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Interrupting White Possession and Unsettling State Borders: Expanding Frontiers of Critical Indigenous Studies

Review Essays by Dr Fiona Nicoll

Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty*, University of Minnesota Press. 2015

Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States*, Duke University Press. 2014

It is both a pleasure and a significant responsibility to review two field-shaping works in critical indigenous studies. *The White Possessive* showcases the unique intellectual contribution of Aileen Moreton-Robinson, both within Australia and internationally. Prising apart concepts of race, ethnicity and cultural difference, her book makes visible and accountable the patriarchal white subject of possession that subtends them. *Mohawk Interruptus* is a rigorous ethnographic account of the intra-subjective and inter-subjective dimensions of academic disciplines and political practices that produce and police the 'authenticity' of Indigenous people. Both books should be read and studied by scholars across academic disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. In particular, they break new ground for researchers in law, sociology, women's studies, critical race and whiteness studies, postcolonial studies, anthropology, political theory and cultural studies.

The White Possessive builds on research foundations established in *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, Moreton-Robinson's first book, published in 2000. This sociological study presented a forensic analysis of how the subject position 'middle-class white woman' has both produced and circumscribed the anti-racist capacities of white feminists. Bringing together her writing about race, whiteness and possession, published over a decade ago, this latest book continues to place white institutional practices and subject formation under scrutiny that is both theoretically informed and supported by empirical evidence through case studies. In doing so, it probes difficult questions about identity and inter-subjectivity that scholarship of racism and Indigenous rights often fail to address. 'The white possessive', Moreton-Robinson's original concept and hypothesis, organises these essays and successfully shifts the terrain of current debates about race and Indigenous people. It also produces a compelling explanation of why academic and political projects organised around such 'virtuous' objectives as 'fighting racism' and 'recognising Indigenous rights' can serve to entrench the captivity of Indigenous people within schemas of 'difference' (coded variously as 'racial' or cultural').

Moreton-Robinson's introduction clearly positions the collection within a broader academic and political programme of 'critical Indigenous studies'. She identifies several threads within debates over the focus of this growing body of Indigenous scholarship. These include: calls for a focus on Indigenous cultural difference to be displaced by attention to the epistemological complexity and 'density' of Indigenous existence (Andersen 2009); deeper engagement with Western disciplinary formations (Nakata 2006) and adopting queer theoretical orientations towards the normalising logics that define Indigenous identity with reference to a fixed political referent (Smith 2010).ⁱ While acknowledging the value of all of these approaches, Moreton-Robinson suggests that other forces are at play to circumscribe the intellectual scope and political efficacy of critical indigenous studies. After making the provocative suggestion that discourses of Indigenous rights may, themselves, work to undermine critical possibilities within Indigenous studies, she points to two further related problems.

The bulk of the critical literature about whiteness produced in the United States of America (US) has focused on civil rights and the African-American experience of racism, and the position of Indigenous people within this literature has been virtually invisible. A notable exception is the foundational work of Cheryl Harris (1993), which established whiteness as a form of property defined and protected in law, and dependent for its being on Indigenous dispossession.ⁱⁱ It is in this context that Moreton-Robinson stakes a claim for the 'white possessive' as a lens through which to understand living legacies of colonisation for Indigenous people in white-settler-colonial nations. As she powerfully writes:

For Indigenous people, white possession is not unmarked, unnamed or invisible; it is hypervisible. In our quotidian encounters, whether it is on the streets of Otago or Sydney, in the tourist shops in Vancouver or Waipahu, or sitting in a restaurant in New York, we experience ontologically the effects of white possession. These cities signify with every building and every street that the land is now possessed by others; signs of white possession are embedded everywhere in the landscape. The omnipresence of Indigenous sovereignties exists here too, but it is disavowed through the materiality of these significations, which are perceived as evidence of ownership by those who have taken possession. This is territory that has been marked by and through violence and race. Racism is thus inextricably tied to the theft and appropriation of Indigenous lands in the first world. In fact, its existence in the United States, Canada, Australia, Hawai'i, and New Zealand was dependent on this happening. (xiii)

Part I of *The White Possessive: Property, Power and Indigenous Sovereignty* contains four essays, which are framed by the theme of 'Owning Property', and highlight, in different ways, how whiteness operates as property in Australia and the US. The first essay, 'I Still Call Australia Home: Indigenous Belonging and Place in a Postcolonizing Australia' is a key intervention within discussions of post-colonialism in Australia from the early 1990s, when concepts of hybridity and multiculturalism were routinely deployed against 'essentialist' understandings of national or racial identities. Moreton-Robinson defends an intellectual refusal of the terms of these discussions by drawing attention to the problem of Indigenous belonging in a place rendered the possession of a white nation-state. Rather than accepting the hybrid subject position of 'migrant' as the basis for a post-colonial (and perhaps proto-republican) identity, she demonstrates

how migrancy is predicated on Indigenous dispossession. She calls for scholarship that will engage with the ontological and epistemological relationship to land that Indigenous people continue to hold, while exploring the ways that white migrants come to experience a possessive relationship to the nation. This conceptual work leads readers into the second essay's discussion of 'Britishness' as a theme within political, academic and literary discourses about Australian identity. She demonstrates how calls to recognise and celebrate the contribution of the nation's British heritage, and political and cultural institutions are founded on a necessary, but disavowed, construction of Indigenous people as embodying racial difference that makes whiteness a property potentially available to immigrants from different parts of the world.

How are cultural spaces imbued with values of patriarchal white sovereignty and how is a sense of possession disseminated through popular culture and embodied in everyday practices, such as 'enjoying the beach'? The third essay, 'Bodies that Matter on the Beach' is an academic response to a 2009 art exhibition by Vernon Ah Kee in the Venice biennale. The essay traverses queer theories of performativity, histories of 'digger-nationalism' and lifesaving, as well as the violent white protests in 2005 that reiterated a sense of white possession on one of Sydney's most popular beaches. Moreton-Robinson engages carefully with material and symbolic details of the installation, including barbed wire, hanging surfboards and video footage of Indigenous surfers on boards depicting the artist's ancestors. Evoking the manner of death suffered by native animal wrangler, and local and international celebrity, Steve Irwin, she memorably compares the semiotic force of Ah Kee's installation to 'a stingray barb piercing the heart of white Australia' (46).

The fourth essay, 'Writing off Treaties: Possession in the US Critical Whiteness Literature', is a crucial piece of comparative research written at a moment when whiteness studies were emerging as an international field for interdisciplinary research on "the persistence of racism in light of the proposition that race was socially constructed and not biologically determined" (47). After mapping historical and current theoretical work on the formation of race as a concept and biopolitical force, Moreton-Robinson compares the focus of white and black writing on whiteness in the US with that of Indigenous authors engaging with sovereignty struggles. Placing the Australian literature within this broader context, she demonstrates how a black/white binary together with tropes of migration effectively sustain the nation as having white possession, silencing and marginalising the political and epistemological challenges posed by Indigenous sovereignties.

Part II opens with a foundational essay from the author that elaborates the concept of patriarchal whiteness in Australia through a case study of the government's response to the Mabo (1992) decision's overturning of *terra nullius*ⁱⁱⁱ in the Native Title Act (1993). Building on the concept of whiteness as property developed by Harris, Moreton-Robinson defines patriarchal whiteness as "an invisible unnamed organizing principle that surreptitiously shapes social relations and economic development... [It] is a valuable possession warranting protection. Patriarchal whiteness invests in property rights and is possessive and protective about asset accumulation and ownership" (67). Her next essay provides a detailed analysis of a specific High Court decision on native title. Close examination of the legal and ethnographic concepts deployed in the *Yorta Yorta* case (1998) reveals how the "possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty

operated discursively and ideologically...to produce legal and political resistance to native title by creating judicial and legal impediments that were presented as though they are race blind” (91). This essay powerfully demonstrates what is at stake for actual Indigenous communities who seek limited empowerment through native title recognition when the racial production of property relations through the nation-state—in the first instance—is disavowed.

But what does the white possessive look like beyond the formal institutions of law courts and parliaments? The seventh essay, ‘Leesa’s Story: White Possession in the Workplace’ explains how possessive white subject formations operate in the everyday lives of Indigenous people in Australia. This case study of Leesa highlights the challenge for Indigenous people who appeal to anti-discrimination law to counter racism at work as they confront a prevailing discourse of ‘colour-blindness’. At the heart of this research is a burning question: “Why do most white people believe that racism does not exist and most Indigenous people believe that it does?” (97) The subject of this case study, a nurse, witnessed differential treatment of Indigenous patients, was excluded from training opportunities and subjected to racist comments about Aboriginal people by her white colleagues. Moreton-Robinson demonstrates how the positioning of this complainant, as suffering from an ‘overly sensitive’ personality, protected the collective interests of patriarchal whiteness in which her white colleagues and the hospital, as an institution, were possessively invested. Although the case was settled, it cost the complainant her own nursing career. Moreton-Robinson’s account of this case gives lie to the neo-liberal refusal to countenance claims of racial bias on grounds of individual choice and agency: “...it took a great deal of strength and courage to take action. She could have chosen silence, and thus self-denial, as the only way to survive. Instead, she chose to stand on her sovereign ground” (108).

The shift in the final essay in this book section (Part II), from the topic of everyday racism in the workplace to the agency of Captain James Cook in the late 1700s, is both disruptive and inspired. ‘The Legacy of Cook’s Choice’ considers the so-called ‘discoverer’ of Australia to be an Enlightenment subject, whose will to possess was fundamentally tied to a way of knowing and seeing Indigenous people as marked by ‘race.’ Revisiting Cook’s descriptions of ‘first encounters’ in his diaries, Moreton-Robinson observes the ‘substantive subjectivity’ of Cook as structured through “...the imposition of one’s will-to-be on the thing that is perceived to lack will; thus it is opened to being possessed...” (144). The second part of the essay reverses the gaze to consider how white possessiveness is apparent in Indigenous oral histories that relate Cook’s arrival and their subsequent dispossession and subjection (115). These Indigenous accounts resonate with disputes over property—including native foods—that were recorded in Cook’s diaries. In spite of being a witness to these disputes, his vision of Indigenous people as will-less subjects of racial difference available for appropriation made it possible for him overlook their cause. Cook’s failure to execute his Imperial orders to gain consent of the ‘natives’ through treaty in the first instance has had tragic and enduring legacies for the sovereign owners of Aboriginal ‘countries’ across the continent. At a moment when sovereignty and treaty have been removed from the agenda of Indigenous constitutional recognition in Australia, Moreton-Robinson’s reinterpretation of the iconic ‘Cook’ narrative could not be more relevant.

The final section (Part III), ‘Being Property’, opens with a call to a ‘new research agenda’ shaped by the capacity of Michel Foucault’s (2004) reflections in *Society Must*

be Defended^{iv} to stimulate the ‘sociological imagination’ (125). Specifically, Moreton-Robinson sees this work as providing a different way of thinking about race and Indigenous sovereignty struggles in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US. Showing that existing literature is limited by “the reliance on ‘rights’ as the cipher for analysing Indigenous sovereignty (127)”, she argues that Foucault’s genealogical account of rights is tied to his concept of race war as a precursor to the institutions of the modern nation-state. After discussing the use of his concept of biopower in postcolonial studies of race, Moreton-Robinson suggests that critical whiteness studies’ literature be brought to bear to understand pressing questions relating to Indigenous dispossession. This would create more nuanced accounts of the agonistic relationship between white nationalist projects, on one hand, and Indigenous sovereignties, on the other. Her aim is to: “Facilitate an exploration of the proposition that white possession is more than a right and [consideration of] how it functions to reproduce procedures of subjugation that are tied to racialized and racializing knowledges produced by disciplines dedicated to the sciences of ‘man’” (131). The implications of this Foucaultian research agenda are significant because they expose the role of disciplinary scholarship dedicated to knowing and advocating for the rights of Indigenous and other dominated populations as possible tactics and strategies of race war. This is a call to a ‘sociological imagination’ flexible enough to address “...society and politics in Western countries where Indigenous sovereignty continues to exist” (135). It is also a call to Australian scholars to assume international leadership in critical studies of whiteness by developing more theoretically informed accounts of the politics of race.

The following essays in this section provide a model for scholarship driven by a critical understanding of whiteness and related biopolitical strategies. ‘Writing Off Sovereignty’ shows how the discourse of national security is mobilised within a white body politic that is nominally multicultural even as it is braced against outsiders. Reading Ghassan Hage’s thesis about paranoid nationalism^v, together with extracts from speeches about security delivered by former Prime Minister, John Howard, Moreton-Robinson demonstrates the inextricable link between the discourse of security and “an anxiety about dispossession shaped by a refusal of Indigenous sovereignty with clear roots in white supremacy” (152). Thus, Australian politics is shaped by and demands adherence to patriarchal white sovereignty. The penultimate essay, ‘Imagining the Good Indigenous Citizen’, pursues the implications of this possessive orientation towards securing the nation for discourses surrounding ‘Indigenous welfare’. In particular, she highlights the function of discourses of ‘citizenship’ as a tool through which Indigenous Australians are subjected to ongoing race warfare via state interventions to address their ascribed ‘pathology’ (172).

The final essay, entitled ‘Virtuous White States: White Sovereignty and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples’ is a powerful intervention regarding debates in critical whiteness studies at a global level. The term ‘states’ in this essay is polyvalent and applies across national, institutional and individual actors. Moreton-Robinson produces an incisive discourse analysis of statements revealing the shifting position of white-settler-colonial nations, the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, on the draft contents of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP)^{vi} that were developed over a period of more than two decades. She shows how these state parties defended their fierce opposition to Indigenous sovereignty with recourse to proclamations reiterating their virtue against the intentions

of Indigenous parties positioned as being destructive and as promoting 'disharmony'. As she notes, with reference to their blanket dismissal of collective Indigenous rights, "With missionary zeal, these states have already determined what is best for 'their' Indigenous peoples by defining what Indigenous rights are acceptable. In this way they stake a possessive claim to us" (184).

The essay's final move considers a political twist, whereby the objecting states were brought to agree to the declaration without conceding any of the moral high ground they previously occupied to oppose it. They acknowledge that bad things happened in the past, they cite the good things they have already done, and they note that the declaration is not legally binding for their national governments. In other words, these states use their support for the declaration as a pretext for public performances of virtue that commit them to nothing that is not already being done at national and international levels of governance. This, of course, begs the question of 'what will prevent continuation of abuses committed in the past?' As I reflect on this closing essay, I cannot help but be reminded of Walter Benjamin's angel of history:

Where we perceive a chain of events [the angel of history] sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (249)

As long as private property rights remain the yardstick of 'progress', Indigenous people will continue to be bludgeoned by well-intentioned white folk who, nevertheless, refuse to acknowledge the ground of our national being. Moreton-Robinson's book establishes how 'white possessive', as a subjective orientation, as a pattern of intersubjective engagement and as an institutionalised form of power deployed to protect white settler property interests, services *continuing* inhumanity against the sovereignty of Indigenous people.

Like Moreton-Robinson, Simpson writes from an Indigenous subject position that has been historically defined as an object of Western disciplinary knowledge. Like Moreton-Robinson, Simpson is highly attuned to the political work performed by constructions of Indigenous cultural difference. It contributes to a growing academic literature by Indigenous authors in different disciplines reshaping existing theories of sovereignty by calling attention to the disciplinary desires that support white settler colonial governmentality. Simpson is acutely aware of her responsibility to do justice both to the specificities of her 'field' and to this broader context of activist Indigenous scholarship. This is evident in two related strategies that she uses throughout the book: a creative refusal to engage certain disciplinary expectations of what an ethnography or auto-ethnography of Kahnawà:ke Mohawk should look like; and an insistence on the complexity of lived identity and encountered borders.

In Simpson's 'cartography of refusal' (33), there are no maps or timelines to absorb the academic reader in different place and time. The 'interruptus' of the title signals the book's play with readers' epistemological desires to possess knowledge of this people,

this author. Instead we are given knowledge from a position of sovereign authority stated most simply as: “I know you; I know who I am” (19). It is from this ground that we are provided with a historically embedded ethnographic account of why questions of membership and belonging have been and remain the focus of Mohawk concerns in everyday life, which is, in turn, inextricable from broader political and legal discourses forged at the border of reservation territories and the adjoining and encompassing nation-states of America and Canada. As a point of entry to understanding this people and this place, readers must learn how Mohawk membership law re-makes and reforms colonial processes of knowing and governing heterosexual kinship ties, by using “the governing impetus of settlement – ‘recognition’ – to regulate, administer, and discipline the subject through a notion of band polity” (13).

The book opens by inviting us to consider questions raised by signpost events of Mohawk refusal. These include the insistence by delegates to international sporting events and conferences that Iroquois Confederacy passports be respected at state borders instead of US or Canadian documentation, as well as the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Council’s decision to evict non-natives cohabitating with reserve residents and members. What do these refusals and evictions tell us about what exists in a lived and conceptual space “across the borders of settler states”? What does it mean to refuse a passport—a gift of belonging and mobility—at the cost of considerable personal inconvenience? (1) And, most broadly, what does it mean to understand borders, not as liminal zones of post-colonial possibility that are rhetorically figured as the ‘Other’ of Western political theory, but as everyday spaces in which questions of membership both constitute and contest political identity? Simpson’s discussion of the power to exclude non-nationals from the reservation underscores the need to defend an identity parsed as ‘Indigenous nationals that belong to a larger, pre-contact, political confederacy in what is now understood to be the north-eastern United States and south-eastern Canada’. Her opening examples show how this self-defining identity is asserted in ways and contexts that trump “presumed shared values of freedom, justice, equality, individualism, even distribution, and free trade” (14).

Simpson aims to provide a picture of contemporary Mohawk life beyond the recognisable, masculine figure of the ‘ironwalker’, labouring to build the skyline of New York City and driving back to the reservation on his days off. Instead her book refigures these men as:

...Indigenous nationals of a strangulated political order who do all they can to live a political life robustly, with dignity, as Nationals. In holding onto this, they interrupt and fundamentally challenge stories that have been told about them and others like them, as well as the structure of settlement that strangles their political form and tries to take their land and their selves from them. (3)

In one of several striking metaphors elaborated throughout the study, Simpson represents their labour as refusing to walk on beams that would define Mohawks as absorbed into Canadian or American national citizenship (7). Poised on a beam herself, as a scholar between constituted academic disciplines of anthropology and politics, Simpson identifies the need for a new ethnographic method. Such a method should simultaneously address the nested and embedded character of Indigenous

sovereignty against the disciplinary focus of anthropology on ethno-cultural traits and political theory's dependence on Western philosophical reference points.

Simpson explains that questions of who one is and the basis for one's claim to belonging are properly *political* ones and that these are pervasive, as they are freighted with historical and institutional residues in everyday life. A more nuanced account of the political life of the nation-state than disciplinary canons and methods currently afford is, therefore, required to make the specific coordinates of Indigenous knowledge and belonging visible. As she explains:

The category and the construct (and institutional apparatus) of the nation state and its presumed homogeneity endure in spite of their fundamental inability to be resolved with the complexity and force that animate the territorial histories and horizons of settler-colonial states. Indigenous dispossession caused by settler emplacement exacerbates the problem of rule, of governance, and of legitimacy itself. In this, people got and still get moved about and they survive eliminations, but the state projects of political homogeneity and the ideal correspondence of 'ethnicity' and territorial boundaries remain irresolvable. The modern order itself is entwined with capital as this accumulative and acquisitive force further detaches people from places and moves them into other zones for productivity, accumulation, and territorial settlement. (17)

To explicate what this means in everyday life for community members and researchers, Simpson's chapter on historiography addresses a productively unsettling question raised by her fieldwork: "Can you claim an identity or membership within a political grouping if it does not claim you?" (63) She recounts a research encounter with an informant who claimed Kahnawà:ke Mohawk membership and was known in the community, but who was not *from* the community, instead claiming connections to a territory from which northern Mohawks historically migrated. Engaging with the complexity of identification and genealogy posed by this case requires understanding of the historical emergence of Iroquois confederacy politics and its constitutive tension between culturalist definitions of Mohawk identity, on one hand, and "genealogic-cum-racialist definitions", on the other (44-45). This tension is inextricable from a history of Kahnawà:ke migrations from the seventeenth century. A combination of their "wilful departure from the Mohawk Valley and heterogeneous disposition" (47) initially constructed Kahnawà:ke Mohawk membership as being relatively open. However, the unauthorised transfer of lands from the church to white settlers from the eighteenth century saw membership inverted into a "sensitivity of closure" (49).

Defensive articulations of an exclusive political identity, in opposition to that of the Canadian nation-state, were cemented when their riverfront land was appropriated to build a seaway canal in 1955:

Canadian and American indifference to Mohawk self-perception, as well as the appropriation of the sites and symbols of Mohawk identity, fed into a new formulation of who they were: a group of people with a shared past and present interests, who were radically different from those around them, and who could now be intruded upon, in what were perceived to be terrible ways, without consent, with indifference, and with the law. (53)

Patrilineal blood quantum laws in provisions of the 1851 Canadian Indian Act became an instrument for holding what ground remained. These illiberal laws were overturned in 1985 by Bill (C-31), which required communities to readmit Indian women excluded by the previous laws due to out-marriage. Simpson explains resistance to re-admitting status women as full community members and decisions to evict non-Indigenous residents co-habiting with tribal members as a political legacy of nineteenth century governance whereby "...the imperative to keep white men away from institutional power [on reservations] was maintained by the technique of status" (59). What might appear to outsiders as an ironic outcome of the good intentions of feminist advocacy is a banal social fact of living on territory where engagement and negotiation with adjacent and encompassing nation-states occurs on vastly unequal ground.

It is only when Simpson has taken us through the political history and existential quandaries of being Kahnawà:ke Mohawk that she provides a detailed review of the ethnographic literature against which her research constitutes a principled and reasoned refusal. She explains:

I am interested in the way that cultural analysis may look when difference is *not* the unit of analysis; when culture is disaggregated into a variety of narratives rather than one comprehensive, official story; when proximity to the territory that one is engaging in is as immediate as the self. (97)

What follows is a systematic account of how a construct of 'Iroquois culture' and a particular understanding of the confederacy produced an ethnographic canon. She examines the epistemological ramifications of a chance meeting between Lewis Henry Morgan, a member of a 'protoscientific' society of propertied New York men, whose hobby was to play with mythical concepts and values attached to the 'the vanishing Indian', and Ely Parker, a young, but influential member of the Seneca. Her exploration of what each man gained from their relationship of co-authorship highlights the political consequences when ethnology's status as an intersubjective artefact of politically interested native and white parties is disavowed and texts are elevated to canonical status.

Simpson makes an argument that demonstrates the extent to which anthropological fixation on cultural difference truncates the complex realities of identity and belonging within and across borders of nation states:

...American ethnology was born from the desires of each protagonist in the writing of the Iroquois past: Morgan grapples with American modernity and Parker with land losses. Each protagonist in the writing of the ethnological Iroquois saw his nation undergo terrific changes, and each himself underwent a transformative process. (85)

Over 150 years later, mainly Euro-American men have contributed to the 'tradition' forged by Morgan and Parker, forming "...a regulatory body of knowledge [with] deep resonance today, in a settler-colonial nation-state that uses anthropological and historical archives to determine legal presence, to adjudicate claims to land" (93). Absent from this body of work are "Morgan's not-so-Indian playmates – Parker's own writing...Parker's sister, Parker's brother, the Iroquois who were not Seneca, the Iroquois who were not traditional, the so-called mission Iroquois" (94).

After completing this process of epistemological de-territorialisation, Simpson is able to address the tension between ‘ethnographic refusal’ and ‘anthropological need’ in a chapter that discusses her fieldwork with the “...deeply resistant, self-governing, and relentlessly critical” (96) community to which she also belongs and to whom her research is accountable. That it takes over half of the book to reach this point is not just an indication of the challenges that face Indigenous scholarship when one’s identity has been spoken of and for by several generations of Euro-American ethnology and ethnography, it is also a scholarly performance that disciplines readers into considering a different ‘order of things’.

While sovereignty is a fundamental value of Mohawk, this is obscured by anthropological definitions of ‘culture’ that fetishise *difference*, rather than rights “to govern, to own or to labour” (101). The modern project of ‘civilising Iroquois’, which Morgan undertook in conjunction with his ‘salvage ethnography’, was predicated on the eventual disappearance of their ‘traditions’. Yet, this assimilation trajectory is stridently and vociferously resisted and Simpson notes that Kahnawà:ke Mohawk are “themselves among the most strident of the strident in defending territory – whether that be internal to the reserve or not” (104). Her methodological challenge is how to address a fundamental recalcitrance within the field as a productive matrix for an ethnographic method shaped by “the goals and aspirations of those we talk to” (98).

One of Simpson’s most important insights is that sovereignty is not a ‘political’ overlay on the traditional cultural views and practices of Mohawk, it is a central organising principle of their everyday lives. As such, it is a site of value, critical judgement and play in encounters with border guards, researchers and fellow community members and it is most often expressed as a form of refusal. Simpson distinguishes this refusal from Fanonian ‘double consciousness’,^{vii} of turning away from the racist gaze to disengage the source of colonial power. Rather, she explains: “There seemed rather to be a ‘tripleness, a quadrupleness to consciousness and an endless play.... There was something that seemed to reveal itself at the point of refusal – a stance, a principle, a historical narrative, and an *enjoyment in the reveal*” (107). In this way, control of knowledge is a practice of sovereignty that inevitably structures the conversations between a researcher who is known in the community and others who are known.

Discretion becomes much more than a matter of box-checking by university ethics committees. Discretion is woven into the fabric of Mohawk belonging and what is *not said* can be more salient than what is spoken:

In listening and shutting off the tape recorder, in situating each subject with his or her own shifting historical context of the present, these refusals speak volumes because they tell us when to stop. Whether or not we wish to share that is a matter of ethnography that can both *refuse* and also take up *refusal* in generative ways. (113)

One of the ethnographic alternatives to the researcher/informant or subject/object relationship she presents is the stories of community members about border crossing that are articulated with her own experience of belonging and are often in conflict with representations produced by politicians and media representations in the occupying nation-states. A telling example of this disjuncture is the way Big Tobacco interests in

illegal cross-border trade via Indigenous reservations were presented in a Canadian television documentary as ‘the problem of Aboriginal smuggling’ and as popular evidence of a ‘dark side’ of Indigenous sovereignty. While the tobacco companies involved were charged with racketeering and tax evasion, public exposure of the activities focused on the need for greater settler-state surveillance on reservations, rather than on the economic rights of Mohawk members. Mohawks became the “...spectacle that obscured a multinational corporation’s deep lawlessness, contravention and cunningly planned crime” (144).

The final chapter addresses the complex negotiation of gendered belonging since the 1990 Oka crisis, when Mohawk women led men in an armed resistance against further encroachment on their territory. As Canada’s Prime Minister drew on ethnographic constructions of traditional Iroquois culture to dismiss the protesters as ‘terrorists’ and ‘criminals’, the women involved were still:

...contending with their ongoing struggles against the state and their band councils. Some women were still suffering the burden of disenfranchisement: the snaking, dividing, and yet ongoing logic of raced and gendered heteropatriarchy manifest in the Indian Act, which sought to divest Indian women from the land by divesting them of their legal rights as Indians. (149)

Simpson conveys the lived complexity of identity and membership for women through whom Victorian concepts of race and gender—as blood quantum—become forms of property manipulated in struggles for and against colonial occupation. She demonstrates that the Oka crisis was inherently linked to C-31 through “...the centrality of territory and women to both, and their status as symptoms of the logic and practice of settler-colonial elimination” (150).

While interviews with women who were living on the reservation and actively challenging their exclusion from aspects of membership convey the ongoing injuries of this historical legacy, Simpson’s interviews with men illuminated other aspects of the problem. One of the most memorable parts of the book is an encounter with a steel-worker who responds to Simpson’s questions: “What is the ideal form of membership for us?” “What do you think makes someone a member of the community?” with a question of his own. “When you look in the mirror, what do you see?” He returns her own reply—made after a very long silence—“I see a nice person”, as the answer to her questions (168-169). This ethnographic encounter casts into relief the constitutive absence of transcendental, personal qualities from the terms through which identity and membership are made and resisted across the borders of settler states. The irreducibly political character of everyday life in these contexts highlights the privilege of white belonging to the occupying nation-states, in which context, one’s personal qualities can emerge as the primary axis of identity and membership.

Simpson’s cartography of refusal is not reducible to accounts of postcolonial ‘resistance’ that leave basic assumptions about the identity of coloniser and coloniser intact. At stake in the refusal that grounds her project is a relationship to the self that is specifically forged across borders. The sovereign Indigenous subject does not require recognition by the nation-state to be known and present to him/herself. The conclusion returns to the signpost event of the Lacrosse players who refused to enter the UK

when their sovereign passports were unrecognised: "...the young men are not being excluded from the nation-state; they are refusing inclusion within it. They are asserting rights based on a prior agreement – treaties between the Iroquois, the Dutch, the French, Great Britain and the United States" (182). The first and most fundamental reference point in this politics of refusal is for their authority to decide the terms of engagement by taking issue with the proffered definition of identity and membership.

Like the actors in the signpost events with which she begins and closes her study, Simpson successfully renders and performs the sovereignty that forms her research object. The 'problem' of Mohawk cultural difference, as defined by political and academic players within the nation-state, is returned to the sender. New territory is claimed across academic disciplines and the borders that sustain their knowledge institutions now appear and feel a little less certain. This is a powerful achievement that will be felt within and beyond the borders of academic research.

As a white Australian woman working in the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies, reading Moreton-Robinson's and Simpsons' books together helps me to understand and articulate the value of critical Indigenous studies within the academy more broadly. Moreton-Robinson's collection explains why it is not good enough to simply declare ourselves to be on the side of Indigenous rights; to do so may misrecognise the aspirations of sovereign Indigenous people to fundamentally transform the ground of inter-subjective engagement. Instead, she places us in a position to recognise and disrupt the white possessive logics at work in our institutions and everyday lives. Simpson interrupts the search for cultural difference that has historically animated political and ethnographic engagement with Indigenous people. She shows the formative role of borders as instruments of membership and belonging between and within white settler-colonial states. Both books show how my sense of 'having' a nation to belong to is purchased at the cost of continuing Indigenous dispossession. Both authors invite a continuing dialogue with non-Indigenous researchers on the grounds of this recognition.

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ⁱ See: Chris Andersen (2009) 'Critical Indigenous Studies: From Difference to Density', *Cultural Studies Review*, 15 (2): 80-100; Martin Nakata (2006) 'Australian Indigenous Studies: A Question of Discipline',

Australian Journal of Anthropology 17 (3): 265-75; Andrea Smith (2010) 'Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism', *GLQ* 16 (1-2):41-68

ⁱⁱ See Cheryl Harris, 'Whiteness as Property', *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8): 1707-1791

ⁱⁱⁱ This legal doctrine held that Indigenous people lacked property rights prior to British settlement.

^{iv} See Michel Foucault. (2004) *Society Must Be Defended*. London: Penguin Books.

^v See Ghassan Hage (2003) *Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*. Sydney: Pluto Press.

^{vi} See *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. United Nations. March 2008.

http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

^{vii} See Frantz Fanon (1967) *Black Skin: White Masks*. Boston: Grove Press.