unemployment is exceptionally high at 19.2 percent.1 The region’s main employers in the timber industry—Canfor, Babine (a subsidiary of Weyerhaeuser), and West Fraser—provide these sufficient wages, but the seasonal and cyclical nature of forestry means that residents face periodic wage cuts, the ever-present possibility of layoffs, and harsh working conditions. Indeed, since World War II, a powerful combination of state and private institutions has managed the pace of timber extraction at the expense of local residents, both in the study area and across the province’s interior as a whole (Marchak 1986; Hayter 2003).

![Figure 1. Model of a hegemonic alignment of means and meaning in the town of Cananea during the Mexican National Era (after Harner 2001).](image-url)
Yet, this area offers an interesting counterpoint to the previous cases of Mexico and Pennsylvania in several respects. First, capital is not in permanent residence there, but rather makes seasonal and cyclical expansions into the forests through roving crews of locally hired loggers and truckers as well as nonlocal managers, machinists, and silviculture experts. As will later be seen, this ephemeral presence has meant that resource firms have had little success in fashioning or promoting an enduring ideology that justifies their monopoly over the means to residents, a situation not uncommon in other resource-dependent areas of Canada’s periphery (Marchak 1980). In addition, the population, although small, comprises a diverse mixture of aboriginals, European settlers, Mennonites, and postwar American immigrants. Several segments, particularly the aboriginals and Mennonites, have resisted incorporation into the wage economy and continue to pursue informal subsistence activities. In addition, the level of unionization is low, particularly when compared to that of BC in general (Marchak 1983). Lacking a strong labor identity, residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds constructed their locale as an “insider’s place” positioned firmly against the late-capitalist forces that have enabled outsiders to manage resource extraction in the area.

The study is based on five years of seasonal ethnographic work in north-central BC, including one full year of residence in the town of Takysie Lake. The results are derived from a content analysis of 114 semistructured interviews conducted within a stratified sample of the area’s aboriginal, Mennonite, and Euro-Canadian residents; a critical interpretation of the region’s real and represented landscapes and symbols; and countless hours of participant observation through which events such as community meetings, public festivals, protests, potlatches, and everyday interaction were recorded and interpreted in field notes.

**Power, Place, and Identity**

Traditionally, place has denoted the areal context of human activity, and the task for geography was to
describe how those contexts differed (Entrikin 1991, 6). Recent work suggests that place is more appropriately conceptualized as a process that engages local experiences and production activities in the sociospatial dialectic of global political economy (Agnew 1987; Soja 1989; Massey 1991). At stake in this process is the ability to appropriate the environs. In other words, how do resident and nonlocal groups render the locale both productive and meaningful by transforming it into the products and symbols of shared experience (Feld and Basso 1996)? Which groups have an advantage in this process? As residents and others appropriate the environs, they imbue simple locations with deep meaning as the locales in which livelihoods and life histories are made.

At base, senses of place are profoundly personal phenomena, composed of the “situated episodes of life history which unavoidably have ‘geographical’ dimensions: real, imagined, or utopian” (Paasi 1991, 248). At the same time, they can form a basis for shared group identities as personal experiences acquire degrees of intersubjectivity through the routines and practices of social interaction. On the collective level, affective identity is the process of marking the categories of group (that is, collective self) against the “other” (Said 1979; Soja and Hooper 1993; Sibley 1995). Marking differences requires categorizing and ranking social relationships, which means that identity formation is a political endeavor that depends on a group’s access to the means. In fact, the arrangements of social power are critical for determining the extent and qualities of identity boundaries. Dominant groups, for instance, can promote the tight closure of semantic edges into a hegemonic order, making it appear to be natural, enduring, and fixed (Gramsci 1957). At the same time, coherent identities may also emerge among resistant groups precisely because they feel themselves to be powerless (Williams 1977). Such subgroups seek to expose and deconstruct the categories underpinning the dominant structure through the identity politics that foment culture wars (Mitchell 1996). It follows, then, that place identities can materialize either through hegemony or as a component of resistance.

Following the work of Harner (2001), a hegemonic place identity emerges when labor or capital consolidates control over the local relations of production and is able to align its material and cultural practices with those of vernacular experience. Hegemony is characterized by the submission of subordinate groups to a dominant social order through complicity, force, or fear (Gramsci 1957). Harner is most concerned with complicit submission, which can be achieved by projecting the perception of equilibrium, harmony, and naturalness through an ideology that normalizes social domination and inequality. Space is both a product and catalyst in this process (Soja 1989; Lefebvre 1991; Soja and Hooper 1993). For example, when Cananea’s labor union gained control of the copper mines in the 1930s, it enforced its own authority by interpreting the town’s history and reshaping its cultural landscape. It moved union headquarters to the workers’ side of town, renamed the baseball ballpark after the “martyrs” of a key 1906 labor strike, and converted the jail into the Museum of Labor Struggle. Because the landscape appeared to be an enduring part of the natural environment, it naturalized union domination of the town among residents, making it seem an ordinary and even advantageous part of life. An alignment of means (control of the copper mines) and meanings (labor solidarity) had been achieved, producing a coherent, hegemonic sense of place based on the conception of Cananea as a workers’ town (refer to Figure 1).

According to Harner (2001, 676), deviations from hegemonic identities occur when institutional forces (such as a federal government) alter the allocation of the means. Such a shift occurred, for instance, when the Mexican government first supported Cananea’s Seccióon 65 against free-market (American) capital in the 1930s. Indeed, only after the union controlled copper production was it able to connect its sense of place with that of vernacular experience. By the 1980s, another shift in the means had occurred as the union lost its dominance to a constellation of neoliberal forces. In this case, however, a singular conception of place meaning has not emerged because, to date, no one faction has consolidated control over the mines or the town’s institutional structure. According to Harner, then, place identity is a product of consolidating access to the means of production. By extension, social struggle alone cannot produce a uniform or coherent place identity. Rather, conflict will continue until “one faction can construct a hegemonic discourse through landscape elements that define and narrate social struggles” (2001, 661).

This study contends that collective place identities can indeed materialize as an integral part of resistance. Past work on hegemony, culture change, and region formation supports this finding. Raymond Williams (1977, 125) once wrote that “no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention.” Consequently, resistant and emergent cultures are regular features of hegemony. Williams explained that there is always tension between received (hegemonic) forms and those of practical
experience, that is, the perceived qualities of existence for any particular subgroup (e.g., a class, generation, or region). This tension emerges because dominant consciousness can never completely anticipate, incorporate, or respond to what is actually being lived on the ground. Williams (1977, 132) coined the phrase “structure of feeling” to denote a subgroup’s emotive response to this conflict between official ideology and lived experience. Such structures arise when lived consciousness conflicts with dominant sociocultural forms. They typically exhibit few tangible signs or symbols, but rather are “characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone ... not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought.”

Highly localized structures of feeling began to appear in BC’s northern interior after World War II as resource industrialization began to privilege outsiders over rural residents in the management of local production activities (Marchak 1980, 1986). Anssi Paasi’s work is particularly helpful in understanding the geographic connections between local identity and this period of economic expansion. Paasi (1991, 243) devised the term “institutionalization” to refer to the “sociospatial process in which a territorial unit emerges as part of the spatial structure of the society concerned.” Regions eventually deinstitutionalize over time, and they may experience several periods of restructuring. He characterized regional institutionalization in four stages: the first three are the sequential development of territorial, symbolic, and institutional shapes respectively; the last is the establishment of the regional system in social consciousness. The first stage describes the localization of a society’s productive and political activities, which, in turn, generates the second phase, the symbolic and cultural construction of that space (including, for instance, naming the region itself). The third period refers to the reproduction of the productive-symbolic space through institutions such as the legal, educational, and social welfare systems.

The fourth stage concerns this article’s argument most directly. A regional system is enconced in the social consciousness of the resident society through what Paasi called structures of expectations. These structures crystallize out of the accumulation of experiences accrued during the institutionalization process. He (1991, 249) conceptualized them as “time-space-specific, region-bounded, institutionally embedded schemes of perception, conception, and action, which can comprise real, imagined, and mythical features of the region.” These structures are therefore manifestations of official regional ideology as they serve to reproduce the territorial structure by enabling residents to interpret new and unpredictable events, information, and experiences within a hegemonic framework. They are conceptually opposed to structures of feeling, which emerge against dominant ideology.

Unfortunately, Paasi failed to develop the insights to be gained by contrasting the interplay of these two structures within a regional system. In particular, dominant regional systems often are unable to incorporate the myriad dynamics of localized experience within their structures of expectation. Consequently, peripheral communities may begin to experience great tension between their structures of expectation (which are institutional, universalized, and received) and those of feeling (which are lived and locally intersubjective). In postwar BC, for instance, the expectation is that resource industrialization will benefit all citizens, but the reality often is that such production disrupts and destabilizes peripheral communities (Marchak 1986). As a consequence, local identities can crystallize as a resident group feels its region threatened by “outside” forces and, indeed, the structures of expectation that underpin regional ideology. Fundamental tensions emerge between insiders and outsiders that compound the dynamics of capital and labor struggle in the production of local cultural and economic value. Indeed, Southside’s place-based emotional structure represents a collective, insider’s critique of the inequities created and reproduced as part of Fordist restructuring in northern BC. As will be seen in the next section, this period of restructuring opened social and material spaces in which such resistant identities could both materialize and thrive.

**Fordist Restructuring in Northern British Columbia**

The idea of British Columbia as a regional formation can be understood in terms of economist Harold Innis’s (1999) claim that the export of a series of natural resources created the foundation not only for Canada’s unique economic geography (with its ecumene near the U.S. border and its expansive resource periphery), but also the country’s high standard of living. The specific mechanism at work in this process is the geographical transfer of value, through which some of the value produced at one location is realized in another area, thereby contributing to the receiving location’s accumulation capacity (Soja 1989, 113). Over time, these transfers created a spatiality of nodes and peripheries throughout the province. Nodality refers to the “sociospatial clustering or agglomeration of activities around identifiable geographical centers” (149). Its presence, in
turn, generates peripheralness: hinterlands “defined by a geographical diminution in nodality that is brought about mainly through controls over access to the advantages of agglomeration” (49). This spatial arrangement is a direct function of social power, which, in both its economic and political dimensions, determines the formation of centers and peripheries within a regional system. To be at a node, one might say, is to be in power, whereas to be in the periphery is to be out of power.

When interpreted within Paasi’s (1991) framework, the territorial shape of British Columbia can be described as an ongoing evolution of nodes and peripheries tied directly to the value-added processes of North America (see also Careless 1989; Innis 1999). Before World War II, transfers of value had led to nodal concentrations in Vancouver, Victoria, as well as to regional centers such as Prince George and, at the smallest of scales, Burns Lake. At the time, the northern interior was characterized by small and isolated aboriginal and settler communities, most of which were disconnected from the economic and administrative reach of this nodal framework (Larsen 2003a). Harris (1997) has described the intense diversity within this archipelago of cultural islands, each one of which was the product of a unique set of interactions between local environmental and social conditions. As a consequence, highly localized senses of place dominated the geographically detached northern interior until World War II (see also Hoagland 1982).

Intense Fordist restructuring following the war integrated these isolated islands into an international framework of resource extraction and exchange (Marchak 1983; Harris 1997). Indeed, reconstruction efforts led to a zenith for late capitalism and a steady expansion in production and consumption rates across North America (Soja 1989; Marchak 1986). This restructuring process was similar to that which occurred in other places where late-capitalist geography was marked by the concentration of vertically integrated firms in the main metropolitan areas of industrialized countries, particularly the U.S. (Soja 1989, 173–76). These firms sought cheap labor and resources in distant, often international hinterlands as a way of profiting from the economies of scale entrenched in the fixed investments of large manufacturing plants. Without any sizeable local markets or provincially owned manufacturing centers, the province’s long-reigning Social Credit Party (1952–1972, 1975–1990) found that the quickest profits were to be had by exporting raw materials to the U.S. This policy, of course, only exaggerated and redirected an existing trend of resource exports that had appeared as early as the fur trade (Innis 1999). Following World War II, the province sent 84 percent of its timber to pulp and lumber plants in the U.S. (Brown 1997, 284). To supply a growing domestic demand for newsprint, American firms opened ten pulp mills in the province between 1963 and 1974, constituting the bulk of the province’s manufacturing assets at the time (Marchak 1983, 39).

These peripheral relationships with other nodal centers of the continent meant that nonlocal firms directly influenced the use and development of provincial resources, despite the fact that most of the land is publicly owned. Indeed, the Social Credit administration enticed foreign firms by granting easy access to resources and offering lucrative incentives for investment. Postwar legislative assemblies passed amendments to the Forest Act in 1958 and 1978 as a way to consolidate forest tenures for large, externally owned timber corporations and to annul competition from smaller, locally operated companies (Marchak 1983, 79). By 1979, over three-fourths of the forest and mining companies operating in the province were owned by nonresident capital, as were half of its manufacturing assets (Marchak 1986, 132–34). The government also financed additional developments in infrastructure, including roads and the elaborate system of BC ferries. It subsidized new logging roads throughout the interior by offering large companies tax breaks and discounts on resource rents (known as “stumpage”) in exchange for road construction. Premier William Bennett (1952–1972) explained the rationale behind his preference for large companies by arguing that they provided the most efficient, cost-effective, and sustainable harvests for the province (Marchak 1986, 138).

Fordist restructuring in BC also depended upon the state to promote resource development through the management of a large pool of cheap and flexible labor (Marchak 1986). Drawing rhetoric from popularly accepted Keynesian economic principles, the Social Credit Party was able to pursue its contradictory goals of accumulation (through monetary and fiscal controls, subsidization of industry, and direct economic planning) and ideological legitimation to the public (through social welfare programs and promises of regional development). In the province’s dominant industry, forestry, there are both seasonal and market-oriented fluctuations in labor demand. The party therefore negotiated with organized labor, namely the International Woodworkers of America (IWA), to create a reservoir of elastic and, ultimately, expendable labor in the north. The government also managed northern labor through unemployment insurance, state-run services, and direct manipulations of salaries and employment opportunities.
The Social Credit governments sought to downplay the socioeconomic traumas associated with Fordist restructuring by promulgating an ideology that promised future development in light of chronic economic woes. Following his election to office in 1952, Premier Bennett announced an official development plan, “opening of the North,” that predicted great future returns for the region’s residents through large-scale exploitation of timber, water, and mineral resources. This ideology became the fulcrum of a dominant structure of expectation that enabled British Columbians to accept and in many cases advocate the rapid development of northern resources at any social or environmental cost. Because of the province’s uneven topography of power and its location within a continental economy, however, this policy had the paradoxical effect of generating wealth for the firms and elite residing in Vancouver and other North American cities (Robinson 1972, 19–21). In particular, northerners found that, far from generating local wealth, these modern markets alienated them from the value-added process. They were chronically out of work and unable to manage resources that were, ironically, under public ownership.

Fordist restructuring in BC, then, created territorial, symbolic, and institutional spaces in which dominant structures of expectation clashed with those of local experience in the north. In other words, the reality of officially sanctioned regionalism for northerners was not the same as the image; they were able to appropriate meaning from their environs, but had little or no control over the means. Marchak (1980) located this same phenomenon in other Canadian provinces. Although her work lacks theoretical explanation, she observes that in recent decades numerous “marginal cultures” had appeared to create a highly grassroots dimension to Canadian regionalism. Dispossessed by the postwar economy, the conception of a single provincial ethos, and even, at the time of her writing, the Constitution itself, these groups politicized their own regional powerlessness as a strategy to reallocate the means in their favor.

Southside exemplifies precisely this sort of marginal culture. Postwar industrialization took little time transforming it into a resource hinterland. Development projects began in earnest as early as 1949 when the provincial government passed the Industrial Development Act, which granted the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan) an exclusive license to the water in the entire Nechako River system. The company constructed Kenny Dam, then the largest earthfill structure in the world, and created the Nechako Reservoir, which covered 358 square kilometers and took five years to fill completely (see Figure 2). When channeled through turbines housed inside Mount Debose in the Coast Range, the weight of the water generated 900 million watts of electricity for Alcan’s aluminum smelter at Kitimat. Unable to use all of this power, the company sold excess electricity to the British Columbia Utilities Commission; it is estimated that at its height Alcan reaped $1 million each month in power sales alone. Local residents did not receive electricity until the 1970s.

The most devastating social effect of Alcan’s project was the full relocation of the region’s aboriginal people, the Cheslatta T’en First Nation, who had a population of approximately 200 individuals (Robertson n.d.). In addition, seventy-nine Eurocanadian settler families living at Ootsa Lake were forced to relocate. All told, six entire settlements were inundated. Neither group was fully compensated for its losses, although the Cheslatta people were particularly undercompensated at $50 per family (Christensen 1995, 81). Both groups suffered intense emotional, social, and economic hardships, and they immediately realized their common frustration and anger at Alcan and the government. Cyril Shelford, then an Ootsa Lake resident who later became the provincial Minister of Agriculture, attempted to form a joint Cheslatta-settler opposition group in 1951. The Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa ordered him to disband the organization on the grounds that Native people were wards of the state and therefore unable to make political decisions on their own. Shelford (1987) indicated later that his emotional reaction to this situation motivated him to pursue a career in politics. Significantly, Alcan made little attempt to legitimize its actions to local residents, despite the fact that its project was integral to the dominant Fordist ideology at the time. Following the construction of Kenny Dam, the aluminum company rotated a handful of employees in the region to maintain and monitor the facilities. Other than the construction of a public boat launch into the reservoir, Alcan did not use the landscape to project any sort of equilibrium to residents.

The second major development scheme occurred in the late 1960s when the provincial government used amended provisions of the Forest Act to lease large tracts of forest to nonlocal firms. Prior to that time, small-scale sawmilling had prevailed in Southside. In interviews, twenty-nine former sawyers estimated that approximately 103 independent sawmills were in operation during the 1950s and 1960s; today, only three local mills are in operation, and two of those are on a seasonal basis. Unemployment escalated over the next decades, eventually reaching a current figure of 19.2
percent for the district. Residents were forced to find work in Burns Lake, and most of Southside’s stores, banks, and even its rudimentary hospital at Southbank were forced to close.

In 1976, the government replaced the small passenger ferry that plied Francois Lake with the Omineca Princess in an effort to promote larger corporate harvests in Southside. Still in operation today, the vessel is 192 feet long and is designed to carry five fully loaded logging trucks weighing 90,000 pounds each or, alternatively, a cargo of sixty-four passenger cars. It represented a significant subsidy of the timber industry as it cost $2.7 million dollars to build, and another $1.5 million to install new landings and docks into the lake (Meacham 1976). The history of the ferry is instructive. In 1970, Cyril Shelford petitioned the Ministry of Highways and Transportation for the modern ferry service, arguing that Southsiders deserved stronger connections with the outside world. His plea fell on deaf ears until several years later when international logging companies sent letters in support. They did so because the existing ferry service could not accommodate their logging trucks, thereby elevating transportation costs substantially. Thus, not because of purely local needs but because a ferry would reduce both the expenses and distances involved in hauling timber to regional mills, the proposal passed through the provincial legislature. The Omineca Princess represented Southside’s “modern moment,” signaling its complete transformation into a resource hinterland dominated by the agglomerative power of nodal centers.

Southsiders, then, enjoyed their ability to appropriate the environs symbolically, that is, to generate meaning by transforming their surroundings into symbols, narratives, home places, and, indeed, lives. Yet, they were increasingly unable to appropriate their region productively following Fordist restructuring. Instead, the province’s regional system had conferred control over the means to an evolving constellation of nonlocal firms and social elites whose activities were backed by provincial legislation. Consequently, Southsiders experienced a sharp misalignment between their locale’s means and meaning, that is, between the official expectations (e.g., the productive process benefits all citizens of the province) and practical experience (e.g., the productive process marginalizes local people and threatens their home places). This tension catalyzed a structure of feeling among residents who began to define themselves collectively against outsiders. Southsiders expressed this place identity by positioning markers of insiders against the readily available evidence of outside power.

**Southside’s Resistant Place Identity**

Southside’s resistant place identity derived from residents’ actual experience of simultaneous attachment to and alienation from their environs. It flourished because dominant regional ideology could not account for this sort of tension. As indicated in the previous section, postwar industrialization undermined the ability of residents to transform their surroundings into economic value. By threatening their livelihoods, industrialization paradoxically made residents extremely conscious of their place attachments. In other words, outsiders had alienated residents from the material appropriation of the environs, which threatened and thereby intensified their emotive attachments to the place. This tension between alienation and attachment sparked a structure of feeling that bound residents of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds to a coherent, albeit erratic, resistant identity. Southsiders reacted to this estrangement by positioning the sanctity of insider attachment against the ongoing threats of outsider appropriation.

The central quality of Southside’s resistant identity is isolation, both real and perceived. Residents use this trait to establish a sense of communal self-worth by distinguishing their region from the province’s urban areas where most people enjoy modern amenities and accoutrements. I surveyed forty-nine residents with the question, What is Southside’s most unique quality? Eighty-two percent responded with variants on a single response: isolation. Bonnie Jack is a Metis woman who married Leon, a Cheslatta elder who used to work on a local sawmill but now operates a logging truck for Burns Lake Native Logging, Inc. The couple lived in Southside for ten years, but moved four years ago to Burns Lake to be closer to Leon’s place of work. Being somewhat removed from the region, Jack was able to summarize this quality of isolation:

They say that to go to Southside is to go back in time. Once you cross the ferry, you’re pretty remote from everything. Living in town [Burns Lake] as I do now, I know that Burns Lakers see the Southside as remote with nothing to do for entertainment. Just farming and logging. You’ve got to have a pretty specific reason to cross that ferry. But Southsiders have lived here in this isolation for their whole lives, eh? This is home for them.  

—(Jack 1999)

Significantly, Southsiders believe that isolation has positive qualities that imbue regional life with a freedom and independence that residents of Burns Lake and other urban areas fail to enjoy. Bonnie Jack continued, for example, by saying, “The only thing I miss about living here
is the freedom, being able to take my shirt off without having to worry about running into anybody.” Virgil Stiller, an eighty-year-old ex-American who now runs a cow-calf operation at Takysie Lake, put it this way: “I live on a place that’s a quarter-mile off the road, and I can walk to my front yard and take a pee if I want to without upsetting my neighbor. That’s what I like about living here” (Stiller 1999). Residents routinely cite the fact that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) have no offices on the Southside as additional evidence of the freedom generated by such isolation. Some claim to drive their vehicles without insurance and to take matters of social justice into their own hands. Southsiders employ this discursive combination of isolation-freedom to distinguish themselves from outsiders and thereby invest insider status with the privileges that remoteness entails.

Southside’s place identity derives not so much from intrinsic qualities of isolation and freedom, but rather from the actual ways that residents position these markers of insideliness against outsiders. The most prevalent tactic is to undercut the authority of outsiders by illustrating how insiders alone are able to contend with the region’s hardships. Whether lifelong residents or recent immigrants, Southsiders use various metaphors to assert that their adjustments to the region’s adversities place them in a special category. By contrast, outsiders—tourists, corporate employees, and summer homeowners—cannot make claims to such a connection despite their often-superior economic and political positions.

The most prevalent of the metaphors involved in this process of positioning is what residents call “the condition of the country.” In this theme of regional discourse, residents relate how they adapted to Southside’s unique difficulties as a way of establishing their own moral authority against the perceived arrogance of outsiders. Virgil Stiller, the cow-calf operator at Takysie Lake, was thirty-four years old when he moved to Southside from Washington in 1967, after having worked for twelve years at a canning company. One morning, while answering my question regarding the quality of life in Southside, he illustrated how he had become an insider by adjusting his own lifestyle:

To survive up here you’ve got to be able to adapt to the conditions of the country and do whatever you can to get work. When I started my cattle operation, I realized that you’ve got to learn how to deal with temperatures that can drop forty degrees in a night, or with long hauls to auction, busts in the cattle market, or even with wolves that pick off weak members of the herd. That’s just the way it is around here.

—(Stiller 1999)

When I asked Stiller about the biggest changes he had noticed in the region, he illustrated how the condition-of-the-country metaphor can be used to establish the moral boundaries between outsiders and insiders:

Well, I’ll tell you, the biggest change I’ve noticed up here is the people. There’s lots of retirees who come up here to get a place in the country. But they want to bring the city into the country! This used to be all open range and the cattle would just roam. It worked well like that. And then the cattle started getting into their gardens and they started raising a fuss. But you know when it’s open range you’ve got to fence out, not in. But they wouldn’t do it. They wanted to bring the city into the country, and they couldn’t do it. So they left—most within a year! You’ve got to adapt to this country to survive; it won’t let you bring the city up here

—(Stiller 1999)

Particularly telling in this passage is that Stiller personified the landscape itself, stating that it simply does not permit the urban ways of outsiders. To become a Southsider, then, one must adjust to the harsh conditions of the country itself—isolated, long winters, lack of work, and unpredictable wildlife. From this perspective, outsiders may have more power and opportunities than do local residents, but they are unable to survive in such a formidable country. It is precisely this difference that imbues the status of insiders with the dignity of simply surviving in a particular place.

The Omineca Princess is the most powerful and ambiguous symbol in Southside’s place identity because it is an icon both of Fordist modernization and of the region’s own collective identity (Figure 3). A second question on the survey cited above asked the question, What symbols(s) or icon(s) do you associate with Southside? A full 91 percent of the respondents answered: The ferry. Subsequent fieldwork revealed that residents have
symbolically appropriated the ferry by transforming it into the symbol of their isolation and independence from the outside world. Significantly, residents use the ferry to define the geographical boundaries between insiders against outsiders. Simply put, an insider is anyone who lives on the south side of the lake, or, as residents often say, "on this side of the ferry."

On the level of social practice, to be a Southsider means to experience the frustrations and pleasures of riding the ferry. The ferry is a meeting place where residents can demonstrate their insidedness to each other as well as to outsiders. Once the ferry has left the Southside landing, it does every hour from 5 a.m. to midnight, residents leave their vehicles and congregate in small groups to discuss local happenings and current affairs. Outsiders typically stay in their vehicles or retreat to the observation deck, making it easy to distinguish them from insiders. When I first crossed the ferry to begin my research in May of 1998, for instance, I was an outsider. Groups of local ranchers, loggers, and Natives talked and joked with one another while I found a small corner where I could remain unnoticed as I gazed across the lake. By the end of my second year in the region, I looked forward to the ferry ride as a time to meet friends and discuss upcoming events. On many occasions, I drove onto the ferry alone but immediately was beckoned by some group of Southsiders to join them. The experience of riding the ferry became one of inclusiveness; I had become an insider through my repeated use of the ferry.

For a region with a population density of 1.3 people per square mile, the ferry is the public meeting place for the region, a locale where residents regularly can congregate, exchange information and goods, and plan activities. In other words, the ferry concentrates an otherwise dispersed people, allowing for social cohesion not readily achieved in such a sparsely settled land. Lori Petkau, a Mennonite woman who now directs the Southside Economic Development Association, once stated that Southsiders are "the most independent-dependent people you will ever meet" (Petkau 1999). By this she meant that Southsiders are highly jealous of their individual seclusion and yet extremely dependent on one another for assistance, particularly during times of tragedy or crisis. The ferry enables Southsiders to be an "independent-dependent people" by allowing them to participate in their community in a neutral, public location without sacrificing their own privacy or isolation. At the same time, this description of independent-dependent people underscores a contradiction implicit in regional identity: although the vessel is seen as the symbol of independence from outsiders, Southsiders are themselves extremely dependent on the ferry for their access to the outside world. In this sense, the independent-dependent trait highlights the highly ambiguous nature of the ferry as an icon of their resistant identity.

The ferry molds life in other ways. Most notably, its regular cargo of arrivals on the Southside means that the region's single paved roadway pulsates with ferry traffic. Regardless of the distance from the landing, everyone knows that the ferry has arrived when two or more cars pass in a single line. People routinely make note of this hourly "ferry traffic" as they watch it pass. The business in the region's two cafés, Likkel's and Keefe's, similarly pulsates with the ferry schedule. At Likkel's, for instance, the café and store are nearly empty and the atmosphere quiet until approximately five minutes after the hour, when a fresh batch of ferry traffic arrives. The place bustles for a half-hour and then settles down until the next group appears. This pulse in ferry traffic is, in fact, a pulse of modernity. It has imposed a highly regimented conception of time on the region as the ferry brings outsiders into the region, literally, on an hourly basis. In winter, each batch of traffic carries several empty logging trucks headed into the forests to pick up loads of trees. In summer, each line of traffic contains recreational vehicles and tourists destined to the provincial campgrounds and recreational lakes. So, although Southsiders have transformed the ferry into their own marker of identity, the vessel maintains its status as an element of modern life and outsider power.

Southsiders use the ferry to define the geographical boundaries between insider and outsider and to emphasize the distance between the two. The issue of distance is significant because, as illustrated earlier, Fordist restructuring in BC entailed diminishing distances through spatial and economic integration. Southsiders, by contrast, have imaginatively made a chasm out of a lake only three kilometers wide. They underscore their sense of insidedness by pointing out how the ferry keeps them isolated from the rest of the province. Richie Burt, one of the small-scale loggers who found himself out of work during the 1980s, put it this way: "It's only twenty miles to Burns Lake, but because of the ferry it takes fifty minutes—make that an hour—and that's if you hit everything right. That's why people feel semi-isolated here. Everyone has to deal with the ferry" (Burt 1999). Southside's identity structure expands distance paradoxically by pointing to the ferry, the very mechanism used by international timber firms to compress the distances to their mills.

The deeply ambiguous quality of the ferry as a symbol in the social imaginary occurs because, in addition to
standing for valued isolation, residents also realize that it signifies outsiders’ material exploitation of Southside. People were quick to point out that the international logging companies were responsible for the new ferry. They also connected this event with the consequent demise of the local mills, economic dependence on the city of Burns Lake, and the prevalence of tourists entering the region. Outsider dominance is readily evident to residents at the ferry landing because it causes regular overloads and long waits as, for instance, when a dozen logging trucks preempt and thereby disrupt passenger traffic for hours. Southsiders summarize this state of affairs with a common phrase: “That ferry runs your life.” In opening up Southside for outsider exploitation, the ferry altered the everyday experience of local residents by converting their formerly detached region into a modern hinterland that operates on a precise schedule dictated by extralocal interests.

The ferry, then, is a contested and ambiguous symbol that embodies the broader insider-outsider struggles over place meaning in Southside. The vessel simultaneously serves as a place of social cohesion and an expression of resistance, all the while symbolizing the power of outside firms, tourists, and politicians. For Southsiders, though, the evidence of that power—symbolized in the ferry and other landmarks such as logging roads and dams—often tends to promote inaction and inward-looking provincialism. Simply put, outsiders—the ones who put the ferry in the lake—are often seen as simply too powerful to resist. One afternoon in Keefe’s Landing Café, Menno Amendt, a Mennonite logger and rancher, lamented his recent loss of a timber contract to the Babine Mill, one of the nonlocal corporate operations harvesting in Southside. Menno’s competitor across the lake, in fact, apparently had outwitted him in an illegal practice known as surrogate bidding, whereby a corporate mill secretly sponsors an independent logger in obtaining a contract. Amendt said he had contacted representatives from the Babine Mill weeks earlier and offered his services as an independent contractor, but the company left him “out in the cold.” When I asked why Southsiders do not fight the nonlocal logging companies, he looked at me squarely and replied, “I wouldn’t know who to fight or how to get a complaint together. Who are you going to fight? You’d have to get a community meeting together or something” (Amendt and Schmidt 1999).

And yet, despite this fatalism, the resistant identity does offer consolation. When the conversation was ending half an hour later, I asked Amendt what made Southside unique. He responded with more animation than at any other time during our talk: “People are more independent here, more independent than any other community you’d find anywhere else!” When viewed through the lens of resistant identity, insiders are at once exploited by outsiders and yet independent of them. This contradiction is most apparent when the ferry service itself is threatened. In 1982 and 2002, for instance, the provincial government announced plans to charge passengers for each run across the lake. The reaction among Southsiders was cohesive and swift in both instances. Residents who rarely appeared in public attended community meetings to voice their complaints and outrage to visiting provincial officials. The government eventually cancelled the plans in 1982, and is now in the process of debating the necessity of the 2002 toll proposal. Residents, in other words, stage effective resistance only to defend the central icon of their place identity.

The Push for Emergence

Southside’s resistant identity is unstable for two reasons. First, the quality of inward-looking provincialism promotes inaction and resignation among residents, thereby hindering the grassroots initiatives and partnerships with outsiders that might improve local conditions and quality of life. This identity, moreover, materializes most forcibly when residents perceive a threat to their region, such as a toll on the ferry, so it does not engender a more enduring sense of collectivity. Second, although not always effective, BC’s dominant groups make every attempt to incorporate and thereby diffuse resistant identities. In the 1990s, for instance, the New Democratic Party (NDP) attempted to cater to rural resentment by creating jobs and conferring management authority to Aboriginal and northern organizations. By doling out relatively meager amounts of funds and authority, however, initiatives such as the Jobs and Timber Accord and Forest Renewal BC had the effect of more fully integrating rural communities into a territorial structure that promotes capital accumulation in nodal centers.

Faced with such pressures, Southside’s leaders strived to transform their region’s resistant identity into an emergent cultural force in the 1990s. Emergent cultures are marked by futuristic visions that seek to remedy a group’s contemporary problems and inequities by promoting alternative geographic designs (Cosgrove 1989, 132). Southside’s leaders appealed to group emotion to spark political activism designed to achieve greater control over access to the region’s means of production through locally driven socioeconomic development. The grassroots leadership first emerged in the 1980s when a loose coalition of residents partnered to protest Alcan’s plans to construct a second hydroelectric facility in the
region known as the Kemano Completion Project (KCP). Led by Cheslatta Chief Marvin Charlie and an ex-American rancher named Mike Robertson, the partnership worked for nearly a decade to disclose the aluminum company’s past injustices and to promote local rights (Larsen 2003b). Many of the region’s residents became involved in the protest. The Mennonite community, for instance, provided food for large visibility campaigns such as the 1994 Cheslatta Solidarity March, while Ootsa Lake settlers donated family photographs and documents for inclusion in a social impact statement. Robertson convinced Ottawa filmmaker Sheila Jordan to produce No Surrender, a highly publicized film documenting the 1952 relocation of the Cheslatta people. He and Chief Charlie worked with other groups such as Greenpeace Canada and the Maori of New Zealand to publicize the resistance. Responding in part to this pressure, Premier Mike Harcourt cancelled the project in January 1995.

The termination of the KCP signaled a shift in Southside’s place identity, which evolved from a purely resistant structure of feeling toward an emergent regional culture that promoted visions for local socioeconomic development through partnerships with external institutions. In 1999, Cheslatta leaders began to hold meetings with Carrier Lumber, Ltd. of Prince George about the possibility of building a joint-venture sawmill near Ootsa Lake. Carrier Lumber is a midsized company that has been in operation for almost fifty years. In the 1990s, it found a unique niche in a provincial timber market that was increasingly blocked by protests from aboriginal and other local resistance groups. Indeed, a 1990 Price Waterhouse survey indicated that roadblocks had cost the provincial timber and mining industries over 1,500 permanent jobs and $1 billion in lost investment. Carrier Lumber avoids such resistance by working directly with local communities to harvest and process wood in small-scale, flexible sawmills that have relatively short life spans of thirty years. In short, the company is responding to the current capitalist era of flexible accumulation, which is marked by highly specialized and adaptable firms designed to profit from rapidly changing sociogeographic conditions (Soja 1989).

For its part, the NDP realized the value of Carrier Lumber’s approach to harvesting precisely because it diffused local opposition. This political shift—one that is still unfolding in BC—represents a response to post-Fordist restructuring in the province’s forest industry (Hayter and Barnes 1997; Hayter 2000). Such restructuring has emphasized alternative uses and meanings for forested land, in part by challenging vertically integrated, Fordist production schemes described earlier (Hayter 2003). The NDP promoted joint-venture partnerships through initiatives and funding packaged in legislation such as the Jobs and Timber Accord (1997) and the Forest Practices Act (1995). Consequently, Carrier Lumber has been able to receive discounts on stumpage as well as other financial and political support from the government. The company typically provides the initial funds to construct a mill, and local residents then incorporate themselves and purchase shares in the venture to fund other startup costs. As soon as the community has paid back the debt to Carrier, its local organization assumes ownership of the mill, and subsequent profits are divided equally between the partners.

The joint-venture operation took shape in Southside over a three-year period. In 1999, the Cheslatta Nation received a grant of $18,500 from the provincial First Nations Forestry Program to conduct a feasibility study for the new mill. A year later, Carrier Lumber met with the Ministry of Forests to obtain a Small Business Forestry Employment Program nonreplaceable forest license for 100,000 cubic meters of wood. The Cheslatta already held rights to harvest up to 3.5 million cubic meters of wood submerged in Alcan’s Nechako Reservoir. The Cheslatta Chief and Council then invited the nonaboriginal residents of Southside to organize themselves as a third partner in the venture because they felt that the mill should benefit all residents, that is, all insiders as defined by the ferry (McGarrigle 1999). In the summer of 2000, Carrier Lumber released the blueprints for the mill and, working with Southsiders, selected a site for its construction on the north shore of Ootsa Lake. The mill’s processing capabilities were estimated to reach a maximum of 125,000 board feet per eight-hour shift, a modest but by no means insignificant figure. The mill was predicted to create thirty full-time jobs in direct employment and an additional sixty jobs in related services and contracts (McGarrigle 1999).

Despite these quick developments, however, Southside’s leaders soon discovered serious impediments rooted within the dynamics of the region’s resistant identity, particularly in the ways that residents collectively defined themselves against outsiders. Leaders such as Robertson and Charlie had motivated residents into action by appealing to the emotionally powerful contours of the region’s structure of feeling. The mill and other related projects, for instance, were publicized in local newspapers as a source of local employment open to all Southsiders (McGarrigle 1999). Outsiders, by implication, need not apply. These projects called for active relationships with those same outsiders, however, a circumstance that at first blush would appear to threaten the integrity of insider identity. As Glenn Sombert, ac-
countant for the Cheslatta Nation, said, “We’d like to think that [Southsiders] could have put something like the sawmill together by ourselves. But we just don’t have the money, knowledge, skills, and connections on this side of the lake to do that” (Sombert 2002). The sawmill forced leaders and residents alike to struggle over a painful contradiction within their own place identity. On the one hand, they needed projects such as the mill to increase their own economic stability and political clout as insiders who had been exploited by outside interests. At the same time, however, it was clear that these projects required intricate and often risky partnerships with those same outside forces. In short, the contradiction represents the persistence of resistant identity dynamics within emergent visions.

I witnessed one episode in this struggle on the evening of 17 June 2000, when a group of nonaboriginal Southsiders met to decide who would be able to become a shareholder under the newly created, community portion of the joint-venture project.10 A representative from the Carrier Lumber Company called the people to order and asked them to agree upon a geographical definition of “community” for the purposes of investing in and managing the joint-venture project. Only community members would be able to buy shares needed to finance the company and therefore receive the right to participate on the steering committee with representatives from the Cheslatta and Carrier Lumber. The responses of Southsiders revealed the persistence of the resistant place identity—the sharp lines between insider and outsider—even as they joined together to pursue the emergent vision of a mill, which would reconfigure such lines by enabling local access to the means. Vicky Smith, the wife of a prominent rancher, stood up and stated the standard line: “The mill’s for Southsiders and we’re all Southsiders. We know who we are. I say anyone this side of the ferry can join.” Others nodded or mumbled in agreement.

The representative agreed that the mill would benefit Southsiders, but raised the thorny issue of money: “Do all of us here think that the community defined in such a way would be able to raise enough for its share of the joint-venture?” One elderly gentleman stood up and answered, “Maybe we should include all of the Lakes District, and bring Burns Lakers into this project.” A woman from the opposite side of the room retorted: “I’m with Vicky. People from Burns Lake think Southside is remote and scary. Would they even go with us on this project? I mean, when I get off the ferry from being in Burns Lake, it’s like the whole world’s been lifted off my shoulders!” It was at this point in the meeting that, in reaction to such a conventionally resistant statement, other people began opening up emergent possibilities, redrawing the lines of insider status so as to make the sawmill a financial possibility. A thin gangly man with an orange moustache replied to the woman: “Well, the loggers on the north side [of the lake] don’t see this place as remote or scary!” This brought reserved laughter from the crowd. Another woman continued, “Yeah, and what about the pioneers from the Southside who have moved across the lake? Wouldn’t they invest in this project? Shouldn’t they be part of the community?” A few people in the crowd affirmed the woman’s idea by mentioning the names of original ranchers who had moved to Burns Lake because they had been forced into selling their property on the south side. After an hour of debate, the representative from Carrier Lumber called for a vote on the definition of the community. An overwhelming majority voted to include Burns Lake and the rest of the Lakes District in the financing and management of their share of the joint-venture project. The majority who voted in favor of the measure insisted that not including people across the lake would have doomed the sawmill financially. With the vote at the public meeting, old resistant lines between insider and outsider—symbolized by the ferry—had been crossed and a new sense of insidedness established, at least temporarily. The very conception of a resistant place identity—that intimate collection of insiders—had been reworked to make social and economic connections across the vast distances established in the region’s structure of feeling.

The emergent vision of the mill ultimately opened new access to the means of production: regaining partial control over the regional economy, creating employment opportunities, and transforming the landscape itself with the mill’s construction (Figure 4). The mill officially opened for business in November 2002. It now employs almost sixty aboriginal and nonaboriginal residents,

Figure 4. Arial view of the Ootsa Lake sawmill, which opened in November 2002.
mainly from the Southside, who together process approximately 100,000 board feet of lumber per shift. Although the downturn in the log market has prevented the mill from reaching its maximum production by 25,000 board feet, local leaders remain optimistic. They are in the final stages of obtaining a community forest tenure over 80,000 hectares of land surrounding Cheslatta Lake. In enacting emergent visions, Southsiders have empowered themselves to appropriate the environs—to render them meaningful through transformation—and thereby begin the work of constituting an emergent sense of place.

**Place Identity and Regional Restructuring**

This case study has yielded several important insights regarding the process of place-identity formation in resource-dependent areas. It is important, of course, to stress caution when generalizing from a single case study. Indeed, Southside’s isolation and difficulty of access have played a role in marking outsiders from insiders and, taken together, these qualities may differentiate the region from other rural contexts. Nonetheless, empirical studies of place identity in rural North America (Marchak 1980; Duncan 1993; Norris 1993; Grossman 2001) show remarkable similarities in several respects.

First, the study illustrates that a singular place identity emerged in Southside despite the fact that no one faction—capital, labor, insiders, or outsiders—ever consolidated control over both symbolic and economic production in the region. In theoretical terms, then, means and meaning never achieved hegemonic equilibrium. Nonetheless, a strong regional identity materialized because the territorial ideology that accompanied Fordist restructuring in northern BC had little success in legitimizing the symbolic, political, and economic tensions between nodes and peripheries. These tensions were exacerbated by the fact that most timber, mining, and hydroelectric firms did not relocate to the area, which undercut their ability to establish and project a place-based ideology. Residents, therefore, found collective meaning in their environs, but possessed little control over the means. As a result, their sense of place took shape as a reaction to their experience of powerlessness, creating a structure of feeling through which they could position themselves as regional stewards subjected to the whims of callous and often overwhelming outside forces.

Consequently, the work presented here indicates that a hegemonic formation of means and meaning is not the single necessary condition for the formation of coherent place identities in the resource-dependent community. It suggests instead that hegemonic, resistant, and emergent identity structures represent momentary outcomes in an ongoing dialectic of identity formation and economic restructuring. In this context, insider-outsider tensions compound and complicate the struggles between capital and labor in the production of cultural and economic value. It is perhaps for this reason that resistant identities have been especially prevalent in rural North America during the late twentieth century, a time when Fordism bound cities and hinterlands into vertically integrated, mechanized production schemes (see Marchak 1980; Duncan 1993; Norris 1993; Grossman 2001). Indeed, Fordist regional systems typically confer access over the local means of production to outsiders residing in nodal centers. Residents, however, continue to localize meanings in the periphery. As a result, rural residents often construct their locales as places for insiders positioned firmly against any and all evidence of outsider power (ibid.). Local identities, then, are constructed and politicized in relation to other places in the regional system.

The study also indicates that resistant identity structures may instigate efforts to reallocate the means to institutions and grassroots groups in the periphery, particularly when those in power make little attempt to justify their own dominance. BC’s regional structure is instructive in this regard because it created a spatiality through which resistant identities could materialize and, in the case of Southside, thrive. Consequently, place identity is not merely a consequence of power consolidation, as was theorized in earlier studies, but also is an integral part of the political work involved in acquiring control over resource extraction and management in peripheral areas. A corollary to this finding is that while resistant identities are both coherent and functional, they also are unstable precisely because they derive from a strain within the territorial structure itself, that is, a tension between the node-focused structures of expectation and the peripherally focused structures of feeling. By definition, these identities do not possess significant access to the means, which makes it difficult for residents to sustain them beyond relatively brief periods of external pressure. As a result, leadership structures may emerge within these communities to transform collective emotions into emergent cultural forms and practices.

Emergent identities encounter both external and internal obstacles. Serious impediments arise instantly because local residents are challenging the economic and political prowess of nodes. Leaders must work diligently to find opportunities within a territorial structure that promotes capital accumulation through concen-
treated firms and urbanized economies of scale. On the other hand, serious impediments to emergent politics can arise from within regional culture itself. Southside’s leaders, for example, found it difficult to propel community members beyond the resistant lines dividing insiders from outsiders, and the region does not yet exhibit a fully emergent culture with its own tangible and enduring symbols, forms, and practices. The very persistence of resistant dynamics in the community can thwart otherwise productive initiatives by denying the possibility of change through relationships with outside firms and institutions. Ultimately, though, emergent projects can generate a localized hegemonic formation of means and meaning that yields a stable and enduring sense of place.

With these insights in mind, it is not unreasonable to question the model of place-identity formation presented by Harner (see Figure 1). The model is helpful insofar as it shows how capital and labor rely on the activity of place making to consolidate control over resource production in the resource town. However, it fails to accommodate the complexity of insiders and outsiders, nodes and peripheries, and structures of expectation and feeling, all of which factor in identity formation, often in complex and contradictory ways. Models such as this one also cannot accurately depict how local identities are defined and mobilized in relation to other places, a key insight gained from other theoretical work on this topic (Massey 1991; Casey 1997). Given this complexity, it may be that the best “model” available for representing the richness and relevance of place in the modern world is narrative itself, an idea developed at length by Entrikin (1991). Place narratives synthesize objective knowledge and analysis with subjective interpretations, positions, and values, thereby leaving open the rich ambiguities, flavors, and fluidities of local experience. In their wide variety of forms—anecdotes, stories, oral histories, and cartographies, as well as ethnographic and theoretical studies—they sustain place making as a multifaceted, open-ended, and ultimately human (rather than solely academic) endeavor.

In closing, the process of place-identity formation in peripheral areas is more complex than an oscillation between periods of hegemony and social struggle. Resistant and emergent identity structures represent two additional possibilities in the ongoing dialectic of place making and economic activity. Each of the three formations possesses its own characteristic forms and practices, but they are best viewed as part of regional evolution and restructuring, which ensures their eventual transformation and reformulation. The study presented in these pages underscores the complexity of that process and, in particular, the idea that sense of place is more than a purely emotional or primordial connection to a home place that vanishes in the modern world. It is instead the way we understand and experience social and economic change from a particular location and the reason we continue to find meaning in our surroundings despite the fact that they are ultimately beyond our individual control.

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Notes

2. Stratified samples select a representative distribution of interviewees from the various segments of interest in an area’s population. In this case, the segments were defined as ethnic or immigrant cohorts that possessed relatively coherent conceptions of group identity while sharing in the overarching regional culture described in this paper.
3. When British Columbia entered the Dominion of Canada in 1871, it did so with control of most of its lands, except for several significant tracts granted by the provincial government to the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Today, roughly 90 percent of the province is publicly owned Crown land.
4. During the postwar period, British Columbia’s labor force became heavily unionized. The IWA recorded 48,000 members by the 1970s, which represented 47.5 percent of the work force and was 10 percent above the national average (Marchak 1986, 147).
5. Unless otherwise noted, all monetary figures are in Canadian dollars. For point of comparison, the 1952 exchange rate was 1.02145 US dollars for every one Canadian dollar; in September 2004, the exchange rate is 0.78 US dollars for every one Canadian dollar. See http://pacific.commerce.ubc.ca/xr (last accessed June 2003).
6. Unfortunately, a lack of detailed records prevents an accurate count of the sawmills in the area. The estimates given by the sawyers ranged from 90 to 115 mills.
8. Density calculation based on 2002 Statistics Canada figures for Area E of the Bulkley-Nechako Regional District, which is roughly isomorphic with the south side.
9. Large, internationally owned mills in the region average some 600,000 board feet per shift.

10. Situation recorded in field notes, Southbank, BC, 17 June 2000. All participants were subsequently consulted for permission and accuracy regarding the statements quoted here.

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