

DAFFODILS AND DISPOSSESSION: *Nikkei Settlers, White Possession, and Settler Colonial Property in Bradner, BC, 1914–51*

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IN 1951, FOLLOWING his internment in Petawawa, Ontario, Haruo Ichikawa settled with his family in Bradner, BC, with a dream of “seeing millions of golden daffodils swaying in the breeze in [his] own fields.”¹ Other Nikkei families, including my own, joined the Ichikawas in Bradner after 1949, when the federal government permitted people of Japanese descent to return to the coast. But these postwar families were not the first Nikkei settlers with daffodil dreams. Beginning in the 1920s, four Nikkei families – the Imamuras, Mikis, Yamadas, and Yamamotos – grew daffodils on unceded Matsqui (Mathxwi) territory in Bradner, a small rural settler community in the Fraser Valley. But in 1942, the Canadian government forced them, and all other persons of Japanese descent, to leave the coastal regions of British Columbia, taking only 150 pounds of personal and household effects with them. Then, in June 1943, the federal government ordered the sale of their farms and auctioned off any remaining personal property that had not been destroyed or stolen.² Under the rationale of wartime exigencies, government agents employed dubious and contradictory policies that undermined Nikkei property ownership and secured properties for white tenants, bulb growers, and soldier-settlers.

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¹ James Haruo Ichikawa biography in *Bradner Flower Show, 1928–1978*, pamphlet, box (events), file, Bradner Flower Show, 54, Reach Archives (Abbotsford, BC).

² For a detailed account, see Kaitlin Findlay, Nicholas Blomley, and the Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, “(De)valuation: The State Mismanagement of Japanese Canadian Personal Property in the 1940s,” in *Landscapes of Injustice: A New Perspective on the Internment and Dispossession of Japanese Canadians*, ed. Jordan Stanger-Ross (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 213–52.

This article focuses on these Nikkei farmers and shows how the forced state sale of Nikkei property contradicted the notion – prevalent among Nikkei and white settlers alike – that their property rights were “sacrosanct.”³ The dispossession of Japanese Canadians was part of a longer trajectory of racialized property practices and policies that facilitated white settler possession.⁴ Although scholars have tended to represent Japanese Canadian dispossession as an isolated moment of wartime racism, it was in fact no anomaly. Settler colonial British Columbia was characterized by what Brenna Bhandar calls a “racial regime of ownership” that continuously prioritized white settlement and property ownership on Indigenous lands. Through land use, ideas of labour and improvement, and the abstraction and individualization of land through maps, surveys, and property registration, this regime equated “civilized life” with European concepts of property and, thereby, enabled white possession. Settlers deemed alternative uses and conceptions of land as wasted or wasteful, and believed the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from said land was justified.⁵ Non-Indigenous people of colour occupied ambiguous and complex positions in this racial regime of ownership and, in Bradner, Nikkei property owners occupied a specific space between Indigenous dispossession and white possession. The relative privilege of Nikkei families vis-à-vis Indigenous Peoples initially secured them Matsqui land upon which to build their livelihoods, but it ultimately proved inadequate to protect Nikkei from dispossession by white settlers. This article traces the multiple, uneven ways in which colonial property concepts played out in the dispossession of Nikkei farmers. In so doing, it details some of the practices on the ground that produced British Columbia’s settler colonial property regime, the system that asserted settler

³ Paige Raibmon, “Unmaking Native Space: A Genealogy of Indian Policy, Settler Practice, and the Microtechniques of Dispossession,” in *The Power of Promises: Rethinking Indian Treaties in the Pacific Northwest*, ed. Alexandra Borrows and John Borrows (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 58; and John Borrows, “Aboriginal Title and Private Property,” *Supreme Court Law Review* 71 (2015): 91–134.

⁴ Other twentieth-century examples include: Ted Rutland, *Displacing Blackness: Planning, Power, and Race in Twentieth-Century Halifax* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Evelyn Peters, Matthew Stock, and Adrian Werner, with Lawrie Barkwell, *Rooster Town: The History of an Urban Métis Community, 1901–1961* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2018).

⁵ Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 5–13; Nicholas Blomley, “Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 93, no. 1 (2003): 121–41; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); and Cheryl I. Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91.

property rights by ensuring Indigenous dispossession and privileging white possession.

The workings of this racialized settler colonial property regime were the common context that connected the dispossession of Nikkei settlers to that of Indigenous Peoples. When Nikkei settlers bought property and acquired agrarian success, they were enmeshed in both Canadian and Japanese settler colonialisms that sought to dispossess Indigenous Peoples.⁶ Even at the moment of their dispossession, the federal government recognized Nikkei property interests, albeit unsatisfactorily, and claimed an obligation to “protect” them.⁷ In contrast, most Indigenous Peoples in British Columbia could not hold real estate or exercise sovereignty over their territory or even over the small reserves that the government allotted starting in the 1860s. Nor, after 1866, could they pre-empt land as white settlers could.⁸ My examination of the state’s treatment of Nikkei daffodil farms and, to a lesser extent, of how Nikkei settlers responded demonstrates that Nikkei farmers were racialized settlers who both benefitted from British Columbia’s liberal settler property regime and suffered from its logics and inconsistencies.

⁶ For an overview on settler colonialism in British Columbia, see Laura Ishiguro, “Histories of Settler Colonialism: Considering New Currents,” *BC Studies* 190 (2016): 5–13. More generally, see J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, “A Structure, Not an Event: Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity,” *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016): n.p. And, on the relationship between settler colonialism in Canada and Japanese Canadian history, see Laura Ishiguro, Nicole Yakashiro, and Will Archibald, “Settler Colonialism and Japanese Canadian History,” 2017, www.landscapesofinjustice.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Ishiguro-Yakashiro-and-Archibald-Settler-Colonialism-and-Japanese-Canadian-history-2.pdf. Japanese agrarian migrants in North America during this period were mobilized and seen by Japan as part of a “borderless” settler colonial project connected to broader imperial aspirations. See Eiichi Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier: Japanese America and Settler Colonialism in the Construction of Japan’s Borderless Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019); and Sidney Xu Lu, *The Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism: Malthusianism and Trans-Pacific Migration, 1868–1961* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019). On property conceptions during the Meiji period, see Audrey Kobayashi, “Property and Its Transformations for Issei during the Meiji and Taisho Periods,” in *Landscapes of Injustice: A New Perspective on the Internment and Dispossession of Japanese Canadians*, ed. Jordan Stanger-Ross (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 53–66. And on Nikkei perceptions of Indigenous Peoples, see Andrea Geiger, “Reframing Race and Place: Locating Japanese Immigrants in Relation to Indigenous Peoples in the North American West, 1880–1940,” *Southern California Quarterly* 96, no. 3 (2014): 253–70.

⁷ Jordan Stanger-Ross, “Introduction,” in *Landscapes of Injustice: A New Perspective on the Internment and Dispossession of Japanese Canadians*, ed. Jordan Stanger-Ross (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 5.

⁸ Keith Thor Carlson, “Indian Reservations,” in *A St6:l6 Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, ed. Keith Thor Carlson (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2001), 94. On British Columbia’s pre-emption policy and the restrictions around Indigenous pre-emptions and, in 1866, Indigenous exclusion, see Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 35–36, 68.

Most Japanese Canadian histories take settler property ownership for granted rather than as a foundational fiction of settler colonialism. Scholars rarely connect migration to Indigenous dispossession, a point that historians Adele Perry, Paige Raibmon, and Laura Madokoro urge us to correct.⁹ Individuals who made, adjudicated, bought, and sold private property did the work of settler colonialism, even when, as Raibmon puts it, Indigenous people “were out of settlers’ sight and, by extension, out of settlers’ minds.”¹⁰ I use literature that bridges migration and colonial studies to reframe Nikkei property possession and dispossession within a broader settler colonial context.¹¹ This article builds on earlier work in which Laura Ishiguro, Will Archibald, and I assert that situating Nikkei dispossession within the context of settler colonialism can transform how we understand Japanese Canadian history specifically and Canadian history in general.¹² This study of daffodil farmers in Bradner does not presume to fully assess or detail this transformation but, instead, seeks to contribute to nascent scholarly and community conversations about it.

This article uses settler colonial analysis to inform Japanese Canadian history through a microhistory of dispossession in Bradner. Through engagement with government records that document the property concepts, rationales, and practices that characterized settler colonial Canada, it traces how state officials, bolstered by local white settlers,

⁹ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 19; Raibmon, “Unmaking Native Space,” 57; and Laura Madokoro, “Peril and Possibility: A Contemplation of the Current State of Migration History and Settler Colonial Studies in Canada,” *History Compass* 17, no. 1 (2019): n.p. Key exceptions include Renisa Mawani, *Colonial Proximities: Crossracial Encounters and Juridical Truths in British Columbia, 1871–1921* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Geiger, “Reframing Race and Place”; and Darren G. Friesen, “The Other Newcomers: Aboriginal Interactions with People from the Pacific” (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2006).

¹⁰ Raibmon, “Unmaking Native Space,” 58.

¹¹ Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 26, citing Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 39. See also Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, eds., *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai’i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008); Dean Saranillio, “Why Asian Settler Colonialism Matters: A Thought Piece on Critiques, Debates, and Indigenous Difference,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 3, nos. 3–4 (2013): 280–94; Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks: Indigenous Nations, Chinese Workers, and the Transcontinental Railroad* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019). And, in a Canadian context specific to Japanese Canadian history, see Mona Oikawa, “Connecting the Internment of Japanese Canadians to the Colonization of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada,” in *Aboriginal Connections to Race, Environment, and Traditions*, ed. Rick Riewe and Jill Oakes (Winnipeg: Aboriginal Issues Press, University of Manitoba, 2006), 17–25; and Nicole Yakashiro, “Powell Street Is Dead: Nikkei Loss, Commemoration, and Representations of Place in the Settler Colonial City,” *Urban History Review* 48, no. 2 (2021): 32–55.

¹² Ishiguro et al., “Settler Colonialism and Japanese Canadian History,” 2017.



Figure 1. The Yamadas and their daffodil farm, ca. 1941. Copyright Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2021). *Source:* Library and Archives Canada/Royal Commission to Investigate Complaints of Canadian Citizens of Japanese Origin who Resided in British Columbia in 1941, That Their Real and Personal Property had been Disposed of by the Custodian of Enemy Property at Prices Less than the Fair Market Value fonds/case file #99.

dispossessed the Imamuras, Mikis, Yamadas, and Yamamotos. I focus, in turn, on how government officials negotiated the definitions, values, and boundaries of property. In so doing, I demonstrate that, for racialized settlers who invested in settler colonial dreams, the promises of property ownership were conditional. I argue that the dispossession of Nikkei settlers was part of a larger project to sustain white settler possession, to re-enact and reinforce the core logics of Canada's property regime, and, by extension, to normalize Indigenous dispossession. I seek to challenge histories that treat the transformation of unceded lands into settler property as a rational *fait accompli* located solely in the past. I thereby ask larger questions about how we frame property and settler rights within the histories – and ultimately the futures – of non-Indigenous people of colour on Indigenous lands.

BEFORE 1942: MAKING WHITE PROPERTY
AND A DAFFODIL INDUSTRY

Nikkei farmers who came to Bradner in the 1920s and 1930s entered a settler colonial space. Over the previous half century, the government of British Columbia ignored Matsqui title, disregarded promises of compensation made by Governors Douglas and Seymour in the 1860s, and limited Matsqui people to tiny reserves held in trust by the Crown.¹³ These steps made Matsqui territory available for transformation into settler property through the pre-emption process. Collectively over time, the resulting patchwork of pre-emption claims and fee simple titles constituted the place settlers named Bradner.¹⁴ The Matsqui, however, did not consent to this attempted erasure of their presence but continued to assert their sovereignty and protest the imposition of settler property onto their lands and waters. In 1915, Chief Charlie of Matsqui explained plainly to government commissioners: “we are the real owners of the land from time immemorial” and “we ask the Commission to give us our payment for the land that was taken away from us and we want to obtain a lasting and secure title to our Indian land.”¹⁵ The commissioners whom Chief Charlie addressed sought to finalize reserve boundaries, a process that federal and provincial governments hoped could take the place of addressing Indigenous title. But Indigenous leaders provincewide refused the premise that adjustments to reserves could stand in for recognition of their title to the whole of their territories. Chief Charlie was no exception. Thus, when Nikkei farmers began to arrive, settler property in Bradner was still in the making, and the lands that they took up remained very much contested.

Bradner’s daffodil industry began in this context. In 1914, British settler and horticulturalist Fenwick Fatkin set out to create a “second Holland” after a chance encounter with daffodils growing in Bradner, and, over the next thirty years, the Fatkin family built a thriving business.¹⁶

¹³ In 1860, The Matsqui People were allocated a ninety-six hundred-acre (3,885-hectare) reserve in 1860 that was shrunk to just eighty acres (thirty-two hectares) seven years later. Keith Thor Carlson, *The Power of Place, the Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 188.

¹⁴ Western-Division Bradner, box (community history), file (Bradner), Reach Archives. Bradner was considered part of the Mount Lehman area until the early twentieth century. For simplicity, I include the Yamamotos in my analysis of Bradner’s daffodil community, though they technically resided in Mount Lehman.

¹⁵ *Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of BC – Meeting with the Matsqui Band or Tribe of Indians on Monday, January 11th, 1915*, 142. See <https://bit.ly/3CfZ9Sv>.

¹⁶ Reminiscences of Charlotte Fatkin, box (community history), file (Bradner), Reach Archives; Fenwick and Charlotte biography, in *Bradner Flower Show, 1928–78*, pamphlet, box (events), file, Bradner Flower Show, 52, Reach Archives.



Figure 2. Fenwick Fatkin (second from right) and bulb growers at the Bradner Flower Show in 1949. Flower shows were frequently organized around colonial themes that celebrated industry, the province, Canada, and the Queen. *Source:* The Reach P1888. Reproduced with the permission of The Reach (Abbotsford, BC) (2021).

Marvelling at the soil's suitability for bulbs imported from Britain and the Netherlands, Fatkin encouraged settlers to "visualize our section of this valley as the Dutchmen sees part of Holland ... or the Englishman part of England."¹⁷ The story that daffodils created "the most valuable

¹⁷ "... And There's Money in Them Thar Matsqui Bush Ranches," *Abbotsford, Sumas and Matsqui News (ASMN)*, 6 October 1937, 1; "Buy Canadian Grown Bulbs," *ASMN*, 17 October 1928, 2;

lands in the country” became an essential fiction that underscored white property and industry as of highest value, ensuring that non-white people, including Nikkei settlers, would have limited access to unceded Matsqui lands.¹⁸

In the 1920s and 1930s, many British Columbians challenged the right of Asians to hold land.¹⁹ In the Fraser Valley, white settlers warned that Nikkei farmers threatened to ruin “the white child[’s]” future, a charge that fit within broader concerns over what historian Laura Ishiguro calls “settler futurity.”²⁰ In 1923, when the province announced that it would not sell to Asian settlers any of the twelve thousand acres of property created by draining Sumas Lake, the *Chilliwack Progress* praised this circumvention of “an invasion such as ... in the Maple Ridge section where Japanese fruit growers ha[d] settled down to almost alarming extent.”²¹ The province’s drainage project dismissed the lake’s significance to the Sumas (Sema:th) people who neighboured Matsqui and, instead, promoted agricultural property development exclusively for European settlers. The new farmlands were rich; years later, Dutch bulb growers described it as having “almost the same conditions as in Holland.”²²

Despite these exclusions, Nikkei farmers laboured to create propertied lives. Property ownership provided independence and upheld Meiji-era ideals of agrarianism, tied to a broader Japanese settler colonial project.²³

“British Columbia Bulbs,” *ASMN*, 21 August 1929, 3; Fenwick Fatkin, “Bradner Flower Show,” *ASMN*, 17 April 1929, 4.

¹⁸ “Bradner Urges Bulb-Culture as Keystone Industry of Matsqui’s High Land Areas,” *ASMN*, 15 April 1931, 5. On environmental change, see Reminiscences of Charlotte Fatkin, box (community history), file (Bradner), Reach Archives; and Kogiro Imamura interview, Aldergrove, BC, transcript, 1995, Japanese Canadian Archives Oral History collection, NNM 1994-74-149, Nikkei National Museum.

¹⁹ Influenced by alien land laws in the United States, British Columbia sought policies to deny property to Nikkei settlers. See, for example, British Columbia Department of Agriculture and Bureau of Provincial Information, *Report on Oriental Activities within the Province* (Victoria: Charles F. Banfield, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1927). For more, see Patricia Roy, *The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man’s Province, 1914–1941* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 118–19.

²⁰ “W.G. McQuarrie, M.P., Speaks on Oriental Menace,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 14 December 1922, 3; “Peaceful Conquest of BC by Japanese,” *ASMN*, 27 February 1935, 1. See Laura Ishiguro, “Growing Up and Grown Up ... In Our Future City’: Discourse of Childhood and Settler Futurity in Colonial British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 190 (2016): 15.

²¹ “Keep Orientals out of Sumas,” *Chilliwack Progress*, 5 April 1923, 1. British Columbia denied applications from Asians to purchase land on Sumas Prairie. See Roy, *Oriental Question*, 118–19.

²² Many of the Dutch settlers who moved to the Sumas Prairie originally settled in Bradner. “Growers Trying Out Sumas,” *ASMN*, 11 April 1930, A11. On the Sumas Lake draining, see James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), especially chap. 4.

²³ Michiko Midge Ayukawa, “Good Wives and Wise Mothers: Japanese Picture Brides in Early Twentieth-Century British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 105–6 (1995): 107; Anne Doré, “Transnational

To this end, many Nikkei acquired land that was difficult to clear, unattractive to white settlers, and available through affordable tax sales.²⁴ That is, the lands that Nikkei converted into property were ones that more privileged settlers with greater options did not desire. Nikkei in Bradner diversified their farms by planting a variety of crops, including a great number of daffodil bulbs, which, after significant initial investments, proved especially profitable.²⁵ Through bulb growing, Nikkei settlers connected with white daffodil farmers whose Bradner Bulb Growers' Association imported and exported bulbs.²⁶ Where farming was one way of participating in the capitalist settler property regime, daffodil farming was a particularly specialized way of doing so.

Access to this regime for Nikkei settlers ended in 1942. Fraser Valley politicians and farmers shared the provincewide anti-Japanese feelings stimulated by war.²⁷ Citing the seizure of Nikkei fishing licences and vessels, the self-proclaimed "White Farmers of the District of the Fraser Valley" petitioned for a permanent ban on Nikkei land ownership. Employing common racist rationales, their petition referenced the large size and "low standard of living" of Nikkei families and argued that many Japanese fishermen whose boats had been confiscated by the government would turn to agriculture and bring competition to white farmers.²⁸ Although this petition was not entirely responsible, the white farmers of the Fraser Valley got their wish in 1943. Under Order-in-Council P.C. 469, the federal government authorized the Office of the Custodian

Communities: Japanese Canadians of the Fraser Valley, 1904–1942," *BC Studies* 134 (2002): 44–45. On Meiji property, see Kobayashi, 53–66. And, on Japanese settler colonialism, see Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*; and Lu, *Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism*.

²⁴ Doré, "Transnational Communities," 45. See Ivan T. Barnet, District Superintendent for the Veterans' Land Act, to Gordon Murchison, Director of the Veterans' Land Act, 3 November 1947, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 5, Japanese and Their Farm Properties, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

²⁵ Doré, "Transnational Communities," 46; "... And There's Money," *ASMN*, 6 October 1937, 1; Tamako Miki interview, Surrey, BC, 1991, Japanese Canadian Archives Oral History collection, translation by Ren Ito, NNM 1994-74-107, Nikkei National Museum; and Kogiro Imamura interview, Japanese Canadian Archives Oral History collection, NNM 1994-74-149, Nikkei National Museum.

²⁶ On the expense of greenhouses, for example, see vol. 403, file V-8-10, pts. 1–6, RG 38-E-4, LAC. Other organizations, such as the Pacific Co-operative Union in Mission and the Maple Ridge Co-operative Exchange, also included both Nikkei and white farmers as members. See, for example, Michiko Midge Ayukawa, "Yasutaro Yamaga: Fraser Valley Berry Farmer, Community Leader, and Strategist," in *Nikkei in the Pacific Northwest: Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Louis Fiset and Gail M. Nomura (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 71–94.

²⁷ "Land Sales, Rentals to Japs Banned," *ASMN*, 4 March 1942, 1; "Geo. Cruickshank Describes Efforts of BC Members to Convince Ottawa on Necessity of Ousting Japanese," *ASMN*, 11 March 1942; "BC Member Fights for Exclusion of Japanese," *ASMN*, 7 July 1943.

²⁸ "Petition re Japanese," vol. 2798, file 778-B-1-40, pt. 2, Treatment of Japanese – Proposals, RG 25, LAC. See also *ASMN*, 14 January 1942.

of Enemy Property (hereafter Custodian), which was responsible for protecting property, to sell all Nikkei property in British Columbia, including the four daffodil farms.²⁹ Though the Custodian claimed these sales benefitted Nikkei families by preserving their property from economic deterioration, the government's policy aimed to consolidate white possession. As I show in turn below, government officials – with the support of white settlers – used the imposition of property definitions, valuation, and boundaries to dispossess Nikkei daffodil farmers and to affirm Bradner as white settler property. These settler colonial practices were no less powerful for the inconsistent rationales and myriad betrayals that they entailed.

REAL ESTATE OR CHATTELS? DEFINING AND REDEFINING DAFFODILS

In 1931, the Yamadas settled on about forty-five acres (eighteen hectares) and, over the next decade, cleared “about 20 acres ... mostly by hard labour,” and raised a family.³⁰ In 1942, they had about two acres (nearly one hectare) of daffodil bulbs. Fenwick Fatkin – who advised the government on bulb properties during the dispossession – called the Yamada farm “one of the show places around Bradner.”³¹ His recognition, however, made little difference when officials evaluated it. Government agents categorized property in haphazard and contradictory ways, especially when it came to daffodil farms. In bending property's definitions, the federal government ultimately furthered the project of white possession.

Though the dispossession became federal policy in 1943, property losses began in 1942. Anticipating removal, many Nikkei property owners arranged hasty sales and leases with neighbours. Kikuye Imamura Yamada, for example, signed a lease with John Dospital on 15 April 1942, just two weeks before her forced uprooting; the government had already shipped her husband, Shintaro, to a work camp.³² She was also forced to register her family's property with the Custodian in April 1942 but

²⁹ Notably, the office's name, the Custodian of Enemy Property, is misleading. Most Nikkei settlers were British subjects during this period and their children were Canadian born. For a perspective on urban sales, see Jordan Stanger-Ross and Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, “Suspect Properties: The Vancouver Origins of the Forced Sale of Japanese-Canadian-Owned Property, WWII,” *Journal of Planning History* 15, no. 4 (2016): 271–89.

³⁰ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 7, vol. 6, RG 33-69, LAC.

³¹ Fenwick Fatkin testimony, 1 February 1949, file, general evidence, 1–4 February 1949, 1552, vol. 77, RG 33-69, LAC.

³² Indenture between Kikuye Yamada and John Dospital, 15 April 1942, file 14041, Yamada, Shintaro, microfilm reel C-9426, RG 117 (Office of the Custodian of Enemy Property Funds),

was “not given any opportunity to read the JP [Japanese Property] form before being asked to sign it.” The Custodian’s agents acted as expert authorities, collecting information about real estate and chattels and instructing Nikkei property owners to record possessions left behind lest they later claim more than they possessed. That government officials described the Yamadas’ property as accurately defined yet refused Kikuye Imamura Yamada’s request to provide a “detailed inventory of all items” because it was “too much trouble to type” exemplifies the contradictions within the process.³³

Such contradictions were especially present when categorizing daffodils as either real estate or chattel property.³⁴ In general, the Custodian arranged separate sales of real estate and chattels, with the latter being sold through public auction. Officials overlooked the unusual case of daffodil bulbs. Unlike items such as strawberry plants and buildings that were sold as part of the land, bulbs were simultaneously landed and moveable. After blooming, bulbs could be left in the ground, but they could also be uprooted, treated, and then either sold or replanted (see Figure 3).

Nikkei farmers confronted the inconsistencies in the government’s shifting definitions. In 1943, Isamu and Tsunako Yamamoto, who were interned in Oyama in the Okanagan Valley, wrote to the Custodian to express their “dire need” of funds.³⁵ Unaware that the Custodian had sold their property to the Veterans’ Land Administration (VLA) in June 1943, Isamu wrote in September: “I would like to obtain permission to draw the daffodils here [Oyama], from my farm at Mt. Lehman [adjacent to Bradner], for we must have it to keep the family going.”³⁶ Clearly, the Yamamotos considered bulbs to be moveable property. Two weeks later he wrote again to refuse the sale of his property and to ask the Custodian “if you could get my daffodils and tulips from Mt. Lehman here, Oyama.”³⁷ Given the Custodian’s obligation to Nikkei property owners, the office did ask the VLA if the bulbs could be collected. The VLA’s legal advisor, however, contended that bulbs were not “being treated as chattels and

LAC; information from RCMP for Yamada (Kikuye) Mrs. Shintaro, 6 August 1943, file 4526, Yamada, Kikuye, microfilm reel C-9345, RG 117, LAC.

³³ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, vol. 6, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 17, RG 33-69, LAC.

³⁴ On the mismanagement of chattels specifically, see Findlay and Blomley, “(De)valuation,” 213-52.

³⁵ Isamu Yamamoto to R.D. Richardson (Farm Department, Custodian), 22 February 1943; T. Yamamoto to Custodian, 21 April 1943; Isamu Yamamoto to Custodian, 17 May 1943. All in file 13385, Yamamoto, Isamu T., microfilm reel C-9422, RG 117, LAC.

³⁶ Isamu Yamamoto to Custodian, 21 September 1943, file 13385, C-9422, RG 117, LAC.

³⁷ Isamu Yamamoto to Custodian, 5 October 1943, file 13385, C-9422, RG 117, LAC.



Figure 3. Bulb growers in Bradner dig daffodil bulbs for cleaning, sorting, and shipment, demonstrating the local contingencies of property definitions, ca. 1950. *Source:* The Reach P4706. Reproduced with the permission of The Reach (Abbotsford, BC) (2021).

[as] therefore removeable” because doing so would “open the door to a great number of applications” to retrieve property from former Nikkei farms.³⁸ Yamamoto’s request was denied.

Both the Custodian and VLA recognized that having bulbs on the properties, rather than shipping them to Nikkei families, might attract people interested in renting the farms until veterans could settle them.³⁹ For H.J. Konrad, who leased the Imamura property, the incentive worked: he sold Imamura’s bulbs and gave the government only 25 percent of the proceeds to transfer to the Imamuras. He later established himself as a bulb grower in Bradner.⁴⁰ When the Custodian and the VLA agreed to use chattels to incentivize tenants, they both agreed that the Custodian would retain “the right to enter on the land to dispose of the chattels in such a way as may be determined upon.”⁴¹ Yet, when Yamamoto asked for his bulbs, the Custodian deferred to the VLA’s claim that they were immovable.

Five years later, the Royal Commission on Japanese Claims (the Bird Commission) further exposed inconsistencies in assigning property categories.⁴² From 1947 to 1951, the commission heard claims from fifteen hundred Nikkei property owners for monetary losses.⁴³ The Custodian’s counsel argued that bulbs were chattels, not real property, a reversal from what the VLA had claimed in 1943. At his hearing in Kamloops on 10 May 1948, Kazuo Imamura challenged this position. He laid out the Custodian’s conflicting definitions: “It appears that the Custodian would now like to treat the bulbs as chattels, the bulbs having deteriorated after the sale of my land, however, he sold them as part of the land and I

³⁸ R.D. Richardson to A.G. Duncan Crux (legal advisor for Custodian), 15 October 1943, file 13385, C-9422, RG 117, LAC; A.G. Duncan Crux to F.G. Shears (Custodian), 20 October 1943, file 13385, C-9422, RG 117, LAC.

³⁹ For VLA and Custodian correspondence on the inclusion of chattels in leases, see vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 2, Japanese and Their Farm Properties, RG 38-E-4 (Veterans’ Land Act Fonds), LAC.

⁴⁰ A. Berner, Chief Inspector for the VLA, Memorandum re: Japanese Lands – Bulb Farms, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 4, Japanese and Their Farm Properties, RG 38-E-4, LAC. See also Harvey and Marjorie Konrad biography, in *Bradner Flower Show, 1928–1978*, pamphlet, box (events), file, Bradner Flower Show, 55, Reach Archives.

⁴¹ Ivan T. Barnet to Gordon Murchison, 26 June 1943, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 3, Japanese and Their Farm Properties, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

⁴² Bulb farms were treated as a special category. See Henry Irvine Bird, Memorandum of Sales of Farm Properties Developed for Bulb Production, 29 December 1949, vol. 2818, file 55908, pt. 7, Japanese Property Claims Commission, RG 117, LAC.

⁴³ On the commission’s limitations, see Roy Miki, *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian Call for Justice* (Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2004), especially chap. 5; Kaitlin Findlay, “The Bird Commission, Japanese Canadians, and the Challenge of Reparations in the Wake of State Violence” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2017).

claim they added to the value of the land at the date of sale.⁴⁴ Imamura underscored how redefining the bulbs as chattels reduced the value of the land at the time of the sale. Kikuye Imamura Yamada echoed her brother's argument. She stressed that "the Custodian sold the land with the bulbs in the ground and treated them in the same category as strawberries and other fruit plants. The fact that he subsequently dug up the [then deteriorated] bulbs and sold them and credited the sale price of \$225.00 to our account does not make the bulbs chattels."⁴⁵

The shifting definitions of bulbs as property or chattels resulted in glaring policy contradictions: the VLA and Custodian refused to send Yamamoto his daffodils because they were landed property only to claim subsequently that "the bulbs were of the nature of chattels."⁴⁶ These manipulations benefitted locals such as Konrad, who sold Nikkei-owned bulbs for profit. Such unstable definitions reveal how and for whom private property's dubious categorizations worked on the ground.

CONTESTED VALUES: RACIALIZING AND DEVALUING NIKKEI BULB FARMS

Like defining property, establishing property values was both crucial and contested during the dispossession. Valuations gave the state a foundation to claim due process and laid the groundwork for the forced sales. Prior to the 1943 dispossession order and the sale of farmlands to the Veterans' Land Administration in 1942, Order-in-Council P.C. 5523 authorized the VLA to oversee and conduct appraisals of Nikkei farms. In 1942, the VLA was officially only a property manager, not a potential buyer. Unofficially, the VLA used the appraisal process to put itself in a favourable position to purchase the farmlands.⁴⁷ Using colonial practices like mapmaking, government agents claimed that their valuations were rational. They gave white labour and improvements to land the highest value during the process, reinforcing property as a racialized commodity shaped by settler colonial capitalism and the goal of white possession.

⁴⁴ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, vol. 6, file 102, Imamura, Kazuo, 7-8, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁴⁵ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, vol. 6, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 9-10, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁴⁶ Ian Macpherson, Real Property Summary for Masao Miki - History of Administration, 7 May 1946, file 4524, Miki, Masao Miki, C-9345, 2, RG 117, LAC.

⁴⁷ Gordon Murchison, Director of Soldier Settlement, to Arthur MacNamara, Deputy Minister of Labour, 3 December 1943, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 2, Japanese and Their Farm Properties, RG 38-E-4, LAC. See also, Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism: The Uprooting of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War* (Toronto: J. Lorimer, 1981), especially chap. 5.

In the spring and summer of 1942, VLA appraisers visited Nikkei farms to record holdings, draw maps, and determine, in their view, fair property values. Ivan T. Barnet, the district superintendent of the Soldier Settlement Board and appraisal supervisor, described the VLA's work as an "accurate record, as far as possible."⁴⁸ Privately, however, he enthusiastically advocated dispossession, incarceration, and deportation projects. He circulated rumours that Nikkei farmers used poultry buildings for fifth column activities and expressed the settler colonial desire to make British Columbia "a white man's country."⁴⁹ Such fictions undergirded the valuation project.

Appraisals relied on fictions as well as experience. VLA appraiser B.C. Wormworth, who had previously surveyed land on the Saddle Lake and Frog Lake Indian Reserves in Treaty 6 territory for non-Indigenous settlement, surveyed three of the daffodil farms.⁵⁰ His expertise belonged to a genealogy of settler property-making and Indigenous dispossession, where making land legible to settlers laid the groundwork for colonization.⁵¹ In drawing their maps, the VLA surveyors also obscured the grounded realities of Bradner's farms.⁵² In one instance, appraisers visited daffodil farms in summer 1942 when flowers were no longer in bloom; farmers had either left the bulbs to naturalize (regenerate) or had not yet uprooted them for treatment against infestation. As a result, the appraisers B.C. Wormworth and G.T. McKay ignored hundreds of thousands of bulbs on the Imamura, Yamada, Yamamoto, and Miki properties. McKay's map of Miki's property missed almost 300,000 bulbs entirely (see Figure 4).

With the revocation of P.C. 5523 in 1943, the VLA was legally able to purchase Nikkei farmlands from the Custodian, even if its own appraisals – the same ones that overlooked bulbs – formed the basis of the sale price. Even before the sale's finalization in June 1943, Gordon Murchison,

⁴⁸ Ivan T. Barnet, District Superintendent of Soldier Settlement, to Gordon Murchison, 11 August 1942, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 1, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

⁴⁹ Barnet to Murchison, 2 June 1942, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 1, RG 38-E-4, LAC; Barnet to Murchison, 27 August 1942, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 1, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

⁵⁰ B.C. Wormworth résumé of experience in General Brief for Crown Counsel, vol. 2472, file 55908, pt. 14, Japanese Property Claims Commission, RG 117, LAC.

⁵¹ On legibility, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like the State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁵² On mapping and surveying as colonial technologies, see Cole Harris, "How Did Colonialism Dispospossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 1 (2004): 175; and Blomley, "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence," 126–29. See also Barnet to Murchison, 2 June 1942; Barnet to Murchison, 10 June 1942. Both in vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 1, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

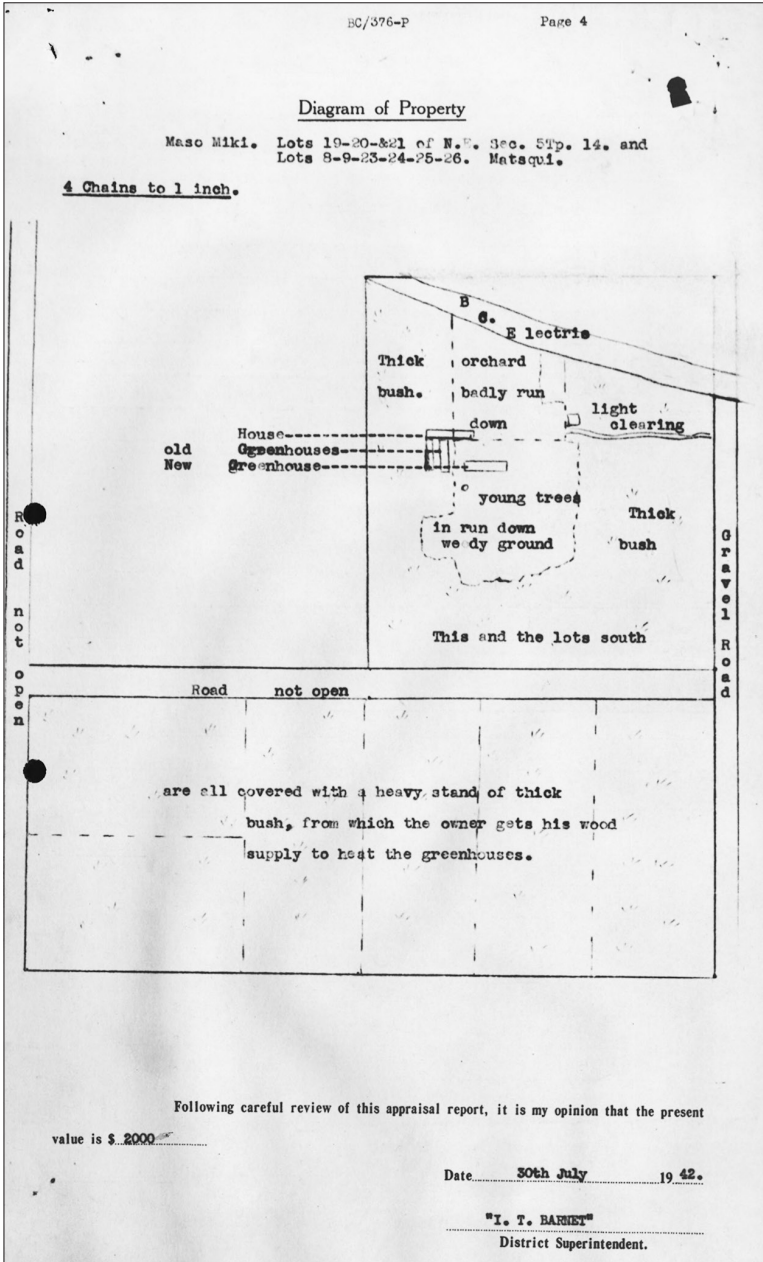


Figure 4. VLA appraiser G.T. McKay ignored bulbs in the ground when appraising the Miki property. Diagram of Property for Masao Miki in the Farm Appraisal Report of G.T. McKay, 14 June 1942. Copyright Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2021). Source: Library and Archives Canada/Royal Commission to Investigate Complaints of Canadian Citizens of Japanese Origin who Resided in British Columbia in 1941, That Their Real and Personal Property had been Disposed of by the Custodian of Enemy Property at Prices Less than the Fair Market Value fonds/case file #840.

director of the VLA, acknowledged the conflict of interest.⁵³ Later, in internal correspondence, he admitted that appraisers had ignored bulbs and had “little idea” of their “variety, type, or value.” Anticipating criticism, he suggested that the VLA backtrack and treat the bulbs as chattels, which would make them the Custodian’s responsibility. Or, he suggested, the VLA could lie and claim that appraisers did value the bulbs adequately.⁵⁴ Murchison was right to brace for backlash. Shortly after this correspondence, Fatkin complained to the Custodian of the “inexperience” of “all connected with the disposition” of farms and how their failure to account for and effectively deal with bulbs in the ground caused bulb deterioration and affected valuations.⁵⁵ Nikkei farmers also protested the VLA’s calculations.⁵⁶ At the Bird Commission, Kikuye Imamura Yamada argued that “the appraiser barely mention[ed]” some of her family’s 200,000 to 250,000 bulbs, which were “a very valuable addition to the premises.”⁵⁷ The VLA’s partial valuations meant that Nikkei families received minimal or no compensation for their bulbs, some of their most lucrative crops.

Ignorance and deliberate oversight formed valuations, but the intention to replace Nikkei settlers with white soldier-settlers also influenced values. At its core, the VLA pursued properties “suitable” for enabling soldiers to become “productive,” excluding ones that were either of “a very low grade type [or too] highly improved.”⁵⁸ In his remarks on Miki’s farm, McKay justified his devaluation by noting that the home could “hardly be classed as fit for white habitation.”⁵⁹ Appraisers generally considered homes built for large families to be unsuitable for veterans’ families and, thus, less valuable.⁶⁰ Barnet considered the greenhouses used

⁵³ Murchison to G.T. McKay, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 2, Japanese and Their Farm Properties, 28 January 1943, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

⁵⁴ Murchison to Barnet, 18 July 1944, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 4, Japanese and Their Farm Properties, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

⁵⁵ Report on the Bulb Situation on the I.T. Yamamoto, Miki, Yamada, and Imamura Farms situated in Bradner & Rand, BC, 14 September 1944 (original), vol. 6, file 102, Imamura, Kazuo, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁵⁶ Proceedings at Hearing, 15 April 1948, vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, 6, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁵⁷ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, vol. 6, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 8, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁵⁸ Murchison to Barnet, 24 March 1943, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 3, RG 38-E-4, LAC. See also Richard Harris and Tricia Shulist, “Canada’s Reluctant Housing Program: The Veterans’ Land Act, 1942–75,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2001): 253–82. The concern with “suitable” properties also stemmed from the poorly executed veterans’ settlement program after the First World War.

⁵⁹ G.T. McKay, Farm Appraisal Report for Masao Miki, 14 June 1942, vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, 3, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁶⁰ See Barnet to Murchison, 27 August 1942; and Barnet to Murchison, 2 June 1942. Both in vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 1, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

for forcing bulbs (see Figures 5 and 6) to be particular liabilities because “the average white man could not work in them standing up straight,” and Nikkei farmers had constructed them “in the most laborious way.”⁶¹ In the government’s view, intensive bulb and greenhouse farms were especially “hazardous in the hands of anyone not an expert in specialized operations,” and veterans were not experts.⁶²

In sum, the scope of VLA valuations was shaped by the twinned goals of the establishment of white property ownership and the racialization of Nikkei labour and property.⁶³ Contrary to ideals of improvement and productivity that underlay British Columbia’s settler colonial society, Nikkei expertise and labour were used to rationalize low valuations.⁶⁴ Thus settler colonialism entailed convoluted racializations: it held Indigenous Peoples as incapable of land improvement and thus ineligible to own property at the same time as it deemed Nikkei settlers overly productive. Both forms of racialization furthered the implementation of a white property regime. They were not unique to British Columbia but, rather, are reflective of the broader racial workings of settler colonial capitalism that frame Asian labour as a foreign economic threat and white settler labour as just and natural.⁶⁵

Ultimately, the VLA purchased the Miki and Imamura farms as part of a package deal for Fraser Valley farmlands at a price about 2 percent less than the VLA’s appraisal value in 1942. Though Barnet doubted the value of Nikkei greenhouses in 1942, a year later he posited that, if unsuitable for soldier settlements, the VLA could sell them “without a great deal of trouble on the open market.”⁶⁶ In other words, low valued properties created profit opportunities for the government. Later, the Bird Commission determined that these valuations were fair despite the VLA’s benefitting from its low appraisals. Bird recognized that greenhouses were in “tremendous demand” in 1942 and 1943 but concluded that a shortage of specialized labour to operate them decreased their market

⁶¹ Barnet to Murchison, 22 September 1942, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 2, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

⁶² Murchison to T.A. Crerar, Minister of Mines and Resources, Memorandum on Japanese Lands, 16 September 1942, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 2, RG 38-E-4, LAC; H. Allam, District Superintendent of Soldier Settlement and VLA to T.J. Rutherford, Director of Soldier Settlement and VLA, 20 July 1949, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 5, RG 38-E-4, LAC.

⁶³ See Audrey Kobayashi and Peter Jackson, “Japanese Canadians and the Racialization of Labour in the British Columbia Sawmill Industry,” *BC Studies* 103 (1994): 33–58.

⁶⁴ See Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 34–35.

⁶⁵ Day, *Alien Capital*, 9.

⁶⁶ Barnet to Murchison, 8 April 1943, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 3, RG 38-E-4, LAC.



Figure 5. The Imamuras' greenhouse full of daffodils, ca. 1941. VLA appraisers applied racial logics to their valuations of Nikkei bulb farms and greenhouses. In this case, bulb grower Fenwick Fatkin had assisted Imamura in construction. Copyright Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2021). *Source:* Library and Archives Canada/ Royal Commission to Investigate Complaints of Canadian Citizens of Japanese Origin who Resided in British Columbia in 1941, That Their Real and Personal Property had been Disposed of by the Custodian of Enemy Property at Prices Less than the Fair Market Value fonds/case file #102.



Figure 6. The Mikis' "newest greenhouse," shown here with substantial damage, ca. 1947. Copyright Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2021). *Source:* Library and Archives Canada/Royal Commission to Investigate Complaints of Canadian Citizens of Japanese Origin who Resided in British Columbia in 1941, That Their Real and Personal Property had been Disposed of by the Custodian of Enemy Property at Prices Less than the Fair Market Value fonds/case file #840.

value. This shortage, of course, resulted from the forced removal of Nikkei families.⁶⁷

As officials devalued Nikkei farms on the premise that soldier-settlers could not make them productive, the local bulb-growing community was more optimistic about its future. With European bulbs cut off by the war, Bradner became a central supplier in Canada. The *Abbotsford, Sumas and Matsqui News* reported the daffodil growers' successes in 1942 and commended the "pioneers" who had built a "promising new industry" on "land wrested from giant stumps."⁶⁸ On the same page, it reported a resolution of the Associated Boards of Trade of the Fraser Valley that "All Jap Farms Be Taken Over by Custodian and Action to Save Crops." The paper neglected to mention that, the farms of four Nikkei, who

⁶⁷ Fenwick Fatkin testimony, vol. 77, file, general evidence, 1–4 February 1949, 1525, RG 33-69, LAC; Henry Irvine Bird, Claims relating to Farms Developed for Greenhouse Production, 15 December 1949, vol. 2818, file 55908, pt. 7, Japanese Property Claims Commission, RG 117, LAC.

⁶⁸ "Matsqui Farm Industry Gains Stature," *ASMN*, 1 April 1942, 1. And, more generally, "Farmlands Value Increase in BC," *ASMN*, 11 March 1942.



Figure 7. Robin Fatkin, Pete Vander Zalm, Nick Vander Zalm, and others loading bulbs for shipment, ca. 1947. Dutch settlers began entering the Bradner bulb industry during the internment and dispossession. *Source:* The Reach P3598. Reproduced with the permission of The Reach (Abbotsford, BC) (2021).

belonged to Matsqui’s “promising new industry,” were among those that Board members, including Fatkin, urged the Custodian to take over.⁶⁹

Further evidence of a lucrative future for bulb growing came in the spring of 1943. While the Custodian finalized the sale of Nikkei farms to the VLA, Dutch horticulturalist William Vander Zalm Sr., the father of a future premier, brought 1.5 million new bulbs to Bradner – half a million to sell to local farmers and 1 million to plant himself on land he leased from locals (see Figure 7).⁷⁰ The local community embraced Dutch settlers who arrived during and after the war and supported visa extensions due to their “invaluable” expertise in bulb exporting.⁷¹ These “Dutch men” were so “anxious” to get bulbs to eastern markets and plant bulb farms that, according to Fatkin, “every possible machine they could get was brought in to get land cleared and have bulbs planted”

⁶⁹ “Urge All Jap Farms Be Taken Over by Custodian and Action to Save Crops,” *ASMN*, 1 April 1942, 1.

⁷⁰ “1,500,000 More Bulbs for Bradner District Planting This Year,” *ASMN*, 31 March 1943, cited in *Bradner Flower Show, 1928–1978* pamphlet, box (events), file, Bradner Flower Show, 13, Reach Archives. See also Alan Twigg, *Vander Zalm: From Immigrant to Premier* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1986).

⁷¹ Jay W. Scofield, Secretary of Bradner Bulb Growers’ Association, to Department of Immigration, 9 July 1946, reproduced in *Bradner Flower Show, 1928–1978*, pamphlet, box (events), file, Bradner Flower Show, 60, Reach Archives. See also biographies of Dutch bulb growers in *Bradner Flower Show, 1928–1978* pamphlet, 51–63.

and “nobody wanted to sell” their property.⁷² In short, the presence of Dutch immigrants with specialized knowledge of bulb farming in the Fraser Valley in 1943 disproves the state’s claim that Nikkei bulb farms lacked value due to the absence of farmers who could take them over. Neither the VLA nor the Bird Commission recognized the burgeoning value of the daffodil business in appraising the farms or in calculating compensation for the Imamuras, Yamadas, Yamamotos, and Mikis.

The devaluation of Nikkei property across the province enabled the VLA to purchase hundreds of farms at minimal cost and to carry out a postwar settlement scheme that prioritized white settlers.⁷³ The settler state argued the devaluation was fair, that it operated within the law and hired expert appraisers. These claims strain credibility when we see how government actors struggled to value, let alone identify, thousands of bulbs. Appraisers devalued Nikkei daffodil farms because the properties were too improved and too productive, a seeming paradox that mirrors broader narratives of anti-Asian racism within settler colonial capitalism. Moreover, officials suggested bulb properties held little value for returning veterans, despite the industry’s established promise for white settlers, already apparent in 1942. During the dispossession, the valuation process for daffodil farms was riddled with lies and contradictions that worked to guarantee white settlement.

CROSSING AND MANAGING BOUNDARIES: DAFFODILS AMONG NEIGHBOURS

If definitions and values formed the dispossession, managing and interpreting property boundaries also shaped the process. Rather than strict demarcations of private from public, boundaries of Nikkei daffodil farms were negotiated and disturbed by the Custodian, ordinary people, and the daffodils themselves. Government agents, white settlers, and Nikkei farmers defined, defended, and crossed property boundaries, claiming authority over Matsqui land by both wielding and skirting the logics of liberal settler property rights. In the end, the actions of the federal government and white neighbours secured and reinforced settler

⁷² Fenwick Fatkin testimony, vol. 77, file, general evidence, 1–4 February 1949, 1520, 1536, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁷³ Soldier settlement after the Second World War did not include Nikkei veterans. See, Oikawa, *Cartographies of Violence: Japanese Canadian Women, Memory, and the Subjects of the Internment* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 107. See also Peter Neary, “Zennosuke Inouye’s Land: A Canadian Veterans Affairs Dilemma,” *Canadian Historical Review* 85, no. 3 (2004): 423–50.

property's legitimacy on Indigenous territory and privileged white possession.⁷⁴

Though maps and the notion of private property suggested otherwise, the Custodian faced the reality that property's boundaries were not secure or stable but, rather, complex "sites of interaction."⁷⁵ Physically, they were porous, and without farmers present, Nikkei properties were especially vulnerable to incursion. The Custodian corresponded with keen buyers, like H.G. Lamming in Cloverdale, Langley Greenhouse Limited, and and scientists from the federal government's Saanichton Experimental farm, who sought to purchase bulbs and often visited the Bradner farms.⁷⁶ In other cases, the Custodian's negligence enabled the explicit theft of chattels from Nikkei properties; on the Yamada farm, the Custodian listed new and unused bulb-drying boxes simply as "lost," suggesting they were either discarded or stolen.⁷⁷ These legal and extralegal boundary crossings were common and benefitted white settlers.⁷⁸

White settlers were central actors in the dispossession in other ways as well. In general, daffodil farming was a collective enterprise, and the Custodian engaged frequently with white growers concerned with the management and disposal of the Nikkei farms.⁷⁹ At the time of their

⁷⁴ Blomley, "Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence," 131–32. One physical way the federal government controlled these boundaries was through the subdivision of Nikkei farms in the Fraser Valley, making their properties more "suitable" for white settlers. See Assessment and Collector's Rolls, 1943–1971, Reach Archives. Notably, most lots owned by Imamura, Yamada, Yamamoto, and Miki were not officially settled by white settlers or soldier-settlers until the 1950s and 1960s. The VLA was owner and rented to tenants during this period.

⁷⁵ Nicholas Blomley, "The Boundaries of Property: Complexity, Relationality, and Spatiality," *Law and Society Review* 50, no. 1 (2016): 245.

⁷⁶ H.G. Lamming to W.E. Anderson (Custodian), 24 April 1945, file 13930, Imamura, Kazuo, C-9425, RG 117 LAC; Memorandum re: bulbs on property of S. Yamada, W.E. Anderson to F.G. Shears (Custodian), 2 October 1944, file 14041, Yamada, Shintaro, C-9426, RG 117, LAC; Barnet to J.J. Woods, Superintendent at Experimental Station, Saanichton, BC, 15 January 1945, file 4524, Miki, Masao, C-9345, RG 117, LAC.

⁷⁷ Findlay and Blomley, "(De)valuation," 227–28; Inventory of Chattels, file 14041, Yamada, Shintaro, C-9426, RG 117, LAC.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of unaccounted-for property, see Personal Property Summary, file 13930, Imamura, Kazuo, C-9425, RG 117, LAC.

⁷⁹ See Fenwick Fatkin testimony, vol. 77, file, general evidence, 1–4 February 1949, especially 159, RG 33-69, LAC; Memorandum re Japanese Lands, Murchison to Crerar, 27 November 1942, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 2, RG 38-E-4, LAC; and Fatkin's Report on the Bulb Situation, 14 September 1944 (original), vol. 6, file 102, Imamura, Kazuo, RG 33-69, LAC. In general, farming co-operatives and other collective organizations presented administrative challenges during the dispossession, even those without white ownership. Nikkei agricultural collectives (Nokai), such as the Yamato Nokai in Bradner, had twenty shareholders, including the Imamuras, Mikis, Yamadas, and Yamamotos, who had either died, been exiled to Japan, or dispersed across Canada when the Custodian attempted to disburse funds from the sale of the Nokai's shared property. See the Members of the Yamato Nokai, the Berry Growers Association,

uprooting, three Nikkei members used links through the Bradner Bulb Growers' Association in an effort to protect their property.⁸⁰ Kazuo Imamura granted Fenwick Fatkin power of attorney over his property, and Kikuye Imamura Yamada and Masao Miki arranged leases with John Dospital and Beryl Underhill, respectively.⁸¹ As a result, white farmers and tenants became unofficial informants for the Custodian.

Mennonite settler and tenant John Retzlaff was among the "foreign elements" the VLA sought to exclude from settlement, but he, too, influenced the dispossession.⁸² After renting the Yamamoto property, he complained to the Custodian that the Yamamotos had misrepresented the farm's crops. Responding to the accusation, the Yamamotos dissented and wrote the Custodian:

We hoped it would be good news, but was worse than bad news, for it was more shocking than anything else. When we leased the farm, we gave what we knew was the minimum acreage. Therefore we do not believe that there was a difference of 1.63 acres. We would like to know *when* and *who* measured our farm.⁸³

The Yamamotos highlighted Retzlaff's betrayal, noting how he had earlier agreed that "there was *at least 6.5 acres*" in berries. Recognizing opportunism in the claim's timing, Isamu wondered "why you [the Custodian] are informing us *now*, after *two* crops are finished ... *This we can not understand*."⁸⁴ The Custodian ignored the Yamamotos' rebuttal and, using funds from their account, granted Retzlaff a refund for the alleged discrepancy. It was berries, not bulbs, that were at issue, yet this

District of Mt. Lehman, Dennison and Bradner, BC; Yamada to Anderson, Custodian, 16 December 1946, file 14041, Yamada, Shintaro, C-9426, RG 117, LAC. On Nokai in the Fraser Valley, see Doré "Transnational Communities"; and John Mark Read, "The Pre-War Japanese Canadians of Maple Ridge: Landownership and the *Ken Tie*" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1975).

⁸⁰ Notably, Yamamoto did not belong to the association.

⁸¹ See vol. 6, file 102, Imamura, Kazuo, RG 33-69, LAC; vol. 6, file 99; Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), RG 33-69, LAC; and vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁸² For VLA remarks on Mennonites, see Barnet to Murchison, 26 June 1943, 28 March 1943, vol. 403, file V-8-10, pt. 3, RG 38-E-4, LAC. Locals were also skeptical of Mennonites occupying Nikkei farms. See "Additional Mennonites Protested," *ASMN*, 22 April 1942, 1. For more on wartime animosity towards both Nikkei and Mennonite settlers, see Scott Sheffield and Kelsey Siemens, "'Enemy Aliens' and 'Conchies': Perceptions of the 'Un-British' in the Fraser Valley, 1939-45," *BC Studies* 209 (2021): 81-154.

⁸³ Mr. and Mrs. Isamu Yamamoto to Custodian, 16 July 1943, file 13385, Yamamoto, Isamu T., C-9422, RG 117, LAC.

⁸⁴ Isamu T. Yamamoto to Custodian, 25 July 1943, file 13385, Yamamoto, Isamu T., C-9422, RG 117, LAC.

conflict demonstrates how tenants affected Nikkei lives by contesting and perhaps skewing boundaries, even those around specific crops.⁸⁵

At sites of conflict, the Custodian usually privileged the authority of white settlers, but at times, this authority was challenged. In April 1942, Kikuye Yamada arranged for bulb grower and neighbour John Dospital to protect her family's property and "attend to all the business pertaining to the berries and bulbs on the farm."⁸⁶ But in October 1944, the Custodian sold the Yamadas' severely damaged bulbs for just \$225 to H.G. Lamming, when, according to Yamada and Fenwick Fatkin, the bulbs were "worth at least \$3000.00" prior to their deterioration.⁸⁷ Testifying at the Bird Commission about this discrepancy, Dospital claimed that Shintaro Yamada's many years of carelessness, rather than mishandling on his part, caused the bulbs' damage.⁸⁸ Supported by Dospital's allegations, the government's counsel interrogated the Yamadas about their bulb treatment, but the family remained resolute that they tended to the bulbs "right to the very last day [Kikuye] was on the premises."⁸⁹ Citing their labour, expertise, and the farm's boundaries, both physical and metaphorical, the Yamadas asserted that Dospital could not have known how they had treated the bulbs.⁹⁰ In the end, they received \$2,500 in compensation.⁹¹ The Yamadas effectively challenged the Custodian's and Dospital's arguments by insisting that their property was indeed private.

For the Mikis, however, white settlers and the property logics they employed undermined their claims. On 13 April 1942, a week before his incarceration, Masao Miki arranged a lease with Beryl Underhill to care for his family's property, prevent trespassers, and ensure "that no Bulbs

⁸⁵ In spite of state claims that bulbs could not be removed, Retzlaff claimed he sent two bags to Yamamoto. The majority of bulbs, however, were left in the ground to deteriorate on the property and could not be salvaged. See Report on the Bulb Situation, 14 September 1944 (original), vol. 6, file 102, Imamura, Kazuo, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁸⁶ Indenture between Kikuye Yamada (Mrs. Shintaro) and John Dospital, 15 April 1942, file 14041, Yamada, Shintaro, C-9426, RG 117, LAC. Within two months of making the agreement, a VLA appraiser noted that Dospital had expressed an interest in acquiring the property.

⁸⁷ B.C. Wormworth, Farm Appraisal Report for Shintaro Yamada, 15 June 1942, vol. 6, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 3, RG 33-69, LAC; and Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, vol. 6, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 9, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁸⁸ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, vol. 6, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 26, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁸⁹ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, 26.

⁹⁰ Proceedings at Hearing, 10 May 1948, vol. 6, file 99, Yamada, Shintaro (Mrs.), 27, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁹¹ With the support of Fatkin's testimony, Commissioner Bird recommended compensation of \$2,500 for the approximately 200,000 bulbs not accounted for by the VLA appraisal. The Yamadas had claimed \$3,000. Commissioner H.I. Bird, Claim No. 99 – Mrs. Shintaro Yamada Summary, 20 December 1949, file 14041, Yamada, Shintaro, C-9426, RG 117, LAC.

must be dug and sold, but that the Bulbs must be left in the ground.”⁹² Like many Nikkei settlers, he expected to return to his property to tend to his farm. Writing in 1944 to the Custodian from a sugar beet farm in Manitoba, Miki protested the sale of the family’s property and made clear his intention to return: “*Please do not sell.*” He then outlined the fundamental contradictions of the government’s actions:

I advise you that you do not [*sic*] such violation for the racial prejudice, and hope not repented of your action taking now. Canada is the democratic country and also Christendom. It is evidently contrariety [*sic*] what you are doing now to the Canada’s principle. Please mind of our properties which we toiled for many years day by day.⁹³

Miki appealed to settler colonial narratives of rationality and improvement embedded in Canada’s property regime, especially in emphasizing his family’s labour on Matsqui land.⁹⁴

Despite Miki’s proactive efforts to safeguard his property during his family’s absence, he was unable to stall his dispossession. When his bulbs became, according to Fatkin, “very badly diseased” by fall of 1944, the agreement he arranged with Underhill became the target of a series of complaints.⁹⁵ By the summer of 1945, the Bradner Bulb Growers’ Association informed the Custodian of the “pests” from the 300,000 “dangerous” bulbs on Miki’s farm that had crossed the property’s boundaries and spread to “surrounding bulb farms.”⁹⁶ A frustrated Fatkin, stressing his expertise as a “life time bulb grower” and president of the association, told the Custodian that “the conditions regarding the bulbs on this farm are entirely the fault of the owner, Masao Miki, who resolutely refused to allow Miss Underhill to handle the bulbs, with the

⁹² Indenture between Masao Miki and Beryl Underhill of Bradner, 13 April 1942, vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁹³ Masao Miki to R.D. Richardson (Custodian), 23 March 1944, file 4524, Miki, Masao, C-9345, RG 117, LAC.

⁹⁴ There are several examples of Nikkei settlers appealing to settler colonial narratives such as *terra nullius* within protest letters. For an example from another Matsqui farmer, see Ishiguro et al., “Settler Colonialism and Japanese Canadian History,” 10–12. For more on the protest letters, see Jordan Stanger-Ross, Nicholas Blomley, and the Landscapes of Injustice Research Collective, “My Land Is Worth a Million Dollars: How Japanese Canadians Contested Their Dispossession in the 1940s,” *Law and History Review* 35, no. 3 (2017): 711–51.

⁹⁵ Report on the Bulb Situation, 14 September 1944 (original), vol. 6, file 102, Imamura, Kazuo RG 33-69, LAC.

⁹⁶ Fatkin to Custodian, 10 July 1945, vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, RG 33-69, LAC; W.E. Anderson (Farm Department, Custodian) to Scofield, 6 June 1945, vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, RG 33-69, LAC.

consequences as above.”⁹⁷ Association secretary Jay Scofield, calling the bulbs “a menace” to the industry, referred to the farm’s poor condition as “simply scandalous especially for [association] members living adjacent.”⁹⁸ Citing the agreement between Underhill and Miki, the Custodian refused to remove the bulbs, even though the office had dissolved similar lease arrangements.⁹⁹ Both the Custodian and the community blamed the infestation on Miki’s moral and agricultural failure.

Miki, however, continued to identify the dispossession’s contradictions. In a letter to the Custodian in 1947, he contested the “unreasonable price” for which his property, including the bulbs, was sold without his consent. As in 1944, he referred to his settler property rights and its assumed guarantees:

I am a Canadian. I got the naturalization paper in 1923 at Bradner, BC. I think it is unlawful that the Custodian or the government would act such compulsory sale on the Canadians’ property without understanding, and even though the forcing act had been proceeded in the war time, it should be returned to the owner or compensate fully for the total loss upon one’s property at the later date ... My old neighbours informed me a few weeks ago that those over 300,000 bulbs had almost been dug out and took away from this property.¹⁰⁰

Despite Miki’s efforts, the Bird Commission maintained that “the bulbs had depreciated to the point of being valueless, a condition created by the claimant’s failure to permit the bulbs to be properly cared for.” It rejected his claim and the family received no compensation on the grounds that it was Miki’s responsibility, even in Manitoba, to care for his bulbs by preparing a lease that could foresee his permanent removal.¹⁰¹

In the end, the boundaries that lined Nikkei properties were subject to the authority of the federal government and, to a lesser extent, white settlers. The Custodian determined where and when a boundary was significant: boundaries were important when disease spread, but less so when crossed by looters entering Nikkei farms. Autonomy over property

⁹⁷ Fatkin to Custodian, 10 July 1945, vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, RG 33-69, LAC; Report on the Bulb Situation, 14 September 1944 (original), vol. 6, file 102, Imamura, Kazuo, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁹⁸ Jay Scofield, Bradner Bulb Growers’ Association to the Custodian, 18 June 1945, vol. 42, file 840, Miki, Masao, RG 33-69, LAC.

⁹⁹ Commissioner H.I. Bird, Claim No. 840 – Masao Miki Summary, 29 December 1949, file 4524, Miki, Masao, C-9345, RG 117, LAC.

¹⁰⁰ Miki to Custodian, 23 January 1947, file 4524, Miki, Masao, C-9345, RG 117, LAC.

¹⁰¹ Commissioner H.I. Bird, Claim No. 840 – Masao Miki Summary, 29 December 1949, file 4524, Miki, Masao, C-9345, RG 117, LAC.

and property boundaries was precarious for the Imamuras, Mikis, Yamadas, and Yamamotos, no matter their investments in Canada's property regime. Boundaries, then, were more about the uneven relations of power than about stable borders that demarcated plots of private land. In this context, although Nikkei settlers worked with white settlers, their tenure was less secure than that of their white neighbours. That Fatkin planted a "real good stock of bulbs" on Imamura's property in anticipation of his return and that Beryl Underhill stood by the terms of her agreement with Miki does not change the imbalance of these relations.¹⁰² At the same time as Miki appealed unsuccessfully to his status as a productive settler, the government absolved Underhill of responsibility for the deterioration of Miki's bulbs. Dospital was not held to account for his unproven claims against Yamada. And Fatkin was a key broker in the dispossession. Though neighbours, tenants, and bulb growers in Bradner were not the architects of the dispossession policy, they were central in the process of making white settler property.¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

The 1940s marked a time of change for daffodil growers in Bradner. While British and Dutch bulb growers capitalized on wartime conditions, Nikkei farmers endured extensive state violence. The Imamuras, Yamadas, Yamamotos, and Mikis lost homes, belongings, daffodil bulbs, and, collectively, nearly two hundred acres (eighty-one hectares) of property.¹⁰⁴ The federal government's policy of dispossession removed Nikkei settlers from the properties they had struggled to acquire. Masao Miki named it a betrayal of "Canada's principle" – that settler property rights are sacrosanct and private property ownership is rational, fair, and justified.¹⁰⁵

The dispossession of Nikkei settlers was not an aberration in Canadian history. It was a familiar process of creating and securing property for white settlers out of Indigenous land by continuously disavowing non-white forms of ownership and place-making.¹⁰⁶ In 1940s Bradner, the

¹⁰² Fenwick Fatkin testimony, vol. 77, file general evidence, 1–4 February 1949, 1543, RG 33-69, LAC.

¹⁰³ I have written elsewhere on this dynamic in an urban context, Yakashiro, "Powell Street Is dead."

¹⁰⁴ Assessment and Collector's Rolls, 1943–1971, Reach Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Masao Miki to R.D. Richardson (Custodian), 23 March 1944, file 4524, Miki, Masao, C-9345, RG 117, LAC.

¹⁰⁶ For examples specific to Stó:lō peoples, see Keith Thor Carlson et al., "For We Are the Real Owners of the Land from Time Immemorial as God Create Us Indians in This Ter-

logics and practices that dispossessed Nikkei settlers further entrenched and legitimized the still-contested Matsqui dispossession. The federal government strategized to ensure that white tenants, bulb growers, and soldier-settlers would inherit Nikkei bulb farms. Appraisers unfamiliar with the region acted with the conviction that their valuations were fair. They calculated values of greenhouses and bulb farms based on their suitability for white settlement, a measure constructed from colonial racial logics that devalued Nikkei daffodil farms at a time when British and Dutch daffodil farmers in the valley flourished. The government treated white settlers as local experts whose perspectives and desires influenced the boundaries of possession and dispossession. When property boundaries were contested, the authority of whiteness won. In 1940s Bradner, and in a racial regime of property ownership, the contest was fixed.

The Imamuras, Yamadas, Yamamotos, and Mikis challenged the slippery logics and inconsistent actions of the government and its actors. The Imamuras and Yamamotos questioned the officials' contradictory definitions of daffodil bulbs as moveable or immovable property. The Yamadas opposed the VLA's massive oversight of daffodil bulbs. And the Mikis testified to the government's betrayals through the rationales of settler colonial property ownership in Canada. Even so, not long after Nikkei settlers were permitted to return to the BC coast in 1949, many reinvested in the property regime from which they had been expelled. Haruo Ichikawa, whose words opened this article, and other Nikkei families moved to Bradner to farm daffodils. The Imamuras and Yamamotos returned too. This return to property ownership after dispossession, one largely overlooked in the historiography on Japanese Canadians, reflects an enduring investment among Japanese Canadians in the idea and material offerings of property, as does the Nikkei community's calls for redress for property and other losses.¹⁰⁷ Though property ownership proved a fleeting promise in the 1940s, it continues to hold meaning for Nikkei settlers today.

Nikkei settlers like the families I focus on here used private property as a site of livelihood and activism, and they suffered greatly at their property's loss. These facts, however, should not prevent us from cri-

ritory: Historical Land Use, Territory, and Aboriginal Title of the Matsqui People," hearing order OH-001-2014, 26 May 2015, <https://apps.cer-rec.gc.ca/REGDOCS/Item/View/2785415>; Carlson, *Power of Place*; and Sabina Trimble, "Storying Swi:lhcha: Place Making and Power at a Stó:lo Landmark," *BC Studies* 190 (2016): 39–66. For a recent study within another context, see Brittany Luby, *Dammed: The Politics of Loss and Survival in Anishinaabe Territory* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ See Miki, *Redress*.

tiquing property's settler colonial foundations. The dispossession of Nikkei settlers reinforced a property regime built on white possession and Indigenous dispossession. While liberal multicultural settler society has in large part viewed access to private property among racialized settlers as a form of justice, Nikkei access to this justice remains predicated on Indigenous dispossession.¹⁰⁸ Two-party conversations about redress that carry on without the involvement of Indigenous People whose lands remain unceded further entrench the appearance of the white settler state as the proper arbiter of the property regime. The conditionality of Nikkei settler property rights and the multiple contradictions within the dispossession process should not lead us to the conclusion that this was merely an unfortunate episode in Canada's property history. It should remind us that this regime – in which white settler property is continuously reaffirmed on Indigenous territory – has cracks at its very foundation.

¹⁰⁸ On a similar critique of the liberatory potential and limitations of property in the US context, see Natsu Taylor Saito, "Race and Decolonization: Whiteness as Property in the American Settler Colonial Project," *Harvard Journal of Racial and Ethnic Justice* 31 (2015): 31–68.