This book stems from collaborative research undertaken by members of the AGREE (Aboriginal Government, Resources, Economy, and Environment) research program from 1991 to the present as well as by others who, in one way or another (e.g., through symposia, workshops, or informal consultation) became involved with our examination of common issues. In responding to the sometimes incremental, sometimes sudden, subordination and dispossession imposed by macro-political and economic orders, northern First Nations are compelled to negotiate “space” for themselves across a broad spectrum of territorial, institutional, and symbolic practices. While these interconnected aspects cannot easily – and indeed should not – be compartmentalized, they cluster around certain cultural priorities, political flashpoints, persistent conundrums, and hopes for transcendence and reconciliation. These have provided some direction for organizing the chapters of this book into five parts.

Part 1, Perspectives on the General Issues, offers an overview by the editor of the volume, followed by the ground-level insights of a prominent First Nations leader. Both chapters perceive inherent connections between political subordination, territorial dispossession, and suffering; and between re-entitlement, autonomy, and community healing.

Part 2, (Re)defining Territory, addresses the all-important issue of reinforcing authority over homelands and waters – an issue so basic to Aboriginal cultural and political identity, and a seemingly inarguable prerequisite for material improvement and autonomy. The chapters in this part address how Aboriginal collectivities seek to redefine the effects of “Crown” property, political boundaries, and the jurisdictional claims of the state; they also address how the strategic redefinition and hybridization of territorial forms reciprocally reshape Aboriginal conceptions and practice.

Part 3, Resource Management and Development Conflicts, follows quite logically from Part 2. Here the cut-and-thrust of renegotiating jurisdictional and property rights is explored across a representative range of contests
over natural resources and the institutional instances through which these issues are mediated – litigation, media campaigns, protest and direct action, scientific authority, environmental review, co-management, and claims negotiation. It is here that the political factors motivating the state and state-sponsored economic interests are cast in sharpest relief. From the composite of cases considered, there emerges a strong sense of the conditions and prospects for Aboriginal action with regard to structural change.

Part 4, Community, Identity, and Governance, expands the view of local development dynamics to emphasize how communities are coping with debilitating burdens of social dislocation and suffering through processes of relocation, social healing, and cultural renewal. It is this part that offers the most explicit views of the problem of constructing and maintaining community; of relations between women and men, young and old, those with a vision, and those who have lost heart; of the human effects of the chronic contradictions between indigenous and externally imposed orders.

Part 5, In Conclusion, considers the imperative of structural reform, and conditions for achieving it – reform that would reaffirm Aboriginal possession of homelands and waters, authentic political self-determination, and room for cultural self-definition. Particular attention is drawn to key recommendations of the recent Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, unwisely neglected by current federal and provincial governments.

AGREE co-investigators include professors in anthropology, geography, and law from McGill University (where AGREE is headquartered) as well as from several other universities in Quebec, elsewhere in Canada, and abroad. Numerous graduate students, both former and current, have contributed immensely to this research and are richly represented in this book.

The research program developed around a partnership with northern Aboriginal communities and leaderships to tackle priority problems in self-government and development. The original partners in this venture were the Grand Council of the Crees of Eeyou Istchee (GCCEI) (Eeyou Istchee meaning “people’s land”), Makivik Corporation for the northern Quebec Inuit, the Innu Nation of Labrador, and the Lubicon Cree First Nation in northern Alberta. Each of these organizations nominated a member to an advisory board for the AGREE research. We are grateful for the guidance and support provided in this capacity by Bill Namagoose (GCCEI), Robert Lanari (Makivik Corporation), Peter Penashue (Innu Nation), and Bernard Ominayak (Lubicon). Although the geographic focus of this book is northern Quebec and Labrador, Lubicon participation provided our discussions with an immensely valuable comparative dimension.

Several political, administrative, and scientific members of the aforementioned organizations, their constituent communities, and allied administrative entities advanced our collaboration with the partner organizations: Peter Armitage, Daniel Ashini, Abel Bosum, Robert Beaulieu, Lorraine
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Between 1992 and 1997, we organized several workshops to bring together researchers and Aboriginal partners. These included an initial planning workshop in the Department of Anthropology at McGill University in 1991, consultation between some of the researchers and Aboriginal partner representatives at the community of Little Buffalo (Lubicon) in 1992, a full team workshop at the community of Oujé-Bougoumou (Quebec Cree) in March 1994, and a thematic workshop (Negotiating Nationhood: An Intercultural Dialogue on Contemporary Native Issues) at McGill University in December 1996.

We also organized a series of team symposia at several professional academic meetings to share work-in-progress and exchange ideas: the Canadian Anthropology Society Meetings, Université de Montréal, May 1992; the First International Congress of Arctic Social Sciences, Université Laval, Quebec, October 1992; the Canadian Anthropology Society Meetings, York University, Toronto, May 1993; and the Learned Societies Meetings, Université du Québec à Montréal, May 1995. Smaller sub-sets of the team also presented together on the issues of this volume at the Learned Societies Meetings, Memorial University, St. John’s, June 1997; at the Seventh Conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property (IASCP), University of British Columbia, Vancouver, June 1998; at the Eighth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (CHAGS), National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, Japan, October 1998; and at the conference, In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Civil Society and the Environment, McMaster University, Hamilton, November 1998.

Regina Harrison and Jonathan Salsberg served as editors for the AGREE Discussion Paper Series, through which earlier versions of several of the chapters in this volume were developed. Several other graduate students and colleagues contributed to the vetting of drafts. Kate Degnen, Kreg Ettenger, Liz Fajber, Tara Goetze, Hedda Schuurman, and Audra Simpson took leading roles in organizing workshops, producing the newsletter, and getting our documentation resources in order. Special thanks are also due to Nicola Wolters, who served a three-year term running our office, as well as to Karine Bates and Brian Thom for more recent administrative support. AGREE has benefited greatly from our participation in the Centre for Society, Technology and Development (STANDD), directed by John Galaty, and the Programme in the Anthropology of Development (PAD), directed by Laurel Bossen.

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A most gratifying aspect of working on this book has been the opportunity to include case material from Aboriginal areas additional to those of the original Aboriginal partners in our research. Thus, we are able to incorporate experience from Quebec Innu and Atikamekw. We are beholden to those authors, and to the Aboriginal communities who have sponsored their research, for contributions that materially enhance the scope and comparative significance of the research program.

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We hope that this book may contribute to the understanding and enhancement of Aboriginal autonomy and self-determined development and reciprocate, in some measure, the support received from so many quarters – above all from the Aboriginal participants and their communities.