Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Arts of

ERIKA BLAND

BA (Hons) (University of British Columbia, 2010)

“Closing the Rift Between Agriculture and Conservation: Explorations of Food Sovereignty on an Island in the Salish Sea”

School of Environmental Studies

Thursday, December 13, 2018
1:00 P.M.
David Turpin Building
Room B255

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Jessica Dempsey, School of Environmental Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Cameron Owens, Department of Geography, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Department of Geography, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Brian Thom, Department of Anthropology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Human food provisioning is inextricably linked to the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity. But a broad human-nature dualism in western colonial capitalist political economy has created a ‘metabolic rift’ between humans and our ecological sources of sustenance. Agriculture and conservation are parsed from one another under this political economic regime—braided streams are seen as separate channels. Focusing on Denman (a.k.a. Inner) Island, which is home to a community of active agriculturalists and conservationists, I explore how relations of power and knowledge maintain the rift between conservation and agriculture, ultimately obscuring the braided streams. Interviews with Inner Islanders revealed wetlands as places where conservation and agriculture values overlap; they are sites to observe divergent understandings and representations about wetlands, as well as the metabolic rift in action. Case studies of wetlands on Inner Island demonstrate both the power and the limitations of state knowledge making techniques in the context of different, contested, or overlapping authority claims over agro-ecological space. Diverse community values surround agro-ecological sites like wetlands, but the way these spaces are defined, mapped, classified, and historicized by the state tends to bifurcate conservation from agriculture, fixing them as either conservation or agricultural spaces in the policy that surrounds them. Contestations over the production of political economic knowledges are at the heart of these divergences—and the rift—between conservation and agriculture on Inner Island. Drawing on the work of Scott (1998) and Blomley (2016; 2005; 2003; 1993), I argue that metises—the practical knowledges of local people—and their intersections with the institution of property, are integral to state legibility of, and consequently power in, wetlands. Furthermore, the settler colonial context which underlies the classification of wetland space affords agriculture primacy over conservation, and perpetuates the rift between the two. Drawing from and contributing to the literature on food sovereignty, I suggest that efforts to close the rift between agriculture and conservation will involve alternative processes of knowledge-making, as well as challenging the settler colonial historical baseline used today in state land classifications and governance.